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Character trait, context or... create! Innovative practices among creative entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

The creative industries are often considered an important engine of innovation; in the creative sectors, but more importantly, also in the general economy. Yet, contrary to most of the knowledge industries, the creative industries are not thought to pursue innovation as a purposeful effort. This raises the question, that if innovation tends to happen unintentionally, which factors contribute to its nascent? Building upon a qualitative analysis of 43 interviews with entrepreneurs in the creative industries, this paper aims to obtain a better understanding of such creative industries innovation by studying how these entrepreneurs become (in their own perception) more innovative. Our findings show that entrepreneurs in the creative industries perceive their innovativeness to be caused by: (1) their own innovative traits and creativity, (2) external spatial, social, knowledge and work contexts stimulating an innovative state of mind, and (3) by means of serendipity, experimentation and inspiration found in creative practices.

KEYWORDS

Innovation; creative industries; entrepreneurship; cultural production

1. Introduction

The creative industries are increasingly considered – by both academics and policy makers – to be crucial drivers of innovation (Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017; Miles and Green 2008; Müller, Rammer, and Truby 2009; Cooke and De Propris 2011; Innocenti and Lazzarretti 2019). Many of today's innovations are presumed to be generated by a dense network of creative individuals within and outside of the creative field (Stolarick and Florida 2006). Stolarick and Florida (2006) argue that such an agglomeration of those whose occupation is creative (or has a creative component) is responsible for regional innovation by means of interaction and spillovers. Following this line of thought, studying the creative industries may offer insights into recent changes in the global economy, and especially in how innovations driving these changes are fostered by individuals and organisations (Jones et al. 2016; Innocenti and Lazzarretti 2019).

At the same time, the link between creativity, the creative industries and innovation, Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou (2017) argue, is often assumed rather than

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subject to empirical analysis. The few empirical studies, they stress, tend to be case studies rather than systematic research. As previous research mostly focused on the macro-level (Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie 2008), they generally pay little attention to the experiences of ‘real entrepreneurs’ (Meyer 2009). Moreover, the creative industries have certain distinctive organisational characteristics (including project-based forms of organisation, increased passion for work, autonomy, and higher frequencies of freelance work, see e.g. Caves 2000; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010), convoluting comparisons with more ‘general’ academic innovation literature.

Thus, the creative industries are thought to contribute to innovation; yet, it remains a black box how those working in these fields innovate, or, in the words of Jones et al. (2016, 753): ‘[t]here is a dearth of systematic understanding of who drives innovation and which networks and industry processes help or hinder the capacity to innovate’. This paper aims to address this gap by asking the question: *what are the drivers of innovativeness of creative entrepreneurs?* Focusing on the self-perceived work practices of co-located workers in the creative industries, it does so by exploring the individual and contextual factors making them – in their own opinion – more innovative. Considering the prevalence of co-location in the creative industries, this research particularly examines the impact of spatial factors (agglomeration as well as the features of physical spaces).

This paper contributes to innovation research in that it further explores the factors driving innovation at the level of the individual entrepreneur and applies this to a growing sector: the creative industries. This perspective is becoming increasingly relevant, as – on a global level – the creative industries witness tremendous growth (Rutten, Koops, and Visser 2020) both in absolute terms as well as in their share of the general economy. Moreover, the creative industries receive generous policy interest due to their perceived innovativeness, but also because their characteristics (e.g. the idea of flexible work, affective labour and precariousness) seem to transcend to other sectors (see e.g. Hesmondhalgh 2012; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). Finally, it responds to the call of Erkkö et al. (2014) for obtaining further knowledge on how spatial contexts in entrepreneurial ecosystems affect innovation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Individual Innovative Traits

Most researchers seem to agree on the proposition that creativity is the ‘idea’ part of innovation. In her influential work, Amabile (2005, 143) argues that: ‘[a]ll innovation begins with creative ideas, [...] creativity by individuals and teams is a starting point for innovation’, with creativity being ‘the generation of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together’ (Amabile 1988, 126). Innovation, then, is usually considered the implementation or extension of such ideas, in which ‘a raw creative idea is converted into an innovative product or service’ (Bilton 2009, 23). As a result, innovation builds on elements of individual creativity and is most notably defined as the successful implementation of creative ideas (Amabile et al., 2005). Creativity, therefore, is an essential prerequisite, but on its own not the same as or a sufficient condition for innovation (Dimov 2007).

In the individual or *trait based* approach, the idea generating capabilities of entrepreneurs are often approached as stable personality traits (Ardichvili, Cardozo, and Ray 2003) (see also Table 1 for an overview).

Much of the existing research on factors driving innovation has been confined to taking such an agentic perspective, emphasising the role and influence of entrepreneur's individual (creative) traits in the innovation processes (Jones et al. 2016). Important individual innovative traits are a need for expression (see e.g. Storr 1993), human capital, and the entrepreneur's educational background. The latter two contribute to increased tacit knowledge in people skills and stronger intuition for seizing opportunities (Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017). For example, Ardichvili, Cardozo, and Ray (2003) theorise that the successful identification of business opportunities by entrepreneurs can be attributed to their personality traits. Though distinctive 'entrepreneurial' personality traits are not necessarily overrepresented amongst entrepreneurs (Shaver and Scott 1991), Ardichvili et al. (2003) also identify the entrepreneur's prior knowledge (also a form of human capital) and creativity as major factors impelling successful entrepreneurial behaviour. Creativity, in a Schumpeterian (1934) sense, means that entrepreneurs scoring high on this trait are more inclined to discover business opportunities.

Next to these traits, other individual level factors also impact innovative entrepreneurial behaviour. In a recent literature review, Shepherd, Souitaris and Gruber (2021) envisage for example the founder's age, imaginativeness, entrepreneurial identity aspirations and affect (i.e. positive emotions) to impact the likelihood of generating and advancing new business ideas as well. Moreover, the founders' cognitions – 'mental operations underlying the co-construction of potential opportunities' (Shepherd et al. 2021, 20) also influence the identification and exploitation of opportunities. These cognitions include successful intelligence (practical, analytical and creative forms of intelligence that demonstrate the ability to successfully develop new ideas), perceptions, and judgement of information or the cognition to identify potential opportunities.

Yet, many authors argue that individuals are not only born with specific innovative traits, but that these are also developed as responses to certain contexts and (managerial, industry and entrepreneurial) experiences (Shepherd et al. 2021; Ardichvili, Cardozo, and Ray 2003). For example, the individual trait of entrepreneurial passion has received increased academic interest (Cardon et al. 2009), with studies highlighting that especially among habitual entrepreneurs, passion for entrepreneurial activities tends to be high and important for their success (Thorgren and Wincent 2013). Possessing a 'right' amount of passion (not too little, not too obsessive) may translate into more innovative dispositions (Cardon et al. 2009; Thorgren and Wincent 2013; Vallerand et al. 2003). Nevertheless, despite researchers treating passion as an individual trait, Cardon et al. (2009) emphasise that it is rather an experience precipitated by certain contexts. Important here too is the work of Bhansing, Hitters, and Wijngaarden (2018) and Cardon (2008), who perceive entrepreneurial passion as 'contagious', potentially 'inspiring' nearby peers. If passion indeed is one driver of innovation, being close to 'passionate' others might affect one's innovative efficacy.

Table 1. Trait and contextual approaches to innovation.

Level	Code	Innovation literature	Creative industries literature
Trait	Individual creativity	Amabile (2005, Amabile 1988), Dimov (2007)	Scott (2006)
Trait	Need for expression	Storr (1993)	Caves (2000)
Trait	Human capital (opportunity identification, prior knowledge)	Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou (2017), Ardichvili, Cardozo, and Ray (2003)	
Trait	Passion	Cardon et al. (2009), Thorgren and Wincent (2013), Vallerand et al. (2003)	Bhansing, Wijngaarden, and Hitters (2020)
Context	Networks and (user) communities	Santamaría, Nieto, and Andrés (2009),	Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie (2008), Parmentier and Mangematin (2014), Turok (2003)
Context	Supply-chain relationships	Roy, Sivakumar, and Wilkinson (2004)	Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie (2008)
Context	Diversity	Fey and Birkinshaw (2005)	Caves (2000), Lee and Andrés (2014), Innocenti and Lazzaretti (2019)
Context	Within-industry interactions		Cooke and Lazzaretti (2008)
Context	'Buzz' and face-to-face	Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell (2004), Grabher (2002, 2004), Asheim, Coenen, and Vang (2007)	Capone and Lazzaretti (2018)
Context	Spatial atmosphere and aesthetics		Drake (2003), Scott (2000)
Context	Interactions between 'creatives' and 'non-creatives'	Stolarick and Florida (2006), Florida (2002)	Stolarick and Florida (2006), Wijngaarden et al. (2019)
Context	Innovation policies	Fitjar and Andrés (2015)	Cunningham et al. (2004), Nijzink, Van Den Hoogen, and Gielen (2017)

2.2. Contextual Factors Contributing to Innovation

Following these lines of thought, we infer that an individual's innovative capacities cannot merely be reduced to individual traits, but are influenced by different contexts, ranging from the vicinity of other, innovative individuals to more macro-economic circumstances. This is often called an innovative *state perspective* (cf. Weinberger et al. 2018). Innovation can be found in 'the skills and knowledge embodied in individual[s] [...]', and the geographic proximity in which spillovers between such individuals manifest (Stolarick and Florida 2006, 1800). Thus, individuals – through their individual traits – may be more or less susceptible to innovation, but certain contexts may facilitate the emergence of such innovative practices. As such, we feel that, in order to gain a better understanding of the emergence of innovative practices, we need to consider the contexts in which these innovations can occur on the level of individual entrepreneurs. The following sections will map the most prominent of such factors. As this research concerns entrepreneurs in the creative industries working in co-located settings, we especially focus on the networks and spatial factors outlined by Stolarick and Florida (2006) above.

Across a wide range of academic disciplines, collaborative exchange, interaction and networks are considered crucial for sparking innovation (Santamaría, Nieto, and Andrés 2009). These exchanges happen through e.g. job changes (Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie 2008), supply-chain relationships, and interactions between buyers and sellers (Roy, Sivakumar, and Wilkinson 2004). As Fey and Birkinshaw (2005) argue, innovation is driven by new combinations of resources, ideas and technologies. This strongly

resembles the so-called ‘Jacobs externalities’, demarcating diversity as a crucial condition for innovation (Innocenti and Lazzeretti 2019). Conversely, other authors (e.g. Cooke and Lazzeretti 2008) argue that spillovers are fostered by interactions between firms within an industry, especially those concentrated in urban areas. In this sense, the idea that diversity leads to innovation contradicts the Marshall-Arrow-Romer (MAR) thesis, emphasising that knowledge spillovers are most efficiently and effectively leading to innovation where the industrial economy is specialised. Nevertheless, both perspectives foreground the spatial component of innovation.

From a spatial perspective, innovation is stimulated by means of cumulative learning processes through face-to-face contacts (Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007). Grabher (2002) argues that entrepreneurs in such knowledge bases are ‘surrounded by a concoction of rumours, impressions, recommendations, trade folklore and strategic misinformation’. This ‘buzz’ can be described as an information and communication ecology, which is especially fed by face-to-face contacts and the proximity of people and firms (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004; Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007). Thus, social and personal proximity, referring to respectively closeness in informal rules, common language and shared habits, may contribute to a firm’s innovativeness (Capone and Lazzeretti 2018).

The local embeddedness of networks and ‘buzzing’ communities indicate that innovation is more likely to occur in certain places and thus, that geographic and demographic characteristics could be a decisive source of innovation. Especially from the 1990s, this link between networks, clusters, innovative milieus and competitive advantages of place have become a key research topic in various fields, most prominently in economic and cultural geography (Scott 2006). On national levels, we see that current innovation agendas tend to include efforts to strengthen collaborative or clustering initiatives of a variety of industrial sectors (see for the Dutch case e.g. Nijzink, Van Den Hoogen, and Gielen 2017) and provide incentives for entrepreneurs in the creative industries to participate in research collaborations with research institutes (Cunningham et al. 2004). Such entrepreneurial universities and R&D activities are thought to encourage innovation not only on the individual level, but for the wider regions too (Fitjar and Andrés 2015). Stolarick and Florida (2006) also argue that the presence of artists, writers and the so called ‘super creative core’ (Florida 2002), ‘rubbing shoulders’ with other knowledge workers such as scientists and entrepreneurs, foster spillovers and innovations.

But do creatives repeatedly engage with (knowledge) workers outside their fields? Do they interact with proximate other entrepreneurs? If so, do such interactions contribute to the entrepreneurs’ self-perceived innovativeness? Before diving into the experiences of creative entrepreneurs, we will first outline current perspectives on what drives innovation in the creative industries.

2.3. The Creative Industries, Creative Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Creative entrepreneurs are entrepreneurs that operate in the creative industries, the industries that ‘have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property’ (Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] 2001, 4), and

are ‘supplying goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value’ (Caves 2000, 1). In the Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] (2001) definition, the creative industries capture the sub-sectors of advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio.¹ These sectors differ from ‘the general economy’ in several respects – both in terms of individual (entrepreneurial) as well as sectoral characteristics – which we will outline in this section.

First, creative entrepreneurship is characterised by a tension between artistic and commercial roles (see e.g. Caves 2000). Navigating this tension requires a very specific skill set (Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017) that reflects in the organisation and work practices ingrained in entrepreneurship in the creative industries. The idea of entrepreneurship builds upon the seminal work of Joseph Schumpeter (1934), who, to put it bluntly, saw the entrepreneur as the individual who combines existing elements, particularly as an outcome of a personal desire or passion to do so. Though Schumpeter’s vision of entrepreneurship encompasses a broad range of industries, artists in particular are, Swedberg (2006) argues - while building upon the more abstruse first edition of Schumpeter’s *The Theory of Economic Development* ([1911] 2003) - quintessential entrepreneurs in the sense that they are dynamic, break out of equilibriums and are driven by the need to create something new (and consequently design innovations). Making money is part of the ordeal and sometimes the principal objective for creative entrepreneurs, though most of the appeal definitely lies in the creation of a novel combination in the cultural sphere (Swedberg 2006). Nevertheless, Scott (2012) argues, creative entrepreneurship is a practice that stands out by occurring ‘sans capital’. In order to gain financial security, creative entrepreneurs need to acquire and convert cultural and symbolic capital by producing (highly) valued cultural products and services. Scott (2012) synthesises these perspectives by arguing that creative entrepreneurs 1] create new cultural products; 2] seek to access opportunities to promote themselves as tastemakers, and 3] – and most important for this paper – need to find innovative ways to do so, not in the least because they often lack access to economic capital.

Second, in order to develop such new products, continuous renewal is among the key principles for surviving. Products and services in the creative industries can often be distinguished by unicity, which means that the production of such output is characterised by a pursuit of novelty. This evokes a strong dependence on distinctiveness, both boosted by the artists’ and creators’ need for artistic expression as well as the audiences’ demand for new experiences (Jones et al. 2016). The mere replication and reproduction of existing designs bear the risk of being ‘boring and featureless’; but the combination of conventional materials could produce innovative works of art and creativity (Becker 1982).

Third, from a more traditional agentic perspective, the romantic concept of the creative artist, designing and implementing radical new ideas, is tightly interwoven into the narrative of creativity and innovation (Scott 2006; Becker 1982). The creative individual, in the words of Scott (2000, 32) is ‘the repository of specific [...] imaginative capacities’. Such individual creativity indicates that entrepreneurs use their

¹For a more detailed history of the creative industries as a (policy) concept – also in relation to innovation – we refer to Jones et al. (2016).

emotions and aspirations, in addition to their individual resources such as their backgrounds and cultures, in order to develop and implement new products (Jones et al. 2016). Moreover, with creative workers being more intrinsically motivated compared to their non-creative counterparts (Loots and van Witteloostuijn 2018), work tends to be more of a vocation than a business. Obviously, this has strong effects on e.g. perceived freedom and autonomy (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010), expressive qualities of work (Banks 2007), and passion for work (Bhansing, Hitters, and Wijngaarden 2018). As a result, creatives are less inclined to consider making their products and services ‘marketable’ or to pursue innovative success as an articulate goal (Stolarick and Florida 2006).

Fourth, self-employed entrepreneurs are overrepresented in the creative industries (Hesmondhalgh 2012; Casper and Storz 2017), and work is often organised around projects, requiring an intricate interplay of various, diversely skilled workers who need to be coordinated to deliver at the right instance (Caves 2000). This also means that innovative projects are often the result of a collaborative effort (Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017; Becker 1982) of a diverse ‘motley crew’ (Caves 2000) of interacting actors. Such actors can for example include user communities, in which users of (often digital) creative products bring in new ideas, tools and environments (Parmentier and Mangematin 2014). Supply-chain linkages too – both forward and backward creative linkages – are likely to introduce innovations to and from the creative industries (Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie 2008).

Fifth, this ubiquity of freelance, project-based work also translates into a strong network orientation. Such networks in the creative industries are thought to contribute to atmospheres encouraging innovation, attracting new, talented workers and generating overall growth (Turok 2003). Creative entrepreneurs, even those who operate in relative isolation, may use such atmospheres for innovation (Drake 2003; Scott 2000). In the creative industries particularly, knowledge transfer occurs through project-based working. Considering the need for the presence of a variety of skills, this points towards a strong role for Jacobs externalities. This also translates to the macro level: Lee and Andrés (2014) demonstrated that, especially in diverse and creative cities, clustered firms tend to reap innovation benefits.

Sixth, new material forms – including new technologies and digitalisation processes – have also shifted the work practices of many creatives. For example, digital technologies have radically advanced the field of photography (see e.g. Jones et al. 2016), and 3D printers have altered the practices of many visual artists (Wijngaarden, Hitters, and Bhansing 2019a). Other material forms such as the aesthetic qualities of place are also thought to positively impact the innovative practices of the more visually oriented creative entrepreneurs, with visual stimuli providing indispensable inspiration for creative production (Drake 2003).

To conclude, literature on innovation in the creative industries echoes the idea that innovativeness can be an individual trait, but can also be fuelled by external contexts (see Table 1). Nevertheless, while bearing some similarities to innovation literature on the general economy, the creative industries – with their aesthetic and artistic appeal and distinct organisational forms – are expected to adhere to different logics in their innovative practices. Therefore, this research explores what creative entrepreneurs themselves

see as their most important sources of innovation, and provides a more in-depth insight into how such sources actually manifest on the individual level.

2.4. Data Collection and Methods

Whereas hitherto much of the existing research on the creative industries has focused on the macro-level (Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017), this paper aims to explore what makes creative entrepreneurs innovative on the micro-level. It takes the perspective of the entrepreneur in micro-businesses (Miles and Green 2008) in the context of her or his daily work practices (Weinberger et al. 2018).

We conducted 43 in-depth interviews with creative entrepreneurs in the Netherlands between September 2014 and October 2015. Like many Dutch entrepreneurs in the creative industries, the respondents were housed in shared office spaces² in creative clusters, and these locations' managers or directors served as gatekeepers for reaching potential respondents. Complementary to this 'ascending' method, we proceeded by means of 'descending' or convenience and snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint 2001). For example, by asking the respondents for other potential candidates, allowing a series of referrals to be made within one network, but also by serendipitous encountering respondents in such business centres. Our primary selection criterion was self-identifying as working in the creative industries.

Though our goal is not to obtain empirical generalisation, but rather to theoretically explore potential factors driving innovation, we took a broad and inclusive perspective. The sample of a total of 46 respondents³ covered the full breadth of the creative industries (Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] 2001), ensuring a maximum variation sample. Seven worked in advertising, one in architecture, six in arts and antiques, three in crafts, seven in design, three in designer fashion, six in digital- and entertainment-media, four in film, video, photography and seven in music, performing and visual arts, and two in software and electronic publishing.

All respondents were either self-employed or working in micro-enterprises (usually as the founder or 'director'). Their ages ranged across the full scope of the labour force, with the youngest being in their early 20s, and the oldest nearing retirement age. All respondents were located in The Netherlands, which has a vibrant and well-supported⁴ creative industries sector (Stam et al. 2008; Rutten, Koops, and Visser 2020). Though international comparisons are lacking, there is little reason to believe the Dutch creative sector significantly diverts from its counterparts elsewhere in Western Europe.⁵ 37% of the respondents identified as women, which is fairly in line with the Dutch creative labour pool (CBS 2018), and the creative industries gender distribution in e.g. the United Kingdom (O'Brian et al. 2016).

²Belcanto in Haarlem, BINK36 in The Hague, Creative Factory in Rotterdam, De Gruyter Fabriek in Den Bosch, De Honig Fabriek in Koog aan de Zaan, Dutch Game Garden in Utrecht, Hazemeijer Hengelo in Hengelo, Klein Haarlem in Haarlem, Strijp-5 in Eindhoven, and De Vasim in Nijmegen.

³One interview having two, and another having three respondents.

⁴Being part of one of the Dutch Top Sectors – designated sectors in which Dutch business and research are thought to excel.

⁵With growth (Foord 2008) and agglomeration figures (Boschma and Fritsch 2009) comparable to neighbouring countries.

Apart from one in English, all interviews have been conducted in Dutch – which also is the native language of the authors. The respondents were informed about the topic of the interviews beforehand and introduced to the research project. They were asked, among other topics, about their professional work, their perceived creativity and entrepreneurship, their definitions of innovation in general and in the creative industries, their own innovativeness, what contributes to innovation, which settings make them (more) innovative, how they develop new ideas and implement them, and whether and how they think innovativeness can be measured. The reason for relying on self-reported data lies in a persisting issue with studying innovation in the creative industries. Measuring innovation in the creative industries is problematic, as much of the quantitative research takes proxies (e.g. R&D expenditure, patents or ‘new’ products or services) as indicators of innovativeness (see e.g. Wijngaarden, Hitters, and Bhansing 2019a). Obviously, such data would, for many firms in the creative industries, be both hard to retrieve and of limited value. When nearly all products ought to be novel, relying on such data sources would yield incomplete or questionable findings.

After transcribing, all interviews were coded in Atlas.ti⁶ in an iterative, bottom-up approach. We aimed to uncover the full breadth of factors in order to compare and contrast with the existing literature. Using a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) approach, we first took an open approach to coding, leading to some 100 codes, which were consequently reduced to 25 factors. Six factors fitted what we described above as *innovative traits*. Fifteen described contexts heightening *innovative contexts*. Finally, we devised a third category which we named ‘*create*’: important drivers of innovation we perceive as particularly unique for the creative industries (see Table 2).

Table 2. Three categories of drivers of innovation.

Trait	Pursuit of opportunities
	Need for expression
	Drive
	Human capital
	Openness
	Passion
Context	Spatial contexts
	Social contexts
	Knowledge contexts
	Work contexts
Create	Inspiration
	Experimentation
	Serendipity

⁶Software enabling qualitative data analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Trait Based Innovation

In line with the innovative trait literature, many respondents perceived their own traits (cognition, experiences, identity aspirations or personalities) as essential to innovation. These traits can be categorised under (from most to least prevalent) internal drive to innovate, passion for work, creativity, pursuit of opportunities, entrepreneurialism and openness to new ideas. Especially the first three were declared to be fundamental to innovative creative work.

Drive means that – despite the traditional yet enduring idea that creative individuals are innovative creators (Wijngaarden, Hitters, and Bhansing 2019a) – innovation is not necessarily a conscious, goal-driven pursuit. Instead, the engine behind creative production is not the drive to innovate, but the drive to do creative work and to become better at this. Tom [Design, 30s], for example, mentioned that:

Innovation is a by-product of your own drive, if you want to be better, you think of something new, you adjust your processes, you adjust your vocabulary. All those kinds of things, yes, then you end up with something that you could say is innovative.

Similarly, James [Music, visual and performing arts, 20s] emphasised that always solving challenges the same way becomes rather dull. Consequently, passion makes one of the most important prerequisites for innovation. Daniel [Crafts, 30s] mentioned that, when looking for innovative practices, researchers should look for ‘the collective passions of creative workers’. Charlie [Film, video and photography, 20s] echoed this idea: *When you repeat the same trick over and over, you will lose your passion. You want to inspire yourself and motivate yourself. Take this extra step, because you want to become better at what you do.*

This drive and passion can, as we will discuss later, be affected by a variety of conditions. Yet, many respondents argued that one is born with such a drive or passion – or a lack thereof – and that

[y]ou can't really learn it. If you haven't had the right 'slap on your head', you won't be able to 'see'. And people that don't 'see' are, in my opinion, not able to analyse reality and make connections, and ask why things are the way they are [Dean, Game industries, 30s].

Such a ‘slap on the head’ tends to be especially prevalent among respondents that are closer to what Florida (2002) sees as the super creative core. Some more commercial industries, such as the gaming industries, are more alike firms in the knowledge industries in the sense that their innovations are also connected to ‘external’ knowledge sources, such as GitHub, conferences and connections to industry networks. Nevertheless, we also witnessed some exceptions here, including the example of Dean above, and respondents working in advertising often mentioning individual traits rather than contextual factors. In these cases, respondents argued that ‘though it helps being in a creative cluster’, the ‘drive to innovate has to come from the inside’ [Julia, Music, visual and performing arts, 30s].

Nevertheless, having an open attitude towards innovations starts early in life: children ought not to be hampered in their fantasies, and sticking to the rules should not be the first priority in education and life, as James [Music, visual and performing arts, 20s] argued. This makes people open to new techniques or ideas. Being open, one can absorb

the – frequently mentioned – contribution of social networks and the local creatives to innovation. This shows that, despite requiring some individual traits, contexts may heighten their innovativeness.

3.2. Context Based Innovation

3.2.1. Spatial Contexts

Indeed, a large number of respondents mentioned one or several contexts that make them more or less innovative. Spatial contexts refer to agglomerations, and the atmospheres and aesthetics of particular places. Here, it is important to note that all interviews have been conducted with creative entrepreneurs co-located in a shared creative (office) building or creative cluster. The vast majority of these places are housed in formerly industrial buildings.

The industrial heritage of many of these creative business centres exuded to their current inhabitants, with respondents frequently highlighting how such spaces inspired them. For example, the innovation of Philips inspired young entrepreneurs in the current Strijp-S cluster (former light bulb and radio factories) in Eindhoven (cf. Wijngaarden, Hitters, and Bhansing 2019b). Here, Jane Jacobs' famous quote echoes: 'new ideas need old buildings'. Bjorn [Advertising, 30s], for example, explained:

[The building] has a character. You just see it, when you're at our elevator, you see all these pictures passing by of Philips' history, and in the machine room here, there are still these old machines and stuff. So yes, it just has a character making it eh, yes, inspiring.

Thus, the (historical) look and feel (c.f. Heebels and Van Aalst 2010) of these buildings influence how the respondents experience their daily practices, as well as, in some cases, inspire their innovative work. Daniel [Crafts, 30s] highlighted this by mentioning that '[t] here is a lot of space for new ideas here. The atmosphere in this building is an atmosphere that contributes to innovation.'

3.2.2. Social Contexts

However, considering the importance of aesthetics for creative entrepreneurs – especially those working in visual arts and design – we observed less focus on aesthetics than anticipated. Instead, very much in line with the academic literature on e.g. networks and 'buzz' (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004; Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007), respondents continuously referred to how interactions with others – be it peers, partners or user communities – helped them to become more innovative.

Almost all respondents cooperated and interacted – in formal and informal ways – with other creative entrepreneurs in their vicinity. Similar to the findings of Wijngaarden, Hitters and Bhansing (2020), the vast majority considered their out-of-the-box thinking peers to be an important catalyst for renewal and innovation. Sometimes, this may be caused by formal cooperation on a project, but regularly these 'inspirational' interactions followed from informally pitching ideas to other creatives. Jessica [Arts and antiques, 50s] for example, described how this works for her:

When you continuously have this cooperation and interaction, and invent new things together . . . do innovative stuff . . . Then it could be that I have no ideas, but when someone else comes in with something completely different that makes me think: 'oh yes, wow!'

However, such innovations did not only occur through interactions with their co-located peers. In line with Stam et al. (2008) – who argued that creative firms are more often than average firms embracing open innovation practices, and see their innovations more often caused by knowledge exchange with other partners – external contacts such as clients and customers also accounted for an important source of innovation. Monique [Arts and antiques, 40s], for example, used her external networks for developing new creative products, saying that: ‘my work emerged from a design process with a team of architects. In a continuous dialogue, we developed a new type of tile, with a particular geometric shape.’

Others, such as Mark [Software and electronic publishing, 20s], referred to online communities such as GitHub keeping him up to date on recent creative tech conferences. Additionally, new knowledge is exchanged in innovation events or specific local knowledge centres. Others do so by integrating users or clients in their production processes, for example by ‘involving them [users] in a very early stage in a game concept. These insights, we implement in order to make something work faster or better. Because of that, we breathe innovation’ [Thomas, Game industries, 30s].

What is especially striking, is that such innovations are rarely found in interactions between similar firms or individuals, but rather by a combination of diverse elements. Such elements could be the backgrounds of interacting individuals, in the words of Lucas [Music, visual and performing arts, 30s] ‘engaging in a synergy between my expertise and your expertise’, but also ‘applications of new techniques or a certain fabric that make something innovative’ [Julia, Music, visual and performing arts, 30s]. This shows that, at least for these creative entrepreneurs, Jacobs externalities are of greater importance than MAR externalities, and that Caves’ (2000) idea of diverse motley crews transcends to entrepreneurial innovative successes as well.

3.2.3. Knowledge Contexts

The idea that exogenic inputs facilitate innovation also manifests in the third sub-category: knowledge contexts. By means of spillovers – mostly but not necessarily through social interactions – creative entrepreneurs gain new knowledge that often proves essential in developing new ideas. This happens through learning – for example in educational settings – and by acquiring new technological skills and opportunities. For example, William [Design, 40s] describes how the presence of a local university helped in bringing in the right elements for the diverse combinations mentioned above:

So, I just think it's sort of fortuitous that Eindhoven, because of the academy, because of Brainport, because of the university, the Technical University, that it's become this kind of hot pot of ingredients, you know.

Obviously, having relevant education makes one knowledgeable of the main techniques in the field. However, learning does not stop after graduating. Many fields in the creative industries have changed dramatically over the last decades, especially those (now) reliant on digital technologies, like Kim [Film, video and photography, 30s] described: ‘in photography, a lot has happened over the last ten years. Twelve, fifteen years ago, I was just working in the darkroom. [...] Now, a lot of techniques are used in post-processing’. Many of these techniques and technologies are conveyed by sources such as YouTube, Reddit, lectures or online conferences. However, particularly for many creative

entrepreneurs, these innovations are not only found in technological progress, but also in reviving ancient techniques. As Heidi [Arts and antiques, 40s] illustrated: ‘We found a very old man who will teach us how to use this old [press] technique, and that is really great, the old technique [combined with] the young people who mainly work with computers’. Nevertheless, Monique [Arts and antiques, 60s] argued that such technologies or materials can make you innovative, but ‘you have to be open to that possibility’. This reinforces the idea that certain conditions can make individuals more innovative, but, according to Monique, only when they possess the required individual traits for innovation.

3.2.4. *Work Contexts*

The final context is found in the nature of the work itself. Here, we see the most eminent features of the creative industries translated into innovative work practices. We highlight the two overarching themes on this topic: job requirements and limitations. To start with the latter: creative entrepreneurs – as we described above – operate in an industry which tends to favour artistic freedom over financial gains. This means that they frequently encounter limitations: in (work)space, time, and money. It is therefore no surprise that working within these limitations appeals to their creativity in solving such problems. For example, many creatives ‘become entrepreneurial because they cannot find a job’ [Charlie, Film, video and photography, 20], or ‘are innovative in the sense that they will always strive to survive’ [Kathryn, Designer fashion, 30s]. They are pushed towards finding their own innovative niche. James [Music, visual and performing arts, 20s] described that in his field of work, innovation occurs by means of ‘making the most of the resources you have’. This often leads to more incremental innovations rather than radical ones, as such ‘making the most’ often requires increased efficiency. Therefore, these innovations tend to occur on the level of humdrum inputs, and less so in creative inputs (Caves 2000). As Tom [Design, 30s] described, such innovation is found in ‘improving [my] processes, talking more efficiently with clients, needing less time for the same work’.

This is reinforced by the structure of creative work in itself, which is, as we discussed in the literature review, geared towards continuous novelty. A lack of renewal leads to the risk of being boring or no longer appealing. For industries that operate on reputation (Caves 2000), such an image is obviously disastrous for business. In the words of Charlie [Film, video and photography, 20s]: ‘Everything is in flux. Creativity is in flux. You can’t try the same trick for a year [. . .]. And when new camera techniques are introduced, you have to go along with that knowledge’. Jack [Crafts, 40s] even argued it should be part of a creative entrepreneur’s business model – there is no right to exist without innovation.

3.3. *‘Create’ Based Innovation*

In addition to *trait* and *contextual* factors, the respondents also mentioned other sources of innovation: experimentation, inspiration and serendipity. Though related to the work contexts described above, none of these three factors seem to fit in either of the two overarching categories. Instead, they occur in *doing* creative work, not the work itself. As such, we devised a third category of ‘create’ based sources of innovation, which seem particular – but not unique – to the creative industries.

The creative industries thrive by experimentation. Contrary to goal-driven pursuits of innovation, common in for example tech and many other knowledge industries (Pratt and Gornostaeva 2009), creatives – especially those more on the artistic side – tend to create by means of experimentation. William [Design, 40s] puts this quite explicitly by saying that

I think true innovation comes from the fact that nobody knows what the hell they are doing. And it's really about exploration and about following the most bizarre leads and possibilities that you can think of and I think that can take any number of forms [. . .]. And sometimes that works, sometimes it's . . . or rather it's not that it works, sometimes it has to happen, alongside.

Others, such as Timothy [Advertising, 40s], see the humdrum work (Caves 2000) – the less creative aspects of creative entrepreneurship – as detrimental to innovation. Instead, more autonomous, free forms of creation are more inspiring and will lead to innovation. In either case, experimentation is understood as a vital precursor of innovation.

Inspiration too functions as such a lever. Inspired by others' passion (Bhansing, Hitters, and Wijngaarden 2018), spatial qualities (Drake 2003) or social interactions, creative entrepreneurs may be able to conceive and implement new ideas. Sometimes, however, this inspiration is harder to pinpoint. As Jack [Crafts, 40s] explained:

Of course, it is always eh, you get your ideas from everywhere. So in the end you sometimes don't know exactly where you got your ideas from, what the eh, which impulses lead to . . . hey, should I do that, or will I do something like that?

In other cases, innovation is found in a combination of such aspects. Lucas [Music, visual and performing arts, 30s] explained that he derived his innovation from seeing other people, but also by cooperating with them, and Timothy [Advertising, 40s] by being inspired and stimulated by seeing the work of others.

Nevertheless, what both approaches have in common is that innovation is serendipitous rather than the main aim. William [Design, 40s] discerns this more creative industries innovation 'spontaneous innovation' from 'planned innovation', with the latter being 'companies [that] tend to have objectives and targets and . . . [and] try to find innovation [. . .] in a very prescribed way'. Serendipitous innovation, conversely, happens because random people are spontaneously discussing random topics. This is important, because serendipity – finding something useful, valuable or surprising without actually looking for it (Olma 2016; Merton, Robert King 1968) – has the potential to induce disruptive innovations, much more than any other efforts to innovate (Olma 2016). In order to be successfully recognised, Olma argues, such serendipitous 'accidental' innovations need individual 'sagacity' to open up new regimes of knowledge and deviation from the beaten path. Innovation, in this sense, occurs by means of a combination of a contextual aspect (an 'accident') and a character trait (the 'sagacity').

In conclusion, inspiration, experimentation and serendipity are augmented by a (combination of) the contextual or trait factors, but cannot be reduced to them. The creative processes themselves – by experimenting and unexpected inspiration – evoke new ideas that may be – and often are – implemented as future innovations.

4. Conclusion

The creative industries are thought of and celebrated as a driver of innovation. Their firms have a strong potential for innovation themselves (Miles and Green 2008), and they tend to foster innovation in other economic fields as well (Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017; Müller, Rammer, and Truby 2009). The creative industries' distinctive structure – with the prominence of freelance (Hesmondhalgh 2012), project-based work (Grabher 2004), extreme flexibility (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010), and the need for expression and autonomy (Caves 2000) – is seen as a forerunner of the culturising economy (Scott 2000) or the avant-garde of the information economy (Cooke and De Propriis 2011). As such, and in the words of Jones et al. (2016, 752): the 'creative industries offer insights into important changes in the global economy and in particular how individuals and organisation innovate to drive that change.'

Nevertheless, how those working in the creative industries become innovative – and how this differs from innovation in other economic fields – has received scarce academic attention (Miles and Green 2008). Focusing on the self-perceived work practices, this paper therefore aims to answer the question of *what are the drivers of innovativeness of creative entrepreneurs?* This paper makes three contributions to the existing literature on innovation in the creative industries: an empirical contribution, a new perspective and a theoretical contribution.

First, this research connects existing literature on innovation and investigates whether and how the factors outlined in earlier studies translate to the creative industries. Here, we understand innovation not only from the perspective of an individual trait, but also from the idea that certain circumstances can make individuals more or less innovative (i.e. reaching an innovative state or enhancing an individual's innovative capability). We follow Weinberger et al. (2018) and Welter (2011), who argued that entrepreneurship is contextual and creativity is malleable by external influences. We propose that this also applies to innovation, with collaboration with other actors, including suppliers, research institutes and others firms, having a tremendous influence on individual innovativeness. While the idea that the capacity to innovate is malleable is not new in itself, it does yield questions around the particular contexts in which such innovations may or may not flourish. Our focus is mainly on spatial and social factors, such as networks and 'buzz', and several types of social interactions and spatial qualities.

The analysis shows that – at least for entrepreneurs in the creative industries – innovation indeed is rarely caused by their personal traits alone. Instead, many respondents revealed that specific knowledge (e.g. spillovers, learning and education), work (e.g. problems and limitations, job requirements), social (e.g. formal or informal interactions with a diverse range of peers, partners and user communities), and spatial (e.g. atmospheres, aesthetics and agglomerations of specific firms) contexts helped them to become more innovative. Nevertheless, an initial analysis also demonstrates that some receptivity (i.e. openness for innovation) for such contexts – an individual trait – is important to reap these benefits and reach an innovative state. In sum, this research contributes to exploring the factors catalysing an innovative state by observing the daily influences shaping innovation (c.f. Weinberger et al. 2018), and adds to the growing recognition of research on the context of economic behaviour of individual entrepreneurs (Welter 2011).

Second, this paper offers a new perspective on innovation and creative entrepreneurship. Much of the rich and extensive literature on innovation has focused on innovation in high-tech and traditional manufacturing (Miles and Green 2008). Nevertheless, and as described above, researchers alluded to the creative industries as important drivers of innovation and economic growth (Innocenti and Lazzeretti 2019). However, what drives innovation for entrepreneurs in these creative industries remains difficult to determine, as the creative industries have unique forms of work and organisation. Studies on innovation in the creative industries have often pinpointed the creative genius, networks and interactions (e.g. Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie 2008; Capone and Lazzeretti 2018; Stolarick and Florida 2006) and aesthetics (Drake 2003) to be important factors. Nevertheless, these studies also tend to focus either on specific cases, or on the macro-level perspective such as national contexts (Erkko. et al. 2014). Despite the plethora of research on place and innovation, the more micro-level perspective of creative entrepreneurs tends to be overlooked. Yet, it is this level that provides nuanced insights into the practices of creative entrepreneurs. By studying the perceptions of co-located entrepreneurs in the creative industries, we are able to gain a better understanding of whether and how contexts on the micro-level may influence innovative practices.

As described in the preceding section, the analysis confirmed the importance of contextual factors heightening individual innovativeness. Three out of the four categories are very much in line with the existing literature – both for the creative industries and other fields – and mostly confirm prevailing approaches. The importance of knowledge and learning ties in well with work on R&D and spillovers. Yet, the creative industries divert in the sense that the importance of goal-driven R&D is marginal, though the idea that getting the right education is widely accepted among creative entrepreneurs (see e.g. Bridgstock 2013). Social factors resemble research on innovation in the general economy even more: ‘buzz’ and face-to-face are highly important (Currid and Williams 2010; Wijngaarden, Hitters and Bhansing, 2020), and networks are crucial in successful creative practices (Capone and Lazzeretti 2018). The importance of diversity is in line with the argument of Stolarick and Florida (2006) and Innocenti and Lazzeretti (2019) that diversity stimulates innovation. On the spatial level, agglomeration externalities were repeatedly described by creative entrepreneurs, demonstrating the persisting importance of the abundant work in economic geography on this topic. Nevertheless, the emphasis of local atmospheres and aesthetic values seem to be more particular to the creative industries (see also Drake 2003) – which, obviously, is no surprise, given the its visual and aesthetic nature. The fourth category, work contexts, is less prevalent in much of the innovation literature and also more exemplary for the creative industries. Specific configurations and restrictions force creative entrepreneurs to do their work in such a way that it encourages innovation. Innovation, in this regard, is not a planned investment, but rather a by-product of the restraints creative entrepreneurs encounter.

Third, we theoretically add to the existing work on traits and contexts (e.g. Weinberger et al. 2018) by formulating a third category of ‘create’ based innovation. Our analysis yielded a number of factors that were not reducible to either of the other categories. Innovations in this context are not a result of personal traits or exogeneous contexts, but rather of *doing* creative work; i.e. the process of creation. This calls for

a more in-depth analysis of such practices, and how they, in various stages of creative production, may or may not lead to innovation. Obviously, the importance of experimentation is not new, but how and what kind of experimentation fosters innovation? How does one (paradoxically) organise serendipity? Which configurations of traits and contexts help in sparking inspiration? What can other industries learn from the more organically occurring forms of innovation in the creative industries? Future studies can continue this conversation in order to learn more about such innovation processes.

Nevertheless, this research does not systematically designate any differences between sub-sectors (e.g. Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou 2017) or other demographics. Indeed, the analysis highlighted some factors – including having an ‘open attitude’, (digital) technologies and several forms of education – that might be more prevalent in other groups, such as individually located entrepreneurs, or entrepreneurs in other sectors or larger firms. As such, this research should be the starting point for succeeding studies that could use this typology and investigate differences between sub-groups as well as the importance of specific factors in general.

Likewise, the respondents lived and worked in The Netherlands, with most of them having a Dutch nationality. Obviously, this could lead to differences in the mentioned factors, as cultural values, institutional and educational infrastructures and support systems differ between nations, and individual drive and creativity may vary across cultures (Faber and Heslen 2004; Zahra and Wright 2011). Future research could do a cross-national analysis. Finally, while the goal of this research is to explore the factors contributing to innovation rather than measuring the prevalence, the results might be biased towards the more spatialised factors as the empirical research is confined to entrepreneurs in the creative industries working in business centres or clusters – mostly in relatively urban contexts.

Despite these limitations, this research helps in foregrounding the factors contributing to innovation for the creative industries, and – considering their forerunner role – perhaps also for entrepreneurs in the (knowledge) economy at large. Many of today’s innovation policies are geared towards programmes designed to foster ‘traditional’ spillovers such as industry networks, councils or other industrial forms of support (Stolarick and Florida 2006). The role of creativity and creative entrepreneurs is still relatively immature, and would benefit from further development. On a more practical level, stakeholders may use this typology for developing a broad range of inputs for their members in order to stimulate the local innovative climate. Policy makers, research institutes and universities may benefit by strengthening their institutional ties and in developing a local innovative milieu. Finally, creative entrepreneurs seeking to expand their markets, develop new products or services, or new methods of production (e.g. Schumpeter 1934) may use it for guidance in increasing their entrepreneurial and innovative activities.

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