English abstract:

Tales of Entrepreneurship

Contributions to understanding entrepreneurial life

The ‘dominant idea’ of entrepreneurship is that entrepreneurship is something extraordinary, performed by ‘special’ people (cf. Ogbor, 2000, Nodoushani & Nodoushani, 2000). This thesis, however, answers a repeated call in entrepreneurship research to view entrepreneurship as an ‘ordinary’ activity, performed by ‘ordinary’ persons. More precisely, it follows and builds upon the proposition that entrepreneurship should be seen as something nearly everyone can perform (Mitchell, 1997, Steyaert, 2004, Hytti, 2005) under all sorts of circumstances (Steyaert & Katz, 2004).

Understanding the ‘ordinary’ in entrepreneurship means entering the entrepreneurial ‘realm of experience’ (the entrepreneurial life-world). And thus looking at all entrepreneurial activities, also those activities that could be looked upon as (too) mundane, (too) ordinary. It also means looking at how activities are formed, how they flow and change. In other words: the dynamics of entrepreneurial activity; entrepreneurial life as becoming process (see Figure 1).

This thesis makes extensive use of narrative; according to Steyaert (1997), narrative is of particular use when it comes to understanding process aspects of the phenomenon under review. It is not merely that narratives relate of processes (sequences of events) that makes them so useful, but more that the relationally constructing of narratives is a process of creating ‘reality’ (Hosking, 2004). A narrative (or story) in its broadest sense is anything told or recounted by an individual, group of individuals, organisation etc. Narratives and stories can take many forms. They can be oral, written or filmed (Barthes, 1977, Linde, 2001), fictional or non-fictional. What makes a story a story and not ‘just’ an account of events and facts is a sequence of events, connected by a plot (cf. Van Eeten et al., 1996, Czarniawska, 1998).
In Chapter 1 of the thesis, a dominant conceptualisation of entrepreneurship – in this case the entrepreneurial myth – is further explored and illuminated. Myths reflect the way a (part of) society attributes meaning to a particular phenomenon. Chapter 1 identifies and discusses what the dominant idea of a privileged hero entrepreneur entails; someone who is extraordinary, superior to ‘normal’ people, someone who creates new worlds, conquers crises, has striking new ideas, can manage alone, goes to extremes to get what (s)he wants, fights establishment and fights suppression.

In Chapter 2, Boje’s (2001) deconstruction analysis is introduced. Deconstruction is a method for ‘retelling’ a dominant narrative such as the entrepreneurial myth. It is designed to add to the plotted narrative other stories, thus delivering a richer account of entrepreneurial experience. To deconstruct means to replace the dominant narrative with a more humble one, since a (plotted) narrative tends to highlight some matters, thereby automatically shadowing others (microstoria; implicit or explicit dualities in a narrative). Chapter 2 offers a way to arrive at a nuanced dominant narrative, in this case that of an entrepreneur as a special person performing special activities. Employing this method in entrepreneurship education helps stimulate critical thinking in students (in other words, to realise that there is more than one truth).
Chapter 3 is a contribution to a more intricate understanding of a dominant idea (in this case of family entrepreneurship) as well as to an understanding of its dynamics. When scrutinised for shifts between time frames and for connected terms, a dominant idea is revealed as no longer static, but dynamic, unfixed.

Chapter 4 combines dynamics, or rather becoming, and the mundane. In Chapter 4, Lefebvre’s notion of rhythm (2004) is used as a tool to analyse the emergence and creation of The Republic of Tea Company (see www.republicoftea.com) as a dynamic, ongoing process. Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of rhythm differs from other conceptualisations of rhythm in that Lefebvre proposes a non-linear rhythmic understanding of activities. Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis performed on the emergence and creation of The Republic of Tea Company resulted in the following propositions: entrepreneurship is a rhythm rather than a linear trajectory starting from an opportunity; and entrepreneurship as rhythmic activity does not unfold sequentially, for linear rhythm excludes ‘time as a locus of possibility for the emergence of the new’ (Ivanchikova, 2006).

Chapter 5 proposes film as a means to ‘capture’ the emerging, everyday quality of entrepreneurial life, at the same time suggesting it as a means to teach students along these lines, by discussing an experiment in having students film entrepreneurship as an ongoing, dynamic process and as a ‘real-life’ phenomenon.