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## Teaching Artist Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/htaj20>

### The Teaching Artist as Cultural Learning Entrepreneur: An Introductory Conceptualization

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Published online: 24 Mar 2015.



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To cite this article: Tatiana Chemi (2015) The Teaching Artist as Cultural Learning Entrepreneur: An Introductory Conceptualization, Teaching Artist Journal, 13:2, 84-94, DOI: [10.1080/15411796.2015.997114](https://doi.org/10.1080/15411796.2015.997114)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15411796.2015.997114>

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural learning entrepreneur:  
A new professional identity for teaching artists?

TEACHING ARTIST JOURNAL 13(2), 84–94

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# The Teaching Artist as Cultural Learning Entrepreneur: An Introductory Conceptualization

## Portrait of the Artist as an Entrepreneur

In the field of teaching artists a new professional profile might be arising: the cultural learning entrepreneur. Compelled by European standards for business and social innovation, the new role is in search of identity and shared understanding. In the present article I present a network project, funded by the European Community, which aims at conceptualizing and institutionalizing this new role within a community of practice. At the same time I attempt an introductory conceptualization, framing it by means of existing literature on related models of entrepreneurship.

The novelty of this approach is in the contextualization of teaching artists as entrepreneurs at the intersection of cultural activities and learning. This has been introduced before in Booth ("The Music" 215–222) under the designation of "educational entrepreneur."

Being a theoretical exercise that is new to this field of practitioners, this effort does not come without fundamental questions: Which and whose learning are we talking about? How do we think of culture in this context? What do cultural learning activities consist in? What does it mean to be (or work as) a cultural learning entrepreneur? How do individuals become cultural learning entrepreneurs?

To address these questions, I was involved in the observation of a cultural learning entrepreneur network at its very beginning and in the desk study of the very definition of cultural learning entrepreneurship. In 2013 I followed the newly established European Cultural Learning Network (ECLN). The ECLN was initiated as a research and development project funded by the European Commission and aimed at the establishment of a European network of cultural entrepreneurs who are working in the field of cultural learning. Defining cultural learning as the learning experiences that cultural entrepreneurs design for themselves and a given target group by means of cultural experiences ("artists support



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their own learning and the learning of others by engaging in creative and cultural experiences"; Stanley), the ECLN research group inquired the profile of the European cultural learning entrepreneur. To do so, the ECLN project established a network of cultural learning entrepreneurs, which consisted of a core group of twelve partners from eleven countries (UK, Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, Netherland, Slovenia, Croatia, Estonia, and Denmark). The network members had the triple function of informants about own practices, respondents about cultural learning practices in each own country, and co-researchers in an action research setting. Each partner engaged its own network of cultural learning entrepreneurs in the research and facilitated focus group discussions at national level. The systematic documentation of these conversations is the core of the ECLN research project.

By launching a research and development project, the ECLN had a twofold ambition:

1. Collecting data on cultural learning entrepreneurs in order to map the field of cultural entrepreneurship and nonformal learning environments
2. Enabling entrepreneurs in this field to reflect on their own and their peers' experiences, and to establish an active community of learners within the network.

The guiding questions turned around a definite kind of cultural industry: the one involving learning outputs and/or experiences. Moreover, the main interest of ECLN was to portrait individuals, contexts, and practices within cultural learning. The overall ECLN research aimed at finding out what a cultural learning entrepreneur looks like in a European context.

The leading research questions for the present contribution are as follows:

How is the concept of cultural learning entrepreneur/ship understood within international literature?

Which are the main themes, advantages and challenges that literature points at, regarding the praxis of cultural learning entrepreneur/ship?

The methodology used for this study is twofold: (1) qualitative observations of two of the ECLN meetings and qualitative interviews with practitioners, mainly retrieved within action research frames (facilitated focus group interviews), and (2) literature review.

The purpose of the review was to validate the original empirical data collected within the ECLN meetings and the conceptualization of cultural entrepreneurship as applied to learning objectives.

Summing up the findings of the qualitative data of this study I find the field of cultural learning entrepreneurship very diverse in practice but very much focused on artistic activities that are instead broadly defined as *cultural*. To which extent this definition is due to the democratic broadening of the concept of art to aesthetic activities that are not traditionally seen as "art" (such as gardening or gastronomy), or to a cultural anxiety toward expressions of "Art," intended as fine-cultural entertainment, is not clear. As a matter of fact the ECLN community members mostly work with or within artistic enterprises, either as freelancers or in larger arts or culture organizations. Field observation and informal interviews have shown that among ECLN participants the practice of cultural learning entrepreneurship is almost implicit and tacit, which makes any conceptualization difficult and ambiguous. This ambiguity and variety is mirrored in the consulted literature, to which the definition of cultural learning entrepreneurship is a novelty, only possibly approached by means of closely related definitions, such as cultural/creative entrepreneurship or cultural/creative industry.

The learning perspective seems to be addressed differently within artistic practices or contexts and in the individual artist's understanding. Cultural learning is addressed as either the learning achieved or facilitated by artists or the artists' own learning achieved formally, informally and in communities of practice. When learning is mentioned in the literature, one finds a similar variety.

Last but not least, the red thread that characterizes the work of these teaching artists is their entrepreneurial self-

understanding and practice. The educational work unfolds often in nonformal settings, where the artists establish entrepreneurial strategies. These entrepreneurial working conditions might allow for independent choices and a high degree of autonomy.

My hypothesis is that looking at teaching artists as cultural entrepreneurs might broaden the view on the educational and social role of teaching artists, adding to the teaching artist profiles a dynamic and autonomous element.

## The Concept of Cultural Learning Entrepreneur/ship

Since creativity and knowledge have been seen as central to human development and economy, the Western world engaged in a large number of studies and initiatives focusing on how to understand creativity and learn creatively. Creativity studies trace the turning point for this interest in the fifties, when post-World War II imposed a specific need on a wretched world: to find new solutions for development and growth (Kaufman and Sternberg). This need, together with other socio-historical changes such as the post-Fordism economy and the commodification of culture and arts, has generated the praxis of cultural entrepreneurship. According to the literature, this consists in individuals and organizations that actively produce cultural artifacts or experiences sell their "goods" in an organized setting (Hartley). Potts and Cunningham proposed the definition of creative industry and described it as "a new analytic definition of the industrial components of the economy in which creativity is an input and content or intellectual property is the output" (233).

In recent years (Jones; Oakley), this tendency has been conceptualized as the orderly building of industry. Cultural commodities can spread from gardening and sports to arts and performances, creativity, and culture, and the arts are nothing but commodities. Nevertheless the most consistent British reviews in this field (Jones; Oakley) focus on the work facilitated by artists or organizations employing artists.

Hesmondhalgh pointed at the need of empirical studies that describe in detail the work of a cultural entrepreneur.

Because of a missing conceptualization on cultural learning entrepreneurship, this concept and field has been investigated by means of related concepts: the cultural/creative industry and the artist teacher. The cultural learning entrepreneur has been an active profile for a long time, defined by other "labels." But how long has this entrepreneurial profile been active?

Raffo et al. go back to the post-Fordist crisis of the big industries as the socioeconomic event that paved the way to the growth and development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including the ones that work with culture, creativity, and learning. Potts and Cunningham maintained that the term *creative industry* was first introduced by the British Department of Culture, Media & Sport in its 1998 template (DCMS).

The term "culture industry" was originally coined by Horkheimer and Adorno ("The Culture Industry") with a pejorative meaning. The authors' Marxist perspective looked at the phenomenon of cultural industries as commodification of culture. Cultural models were subjugated to industrialization and capitalism, with the consequence of losing quality and independence. By imposing the industrial production model to culture, capitalism was giving the same standards to material and immaterial goods and taking away authenticity from cultural production.

The critical approach to culture industry was commonly shared within the Frankfurt school; for example, Marcuse pointed at the ideological significance of the growing gap between leisure and work, and the subsequent cultural production of pure entertainment for the masses in order to pacify and manipulate them (see also Shorthose).

The Marxist positions have successively developed into two different theoretical approaches: The first one is enthusiast of an industrial model that provides affordable cultural goods to a growing mass of consumers, and the second one expects governmental support to cultural industries, with the payoff of a large socioeconomic

return in terms of creativity, personal growth, employment, and wealth (Jeffcutt, Pick, and Protherough 132–133). To these catastrophic views on culture industry Jeffcutt et al. added what they call the romantic view: culture as an antidote to industrialism and as a positive means to democratization. This involves cultural learning as content that is related *through* culture or cultural experiences or is about these, as the ECLN practitioners seem to do.

entrepreneur, which is very similar to the profile of a cultural learning entrepreneur and common challenges are contained within the two definitions.

Recently, within the field of creative industry studies a new definition emerged. Potts et al. propose to turn to define creative industries social network markets. This, in their opinion, catches the systemic complexity and relational essence of the phenomenon.

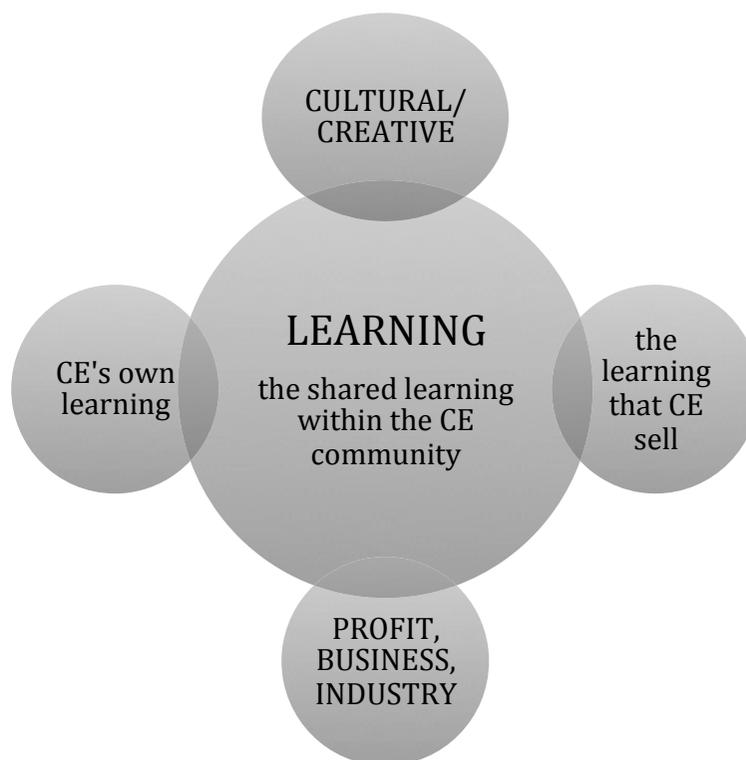


Figure 1. The cultural learning model in entrepreneurship.

Definitional issues are challenged by a further semantic complexity: The adjectives cultural or artistic do not simplify the conceptual exercise in order to introduce cultural learning entrepreneurship. Jeffcutt et al. (129) quoted Williams in order to explain that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language, and "art" or "artists" also provide no conceptual clarity or unity. Oakley, for instance, reviews the field of cultural entrepreneurship focusing on artists as members of the cultural labor market. This contribution depicts a cultural

In one of the ECLN-related meeting cultural entrepreneurs discussed the role of learning in the context of culture industry. Figure 1 depicts one of the ways of understanding the dynamics in the field. It shows that defining cultural learning entrepreneurship demands a large effort of navigating through a cross-disciplinary and multifaceted field, balancing between different kinds of learning (the artist's one, the participants' one, or the shared one) and different agendas (the industrial, the educational, the cultural).

The model focuses on cultural entrepreneurs whose role is to make profit out of culture and not necessarily (even though often) by means of art or not necessarily by means of learning experiences. The ECLN meetings suggested that thinking of educational experiences as a part of the role of cultural entrepreneurs can enrich the impact of the arts on society and as well on industry. Teaching artists, if looked upon as entrepreneurs, might bring the change potential of learning experiences to several societal contexts that not necessarily are designed as educational environments.

Last but not least, the term *entrepreneurship* in connection with cultural fields raises few questions and cross-cultural comparisons. Mulcahy underlines the etymology of the word entrepreneur as originally linked to the semantic field of cultural production: He is surprised that the *Oxford English Dictionary* reports as first meaning of the word "director of musical production." What happened to this semantic undertone? Second, Mulcahy addresses the issue of profit for cultural entrepreneurs. The "American model" of cultural entrepreneurship is built at the intersection of three different functions: (1) the bottom-line and profit-generating, (2) the not-for-profit and patronage, and (3) governmental subvention. The cultural entrepreneur administrates and balances all the three functions.

## Main Themes, Advantages, and Challenges Regarding the Praxis of Cultural Entrepreneurship

Mulcahy addresses one of the central issues in the field of cultural entrepreneurship: the issue of funding and patronage. Europe and the United States seem to follow two different models, which are context related and perhaps not replicable in other contexts. He raises worries about privatization in this sector, which might lead to strategic choices that overprioritize blockbuster solutions. As an example he brings the tendencies in the

museum sector, where blockbuster solutions spin off democratization but also deliver less quality.

Potts and Cunningham propose four models for understanding the rapidly growing creative industries and describe the importance of adequate policy attention.

Their studies highlight that the economic value of the creative industries may extend beyond just the manifest production of cultural goods or the employment of creative people but may have a more general role in driving and facilitating the process of change across the entire economy, holding a "dynamic significance" rather than a static one (233). They propose the following models and related policies:

- *Welfare model*, supported by welfare subsidy. It drains the economy against the background of low incomes and productivity and offers low growth.
- *Competition*, supported by standard industry policy. The creative industries sector is just one of many industrial sectors and has a neutral effect on the whole economy. It does not require any special policy.
- *Growth*, supported by investment and growth, is associated with the generation of jobs, commodities, services, but also with new types of the above.
- *Innovation*, supported by innovation policy. In this model creative industries are not "an industry per se, but rather . . . an element of the *innovation system* of the whole economy" (238). They support change.

Peters proposes a different taxonomy, based on the intrinsic *role* of the cultural entrepreneurs more than their economic value. He conceptualizes two educational roles: the one associated with "personal anarcho-aesthetics" and the one associated with the "design principle" (42). The former is generated by myths about creativity, Romanticism and cultural inheritance (the passionate, unique genius) and the latter is relational and attuned to educational theories that value networks, communities of practice and peer exchanges.

Gibson instead addresses a general rule of thumb: Culture matters in research on the cultural industries, in the sense that, when defining or trying to define the phenomenon of cultural or creative industries, what matters is the cultural construction shared by a given community of practitioners and/or scholars.

## The Learning of Cultural Entrepreneurs

One fundamental issue in this field is, How, when, and where do the cultural entrepreneurs learn their profession? Raffo et al. address the reason why cultural entrepreneurs rarely engage in formal business training and support. They argue that these specific kinds of entrepreneurs are rather motivated through their activities and jobs by means of activities embedded in their environments. In spite of the economic relevance of cultural entrepreneurship (Raffo et al. 215), documented by several government white papers and commentators, research findings still point at a skill gap and training needs.

The cultural industries sector, looked upon as a potential champion for future developmental solutions to national and international growth and prosperity, still thrives against the background of nonformal training settings and does not thrive in formal training situations. The reason seems to be that these entrepreneurs regard reflection within their community of practice or with other practitioners as most valuable for their own learning about providing their business with successful outputs. They have concrete problems to solve, and they regard their peers as their preferred learning sources rather than formal business training. Raffo et al. mean that this must be taken in consideration if policies want to find ways to support the growth of this sector, for instance, by eliminating inadequate formal business training offers, or by proposing different models of learning, or by allowing learning to happen in communities of practice within the context of specific business activities. For instance they propose

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that the latter could be addressed by “culturally sensitive mentors who are from, or have an in-depth knowledge of the sector [mentors that] appear to be given particular importance by cultural entrepreneurs” (218).

Last but not least, cultural entrepreneurs seem to need more dialogic and discursive environments, where they can interact with each other, and with experts or mentors, in a situated context. This means a different pedagogical approach to the artists’ own learning but, as I suggest, probably also the artists’ knowledge about progressive educational approaches also applies in their work.

The literature consulted focuses on two kinds of areas of learning for cultural learning entrepreneurs: the entrepreneurial and the pedagogical. Almost absent is a focus on achievement of skills pertinent to the artistic modality or cultural domain of choice in an educational perspective. One explanation can be that this type of learning is included in the professional learning journey of the individual artist, either in formal paths or in nonformal trajectories, or a combination of the two. Nevertheless, contributions on cultural learning entrepreneurship mostly highlight the aforementioned topics. One contribution that stands out is the recent *Teaching Artist Handbook* (Jaffe, Barniskis, and Cox) that inspires the teaching artists’ learning by integrating artistic and educational perspectives.

In 2004 McCaslin, Cohen, and Booth systematically addressed the topic of professional development for teaching artists by collecting a significant sampling. However, the authors conclude that a larger study of this field is needed on a larger scale. In 2009, Saraniero partly addressed this need

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by publishing a contribution on the topic of training and preparation of teaching artists. Even though only related to a sample of Californian teaching artists, the findings and methodology of this study show interesting results. For instance, most of the artists report that they have been trained at universities and colleges even though they value the hands-on approach and they put together their education in individual ways. The fundamental role of mentors is also reported and as well the need of training the art form at the same time as the pedagogical one. With regard to the credentialing process, especially in case of skills acquired in nonformal settings, it is critical and still without a sustainable solution.

## **Cultural Entrepreneurs Generating Learning**

As the prior definitions and the economic views on cultural/creative industries show, the concepts of industry and entrepreneurship are tightly associated with generation of profit. However, Sterngold calls

for more caution. The outputs of creative/cultural entrepreneurship are not only of economic nature: These activities enrich a community in a wide variety of ways that arts advocacy supports and communicates. Especially when creative industry consists in cultural or artistic events or products, the outputs can be intangible but highly valuable, such as learning, entertainment, community building, facilitation of change, and so forth.

The economic perspective is even more critical when considering that, in fact, many artists or cultural entrepreneurs do not earn a considerable amount of money, or enough money, or money at all. The first case is the one of low wages that, in spite of everything, allow a sustainable living; the second is the case of artists or cultural entrepreneurs who are forced into part-time jobs in order to provide the necessary earning besides their artistic activities; the third and last one is the case of artists or cultural entrepreneurs who work for free. This paradox, unacceptable in a radical conservative business perspective, draws from ideals of community service, social engagement (or entrepreneurship), participatory and educational arts activities (Reiss and Pringle).

Participatory ideals date back to the thirties and to the Frankfurt School, but educational ideals based on playfulness and creativity date back even longer: Rousseau was the first to translate the Romanticist view on creators to education, becoming the background for most of the child-centred pedagogy (Peters 49).

The purpose of art and arts education changed radically with the ideology of progressive education (Jones 17–19) that brought the child at the centre of the educational attention. Hall explores the concept and praxis of artists-teachers, as the contribution *Making Art, Teaching Art, Learning Art: Exploring the Concept of the Artist Teacher* clearly states. As this article and the many contributions in specialized journals such as the present one document, the work of teaching artists needs the active effort of balancing two different professions and identities. This means that learning outputs emerge in the dialogue between

the two and in active relationships with the educational context.

Among the reports that compile major studies that provide new evidence of enhanced learning and achievement when students are involved in a variety of arts experiences we can quote *Champions of Change* edited by Fiske that covers seven major studies, and *Critical Links* edited by Deasy. This compendium summarizes and discusses 62 research studies that examine the effects of arts learning on students' social and academic skills. The research studies cover each of the art forms and have been widely used to help make the case that learning in the arts is academic, basic, and comprehensive. However, these are general findings on the impact of the arts on learners, regardless the teaching artist's contribution, even though a large number of experiments with arts-integration or arts in education are—as a matter of fact—designed with the collaboration of professional artists (Chemi).

One of the most relevant contributions in this theme is the 2011 Cultural Learning Alliance's *Imagine Nation*, which makes the case for cultural learning.

This contribution strongly advocates for the social and economical function of cultural learning, stressing the transformative element of learning through the arts and culture. The subject of cultural learning seem to "constitute a body of knowledge, skills and understanding that has intellectual depth and critical rigour" (Cultural Learning Alliance 9). The fundamental role of cultural heritage in the building of learning, identity, and to foster development, especially for children and youth, is not to be ignored at any time, though is to be fully exploited. The dominating discourse is here the essentiality of the arts and culture for fostering the creativity that nations (here UK, but can be extended to EU and Scandinavia) must develop in the future. Here the economic discourse has an easy entrance with arguments taken from the fact that the practices of cultural learning sustain cultural businesses, such as museums or cultural institutions.

Exceptionally, in this contribution is possible to find a definition of cultural

learning: "is an active engagement with the creation of our arts and heritage" (Cultural Learning Alliance 15). The publication stresses the art-making part of participation in a cultural heritage. Gardner, on the contrary, has conceptualized a different attitude: the participation in the arts (can be extended to cultural experiences in general), which includes both the making and the participation in artistic experiences as audiences, seers, listeners, readers. Personally I wish to add to Gardner's taxonomy a third level of participation: arts appreciation, which involves an expert level of cognitive and affective participation but not necessarily in the making of works of arts or cultural artifacts. The making in this case is the active construction of meanings and perspectives, rather than the making of artistic artefacts.

The arts can be thus defined as a broad range of artistic activities within a given cultural heritage. The latter can be defined as the understanding of the individual as being part of a cultural tradition, "material culture and the world around them" (Cultural Learning Alliance 15). According to the Cultural Learning Alliance publication, much of the learning that cultural learning entrepreneurs facilitate is focused on the transmission of a given cultural tradition or heritage. This is partly confirmed by the ECLN research and by other publications, with the addition of other kinds of learning outputs. For instance, the ECLN members teach artistic skills or through artistic skills, or other teaching artists' practices aim at facilitating learning that can be emotional, curricular, relational.

Even though results from studies on the benefits of the arts for learning (e.g., OECD) can be associated to the benefits of teaching artist partnerships or cultural learning

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enterprises, more specific studies are needed in this field. Specifically, the assessment of what kind of learning the two roles (teaching artist and cultural learning entrepreneur) can generate or facilitate in different educational contexts, are mostly needed.

## Selling Out or Culture-Making? Conclusion and Perspectives

One of the recurring topics about cultural entrepreneurship is the perceived gap between money and art or culture (Casacuberta and Gandelman; Caves). Jeffcutt et al. explain that some theoretical positions contribute to describing this complexity. Poststructuralism, for instance, denies any distinction between high culture and mass culture, seeing them both as nothing but commercial. Postmodernism and pop art replicate and reproduce the logic of consumer capitalism, in fact reinforcing the capitalist mind-set. However, when using the entrepreneurial metaphor, the concept of cultural industry might be imprecise and oversimplifying because the cultural industry rather than selling goods is more often offering experiences. Moreover, learning, economic, and artistic success do not necessarily coincide.

But even in the field of organizational learning, the arts are described as agents of learning and change. Darsø categorizes several roles of the arts; among the others she points at the art as a process of change,

that is, a tool for radical innovation and organizational learning. Similarly, Taylor and Ladkin developed a categorization of the role of art in a business context which includes the "making": the "artistic making draws upon the richness of the inner life and allows it to flourish and contribute to our experience of more fulsome living" (15).

Several dilemmas are linked to the activities of organizational aesthetic, for instance, the fact that business might have a too strong influence on the arts' cultural and ideological independence: "Business sponsors of the arts help to shape decisions about what artists may do" (Jeffcutt et al. 134).

However the precariousness of the jobs in the field of cultural or creative entrepreneurship in general is well documented (Gill and Pratt; Throsby; Throsby & Zednik): Banks and Hesmondhalgh address the challenges of finding a job in this field where employability issues include insecurity, inequality, and exploitation. On the other hand it seems to be possible to reconceptualize the "selling out" against the "starving" discourse: Wilson's definition of social creativity, with its focus on social justice and empowerment (374), seems to bypass issues of commodification, exploitation, and instrumentalization of the arts and culture by associating the field of cultural entrepreneurship to social innovation and change. More studies are needed in this direction, which values learning as social change and the arts as means of change processes and learning.

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