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THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP DISCOURSE – OUTLINED FROM DIVERSE CONSTRUCTIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT THE ACADEMIC SCENE

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Principal Topic

The interest in entrepreneurship seems to be escalating, emanating from the industry sphere and Schumpeter's thesis on economic development until today's discussions on opportunities (e.g. Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). In general, entrepreneurship is held forward as the model irrespective of what diverse problems that are addressed. In this vein entrepreneurship has disseminated into other spheres such as the public (Edwards, Jones, Lawton and Llewellyn, 2002), the private (du Gay, 1999), and the educational (Eyal and Inbar, 2003). Irrespective of which sphere that is under scrutiny, economic growth and development seem to be an inherent assumption with regards to entrepreneurship and is consequently the dominant reason of studying it (Ahl, 2002; Ogbor, 2000), although there is little known about how new businesses influence economic performance (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). However, nowadays there are voices proclaiming that entrepreneurship research should bring forward new perspectives of entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2004; Jennings, Perren och Carter, 2005) and in the academic sphere other rationales are discernible. To mention a few are issues such as environmental concerns stressed (Albrecht, 2002; Pastakia, 1998), as well as social development (Duhl, 2000; Wallace, 1999; Leadbeater, 1997), and equality perspectives (Ahl, 2002; Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio, 2004). Somehow, there seems to be a kind of bewilderment, a mystification – or perhaps a latent conflict – regarding what basic assumptions we should attach to the concept 'entrepreneurship'. Most often change and development are, one way or another, ascribed to entrepreneurship. But there are different standpoints, be it silent, regarding as to whether economic, ecological, social and egalitarian dimensions should be given first priority in developing individuals, companies, regions, nations, or in a global perspective; the entire world.

The academic world is an arena where the different spheres and standpoints of entrepreneurship find a meeting place. The discrepancy between the meanings attached to entrepreneurship raises seldom any questions in research texts on entrepreneurship, but there is instead a sometimes intense debate of how entrepreneurship should be defined. Accordingly there seems to be a desire to bring together entrepreneurship research around a clear definition of entrepreneurship and there is seldom a discussion of what actual consequences such definition would bring about. In most cases the 'entrepreneurship' concept show up as a chameleon to describe diverse things such as companies growth (Davidsson, Delmar and Wiklund, 2001); how depleted communities could work as hosts for a unique type of enterprise that combines good business practices with community goals (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004); that former Soviet Union can seen have been imbued with a mundane type of entrepreneurship (Rehn and Taalas, 2004); that charity work and enterprising make up a social entrepreneurship that could reform communities from common good (Leadbeater, 1997; Thompson, Alvy and Lees, 2000); that there is a connection between women's entrepreneurship and a strong driving force to protect mother earth (Campbell, 2004); and that increasing enterprising among immigrants not necessarily need to imply a way towards integration but create instead economic marginalisation and segregation

(Hjern, 2004). These are only a few examples of the contrasts that show up in entrepreneurship studies; an ambiguity that is most often ignored. However, sometimes it is recognized that what one is trying to describe by way of 'entrepreneurship' (Gartner, 1999; Steyaert and Katz, 2004) and how we most often understand the 'entrepreneur' (Sarasvathy, 2004; Howorth, Tempest and Coupland, 2005) is somewhat equivocal. This being so research texts on entrepreneurship can be viewed as an intersection between different spheres of life. With regards to mainstream research on entrepreneurship this crossroad often is reckoned as confusing, extremely fuzzy and problematic since the lack of a homogenous definition of entrepreneurship becomes palpable. We disagree about that view and have in mind to show that this crossroad can instead enable us to raise some interesting questions concerning the role of entrepreneurship in developing, or changing, society.

We use a discourse approach (Foucault, 1972; 1974; Wetherell and Potter, 1987; Fairclough 1992; Ahl, 2002), to analyse the research texts on entrepreneurship which we have divided in following categories: 1) texts which discuss entrepreneurship from a critical perspective; 2) texts which discuss entrepreneurship research but leave the discussion of taken for granted assumptions aside; and 3) texts which discuss 'other' aspects of entrepreneurship. We thus take a social constructionist stance as we do not view society or humans as 'natural observable facts' but as social constructions which are constantly produced, reproduced and transformed (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995). This point of departure has some important implications. First, we look upon research texts as an instance from which we can observe society as a whole, ignoring the diverse spheres by looking at them as false dichotomies which hold up the structures we have produced socially, historically, culturally and politically. Second, the basic assumptions that are associated with entrepreneurship are especially notable in the academic world since there is a discrepancy regarding what we are talking about when we are talking about entrepreneurship. The ambiguity and vagueness as to what entrepreneurship means could therefore be viewed as an opportunity to make our taken for granted assumptions regarding entrepreneurship visible. According to Gartner (1999; 2001) this is also where we should start out from if we are interested in building an entrepreneurship theory. Hence, focusing on how entrepreneurship is depicted in research texts not only ties the different spheres, rationales and assumptions together, but they are disclosed. With such a view entrepreneurship does not solely belong to the economic sphere but becomes the power of humans to create new social structures and revitalize society. How the concept 'entrepreneurship' is used within the research community seems to us as an intriguing point of departure in tracing the many different faces of entrepreneurship and calling into questions our assumptions about society and human being. Hence, the themes we find interesting to elaborate on in this paper are the following:

- Is there a process towards institutionalizing entrepreneurship in society?
- What taken for granted assumptions with regards to entrepreneurship could be disclosed from looking at entrepreneurship in the different spheres?
- What is wished to be accomplished with the increasing focus on entrepreneurialism?
- What kind of subject is produced in research texts on entrepreneurship?

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