

CREATIVITY IN PRODUCTION AND WORK

EXPERIENCES FROM SLOVENIA

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This article deals with creativity in Slovenia in relation to production and work. The focus is on depicting social environments that configure ideas about creativity and the narratives of experiencing it. The author explores creativity in relation to entrepreneurialism, innovation, social concern, and social experimentation. The article addresses ethnographic material, public discourse, and contemporary media (social media, TV, and newspapers).

Keywords: creativity, production, work, entrepreneurialism, entrepreneurship, innovation, social experimentation

Prispevek se ukvarja z ustvarjalnostjo v povezavi s produkcijo in delom v Sloveniji. Avtorica se osredini na družbena okolja, ki vzpostavljajo ideje o ustvarjalnosti in na različne pripovedi o izkušnjah ustvarjalnosti. Ustvarjalnost raziskuje v povezavi s podjetnostjo, inovacijo, družbeno skrbjo in družbenim eksperimentiranjem. Članek se sklicuje na etnografsko gradivo in analize javnega diskurza in sodobnih medijev v Sloveniji (družbenih medijev, TV in časopisja).

Ključne besede: ustvarjalnost, produkcija, delo, podjetništvo, podjetnost, inovacije, družbeno eksperimentiranje

INTRODUCTION

The transformation from a society based on industrial knowledge to postindustrial knowledge creates new ground for creativity. Creativity seems to be on everyone's lips: being creative promises success in professions that form the new creative industries and fosters belonging to the new creative class. Due to its institutionalization in management (by maximizing productivity in a competent market), it also ensures success in other kinds of work. Creativity has become an imperative that cannot be thought apart "from the rise of a neoliberal agency that requires subjects to imagine and fashion their own future by managing risks in increased uncertainty" (Wilf 2014: 407; cf. Gershon 2011: 539–543).

The contemporary understanding of creativity in the labor market and in production in general interrelates with the concept of innovation, defined as producing technological goods or social services, both commodities with a market value. The ability to imagine something new is often based on the Romantic ideas of a genius, a talented individual that creates out of an autonomous inner nature. Anthropologists have challenged such mystifications that treat creativity as an end product, a result of an isolated event that lies outside the social context (Ingold and Hallam 2007; Wilf 2014).

Proceeding from such a critique, this article explores distinct ways of contextualizing creativity in contemporary Slovenia in relation to production and work. I explore creativity in the following contexts: in industrial production, lean business techniques, the recently

booming startup scene, innovative entrepreneurialism, the creative industries with a particular focus on coworking practice, and social experimentation directed towards social change. The areas selected follow my interests in work ideologies, experiences of work, and labor market restructuring. Creativity is a vast topic. It can be studied from many theoretical aspects and in relation to distinct contexts. My aim is not to cover the subject entirely but, as already pointed out, to explore creativity in the context of production and work.

The article addresses ethnographic material, public discourse, and contemporary media (social media, TV, and newspapers). The ethnographic material builds on fieldwork among textile industrial workers in postsocialist Slovenia (carried out between 2000 and 2012), interviews with the two coworking communities in Slovenia (in 2015 and 2016), and fieldwork among grassroots initiatives that I address as social experimentation (2017).¹ The article does not explore all of the sectors selected with the same methodology: the first part of the article builds on public and media discourse, and the second on ethnographic material.

First, I present a broader structured conditionality, a hegemonic entrepreneurial model that strives to remodel production, working subjectivities, and society. The focus is on depicting social environments that configure ideas about creativity. The second part of the article addresses ethnographic material to explore how creativity is narrated and experienced. My aim is to show that creativity became a very popular concept in recent years that I see closely interlinked with social parameters such as entrepreneurialism, innovation, social concern, and social experimentation.²

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF

By exploring neoliberalism as a situated practice, anthropologists insist on discussing the lived effects of neoliberalization and its agenda in its local manifestations instead of treating it as a global overarching coherent trend.³ In anthropological depictions of neoliberalism there is, however, a common denominator of portraying it as a project with a totalizing desire: marketization of labor, deregulation and privatization, destatization of government activities, individualization of social protection, and transforming workers and citizens' subjectivities. Flexibility has been described as the core of the neoliberal agenda, as an

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² I would like to thank all of the reviewers and the guest editor for their insightful comments that helped me improve this article.

³ For literature on neoliberalism in anthropology (as an analytical category or historical process and its criticism), see Gershon (2011) and Ganti (2014).

imperative for one's employability that is supposed to construct an individual's capacity for creative self-invention. A neoliberal perspective relies on a particular form of subjectivity and on a corporate form of agency, "produced by consciously using a means ends calculus that balances alliances, responsibility and risk" (Gershon 2011: 539). By seeing people as businesses, it presumes that people own their skills and traits, which are perceived as assets that must be constantly managed (for more, see Gershon 2011: 539; cf. Urciuoli 2008).

Deriving from this theoretical background, I briefly review the labor market reconfiguration in Slovenia in recent years, in particular in the context of the intensification and flexibilization of labor after the accession to EU in 2004, and structural adjustment policies (budget austerity) after the financial crisis in 2008. Due to treating creativity in relation to production and work, I argue that insight into a broader labor market transformation is important. I am interested in exploring how calls for creativity that perpetuate the labor market address individuals and how this narrative of creativity is articulated.

Activation policies (in particular after 2005) significantly marked the restructured labor market and (by implementing the Lisbon strategy) brought radical changes to the social system. The active employment policies introduced the concept of employability (instead of employment) as one's own ability to treat the employment problem. The state promoted self-employment (Kanjuro Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015) as a special employment status (since 2008) that can be achieved by marketing one's entrepreneurial self. These changes were accompanied by moralization, stigmatization, and even criminalization of unemployment. Unemployment and poverty were not considered a structural problem, but a result of people's personal decisions and lack of motivation (Leskošek 2014).

The withdrawal of the state from social provision, marketization of labor and health, and transformation of workers' and citizens subjectivities changed the way we understand and treat social problems, social positions, and class relations. Based on the work of Nikolas Rose, my research links such restructuring processes with a self-responsibility paradigm. I treat the self-responsibility paradigm as a matrix that established a new ideal of the individual and the self by emphasizing self-dependence and self-reliance with the idea that "we can count on nobody but ourselves" (Vodopivec 2012a).

Rose refers to the political rationalities and technologies of government⁴ to draw attention to self-regulatory mechanisms, the contemporary role of the economy, and management expertise in developing the entrepreneurial self that directs the way people drive and steer their lives and themselves as enterprises. He argues for the importance of analyzing language and vocabularies "not simply in terms of meaning or rhetoric, but as 'intellectual technologies,' ways of rendering existence thinkable and practicable, amenable to the distinctive influence of various techniques of inscription, notation and calculation" (Rose and Miller 1990: 27).

⁴ Nikolas Rose drew his ideas from Michel Foucault, above all his concept of governmentality and biopolitics.

In such a context, entrepreneurship does not merely target organizational forms or business models, but generally establishes the ideal of the individual's activity in different spheres of life. Individuals are transformed into enterprising individuals that strive for prosperity, excellence, and fulfilment. Such transformations are related to new types of morals and values: individuals' prosperity is measured by their success and skills in successful self-management (individuals should become good managers of their lives). This accounts for their personal gain as well as social progress (Rose 1998). Business methodologies set new ways of thinking to maximize productivity and ensure economic and personal growth.

I do not state that these processes are totalizing. However, they have strong social effects, which do not result merely in social exclusion, marginalization, and criminalization of those that cannot follow the change, but also in the internalization of such expectations and feelings of guilt when these are not achieved.

In addition, the paradigm put forth a demand for self-regulation and self-improvement. The imperative for constant (self) transformation, which is the responsibility of every citizen, builds on creativity and innovation (relating to production and consumption). I do not claim that people blindly follow ideological prescriptions dictated by capital. By exploring experiences of creativity and people's aspiration to create and be creative, I see creativity as generated and driven by people's curiosity, internal motivation, desires, and visions. I address this in the last two sections of this article.

The following section deals with creativity as an organizational resource, inscribed in new management strategies and reorganization of labor, production relations, and conditions. Before moving to the very concrete place that I explored in my fieldwork, the production floor in a textile factory, I briefly address a general cultural perception of innovation because within the contemporary production system creativity is most often thought of in relation to innovation.

Business consultancies, politicians, EU bureaucrats, strategic documents in particular, development agendas, the labor market, and entrepreneurial and research policies (e.g., Horizon 2020, the Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011–2020) are all about creativity and innovation. Innovation and creativity should not merely get people out of a crisis, as stated by political speeches, programs, and documents followed by the 2009 EU Year of Innovation and Creativity, but also generate growth and development.

A general understanding of innovation revives Schumpeter's definition;⁵ it encompasses the production of new commodities, technologies, or organizational changes—anything that can open up new markets (aimed at economic growth). It is intended to be the work of an individual, the result of his or her experimentation.

The anthropologist Eitan Wilf (2015), however, stated that innovation in business works as a systematic strategy that is not entirely random or totally calculated. Based on

⁵ Joseph Schumpeter published his book *Theorie der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung* (The Theory of Economic Development) in 1912.

fieldwork among business consultancies in the US, Wilf depicted how mentors in business innovation workshops create a puzzling environment and use competitive relations among the participants to encourage new, innovative solutions. On the one hand, the unstable environment created at the workshop reflects the insecurity of the contemporary social world. On the other hand, innovation is encouraged and limited by systematic strategies, or structural contingencies.

Routinized innovation is a new cultural organization ethos that emphasizes constant generation of newness, new cultural knowledge that consists of systematic strategies of such generation, and new cultural artefacts that result from the application of such strategies (Wilf 2015). Wilf argued that such an ethos is an engine for a faster pace of cultural evolution.

Wilf's article is a reminder that, in spite of the general understanding of innovation as an individual experimentation's result, institutionalized innovation (in business) is marked by intense intragroup competition, and it is conditioned and based on rationalized and rule-governed production that also incorporates some space for spontaneity. I address Wilf's work as an introduction before moving to exploring creativity as an organizational source inscribed in management strategies and in organizations of extreme uncertainty: startups.

RUNNING LEAN

I first heard about lean production when doing my fieldwork on the shop floor at the Predilnica textile factory in Litija in 2004. Lean manufacturing was part of the new management strategies in the restructured factory. By implementing constant improvements with minimum costs,⁶ Predilnica turned into a small company with flexible production, minimum waste, and maximum production. The new management strategies were supposed to enable flexibility to quickly adjust to market needs. Due to its specific yet flexible specialization—producing yarn above all for the furniture, automobile, and medical industries—Predilnica not only managed to survive (whereas the majority of textile factories went bankrupt), but was also considered a success. The flexible production resulted in flexible workers that knew how to manage different machines to perform distinct jobs.

Lean production management redefined workers' positions, the way they worked, and their bodies and minds. Based on efficiency and innovation, it aimed to offer a creative tension at the shop floor, where workers were involved in solving problems⁷ (which in a Fordist organization⁸ separated manual from intellectual work). Due to the new manage-

⁶ Lean (just in time) production was developed following Japanese production strategies, with minimum waste and flexible workers, to quickly respond to rapidly changing market demands.

⁷ The "lean production philosophy of creative tensions" is often cited in the literature on the topic. It comes from Womack, Jones, and Roos (2007).

⁸ A main feature of the socialist organization of labor was division into small units, or assembly lines (similar to the Fordist organization of labor, even though it cannot be equated; for more, see Vodopivec 2012c).

ment practice, workers that operated machines were invited to think about innovation. The new organization was intended to stimulate their initiatives, as well as communication between lower management and workers. The attention of human resource management was redirected from collective relations towards individuals and their creativity and autonomy. Management and labor reorganizations required a new worker: not merely a machine operator but a thinking subject, an innovator that makes suggestions, constantly pondering new, better ways of working.

Lean management was supposed to be revolutionary, not merely in production but in any kind of organization. It was not based on a hierarchy, but on collaboration. Experts in organizational life and engineers of human relations gave an enterprise a new technological form through architecture, organization of work, and supervisory systems. The new regulatory practices drew extensively from psychology and other psy-sciences (Rose 1998). In such contexts, creativity was treated as an organizational resource with the aim of allowing proper workflows and control systems to maximize productivity, excellence, and competency. Due to these new values of creativity and freedom at work, human resource management's redefinitions of workers' subjectivities had to connect economic goals with self-regulatory, self-disciplined, and self-monitoring mechanisms for workers to internalize the requirements of the company and realize them independently (to work not out of fear, but inner motivation). Instead of direct control, alternative forms and new disciplinary techniques developed; for example, responsible autonomy (Friedman 1977: 43–57).⁹

Lean techniques shaped new business forms and production relations. In my research, I followed them out of production halls to new business scripts and environments. Together with the revolutionary development of the internet and telecommunication technologies, lean techniques designers formed a base for a new production model: a startup company. A startup company was a new organizational (entrepreneurial) model. It could have been a small business or a partnership. It was designed for fast-moving environments of extreme uncertainty. As claimed by Steve Blank (2013), an entrepreneurial visionary and one of the founding fathers of the new approach, “the creation of an innovation economy that's driven by the rapid expansion of start-ups has never been more imperative.”

Startup companies were not developed as “small versions of large companies” but as new conceptual models with new methods, tools, techniques, and terminology. These new businesses aimed at growth and continuous innovation. They were based on generating innovative ideas, developing them into competitive products and growing fast. Initially designed to create fast-growing tech ventures, the lean method and startup principles were later applied to government agencies, schools, and universities because they were considered very successful tools in contemporary times of extreme uncertainty.

⁹ Due to the nature of work (fulfilling the norm), workers on the shop floor have to be fast at operating machines, and they only rarely propose changes. Even though lean manufacture affected workers' bodies and minds, it did not revolutionary change the way they worked on the shop floor (Vodopivec 2012c).

The lean startup method¹⁰ places experimentation over elaborate planning and iterative design over the traditional big design of up-front development. It builds on a feedback system and teaches constant flexibility. It is based on three key principles (Maurya 2014): a business model canvas (instead of a business plan), customer development (to test hypotheses), and agile development (to eliminate wasted time and resources). New ventures start with creating minimum viable products; they offer them to customers to receive their feedback immediately. Customers' input is used to test assumptions and make adjustments, and business concepts are constantly improved through such feedback. The emphasis is on nimbleness and speed. The instructions teach them to go out of the building, ask questions, observe and identify what people do to figure out what people need and offer them a solution. Lean startup techniques are characterized as very adaptable and based on a linear development approach.¹¹

In the international arena, startup companies and methods are only a few years old. In Slovenia, the startup scene is even younger. According to the 2016 European startup monitor:

Slovenia has a relatively young but extremely dynamic and rapidly developing startup ecosystem. National startup celebrities, such as Outfit7, Celtra, Zemanta and Databox, have carried the voice of the country's extreme entrepreneurial talents, with their excellent engineering and field knowledge, as far as Silicon Valley. (Rus 2016: 10)

In the last four years, many Slovenian startup projects have been accepted into business accelerators abroad. In 2013, some even won startup competitions; they were present on websites for crowdfunding, in particular on Kickstarter.¹² According to the media, Slovenian startup companies gained international recognition and were introduced as an innovation that generates (even social) innovative environment. Such news offers a new promise: "It is possible! Even in Slovenia."

A supporting environment has been flourishing since 2012 with a number of new institutions and projects emerging. However, as claimed by the Startup Manifest (startup national strategy), larger support in Slovenia is still missing, leaving the startups very self-dependent (cf. Rebernik and Jaklič 2014). The public-private partnership Start:up Slovenia Initiative¹³ was designed with the aim of building the Slovenian "startup ecosystem," an

¹⁰ The lean startup methodology was proposed by Eric Ries in 2008 and argued for in Ries 2011.

¹¹ New business literature on lean methodology and startup principles (by Steve Blank, Eric Ries, Bob Dorf, Alexander Osterwalder, etc.) generated a startup mentality that helped shape a new way of work and life, requiring an inner transformation as well.

¹² As stated on Crowdfunding Slovenia 2013, Slovenian projects are among the most popular in the world (more than ten projects with more than \$1 million on this site alone, according to the manifesto; see Rebernik and Jaklič 2014).

¹³ The leading partners of the initiative are the Maribor Venture Factory (Tovarna Podjemov) and Ljubljana Technology Park; other members include the Littoral Technology Park, the Mura Valley Technology Park, the Savinja Region Incubator, SAŠA Incubator, and RC IKT.

infrastructure that would create and promote national programs for supporting “innovative entrepreneurship” to connect private and public actors¹⁴ and place Slovenia on the map of established European startup hubs. Its role is much broader than offering its support to startups; it aims to identify and engage talents, and promote values of innovativeness, entrepreneurial drive, and general creativity with the purpose of providing competing individuals, helping them access capital and the global market, and create new jobs. One of its major goals was “to adjust the entire education system, from preschool to university, so it will be able to encourage creativity and entrepreneurial drive” (Rebernik and Jaklič 2014: 6). Start:up’s principles, values, language, and vocabulary, which promote creativity together with innovative entrepreneurialism, were also encouraged in Slovenia through other projects with a particular aim to change the mindset and raise a new generation with a different attitude towards the (labor) market, work, and life. Education was thus an important target.

CREATIVITY AS INNOVATIVE ENTREPREUNERSHIP

A very successful project in promoting innovative entrepreneurialism that has gained much attention was the TV show *Štartaj, Slovenija!* (Start, Slovenia!), organized by the media house Pop TV and Spar retail in 2016. The aim of the project (similar to the Start:up initiative) was to create an innovative entrepreneurial environment. The show itself was presented as an innovation: “On the show we would like to prove to you that you CAN create your own business, that you CAN be successful, and that you CAN live your dream” (Introduction to the show; see *Štartaj, Slovenija* 2016). For Spar (a decision was made by Slovenia’s Spar management), the main incentive for the project was “to do something good and to change the mindset” (Križnik 2017).

The organizer explained that this project was part of its social responsibility program.¹⁵ Spar invited twelve innovators to the TV show to sell their products and “to persuade the market that their products are needed.” The event was documented by Pop TV and viewers were invited to take part through Facebook and Instagram. Anybody could “contribute to the story” and support young entrepreneurs by buying their products. The idea was to back creative individuals and set a good example of how “even in Slovenia it is possible to succeed.” Such a statement needs a further explanation. The positive and supportive tone was new in the media (TV and newspapers). It was only recently that the media started presenting inspiring stories. In particular, after the economic crisis in 2008, an apocalyptic

¹⁴ The actors were the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, the Slovenian Enterprise Fund, and Spirit.

¹⁵ I was surprised that such a categorization went unchallenged. When social responsibility (the ethics of benefiting the entire society and assessing one’s impact on a structural level) becomes a corporate brand or part of corporate ethics, it changes its nature (Vodopivec 2016).

and pessimistic tone prevailed in the media. The show *Štartaj, Slovenija!* was particularly aimed at young people “to offer them a hand and stand by them.” Due to its popularity and success, *Štartaj, Slovenija!* was followed by a sequel in late 2017.

Matija Goljar, who ran the show, was already a well-known public figure. In various articles and interviews, he was presented as the most successful young entrepreneur. Goljar is the director of the entrepreneurial sandbox and social enterprise Ustvarjalnik (Creator), which has the mission of teaching young people how “to convert their skills (and what they love) into a source of income” by creating their first business projects already during their high school years. According to newspapers, TV, and social media presentations, Goljar seems to embody entrepreneurial drive, dynamism, enthusiasm, and optimism; he was thus a perfect match for the show, which aimed to contribute to broader social recognition of and support for innovative entrepreneurship.

The promotion of successful entrepreneurial stories is directed at young people in particular in order to encourage them to dare to create a better future for themselves. In the media, such statements are very often explained with a self-responsibility paradigm (and in an antisocialist stance), as the creative production director from Pop TV claimed when explaining the concept of the show:

The time when the state took care of our jobs is long gone; it is time for us to stop dreaming about them. The young generation will have to create its own jobs, and the faster we acknowledge this fact, the sooner we can become an economically successful country. (Kupec 2016)¹⁶

In such a context, creativity is a virtue that is turned into a capacity of the entrepreneurial self.

The contemporary labor market is flooded by a skill and competency discourse (Urciuoli 2008). In addition to hard skills (knowledge), there are also soft skills, which are often thought to be even more important than hard ones when searching for a job. Creativity has become one such basic soft skill, alongside communication, teamwork, leadership, tolerance, flexibility, loyalty, risk taking, and others. These skills or marketable capacities can be taught, trained, packed, and put on the labor market. According to Bonnie Urciuoli’s notion of a “worker-self-as-skills-bundle,” not only the worker’s labor power is commodified, but also the worker’s very person. Skills form aspects of personhood and modes of sociality as productive labor (Urciuoli 2008). A neoliberal perspective presumes that the self is composed of usable traits and skills, which are treated as improvable assets (Gershon 2011).

As already mentioned, after the financial crisis in 2008, the Slovenian government encouraged self-employment (Kanjuro Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015) and marketing one’s

¹⁶ In Slovenia, a self-responsibility paradigm was introduced in a critique of socialism (Vodopivec 2012a). Now, the anti-socialist contexts are not so common anymore. A constant transformation seems to have become a new normality.

enterprising self. Career clubs, fairs, festivals, and portals (in addition to the public Employment Center) mushroomed to help individuals, particularly young people, with practicalities: to train them how to invest in their skills and to enhance their performance and self-marketing. It would be important to analyze how these organizations really work and how their users experience them. I have not carried out such research. However, according to these organizations' websites, they aim to strengthen individuals' skills such as entrepreneurialism, marketing, and social capital to nurture their motivation and drive, and to teach constant evaluation of oneself (and of one's performance) based on self-reflexivity (organizing and analyzing data about oneself for better choices, decisions, and performance).¹⁷

Lean techniques and startup principles target not only entrepreneurs and innovators, but strive above all for education (in addition to science, NGOs, and local governments) in primary and secondary schools to raise a new generation with a market-driven mindset. Encouraging Creativity, Entrepreneurialism, and Innovation among Youth is a program offered every year to high schools by Spirit, Public Agency for Entrepreneurship, Internalization, Foreign Investments, and Technology through Slovenia's Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. The program is successful (the number of schools participating is rising) and popular among students. Although I have not carried out an in-depth analysis of the program's performance, I find problematic its limited understanding of creativity (according to its visions, goals, and methodologies) simply in terms of innovative entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism (entrepreneurial drive). As opposed to entrepreneurship as an activity, entrepreneurialism is explained as a personal trait or skill that builds on tenacity, belief in oneself, self-confidence, flexibility, ability to tolerate risks and recognize opportunities, reliability, persuasiveness, responsibility, honesty, and other characteristics.

Even though the program is aimed at sensibilization for broader issues, the solutions it offers are similar to those in business, where creativity is explained within the nexus of self-initiative, taking risks, responsibility for self-reliance, and public performance. An aim of such programs is to empower young people and to equip them with tools that match current labor market requirements. However, problematic aspects of such programs (e.g., commodification of knowledge, thinking in terms of "lean" skills according to capital requirements, and praising skills and personal traits above knowledge) are only rarely challenged in public.¹⁸

¹⁷ The entire focus is on performance and not on gaining new knowledge or working skills. Comments made by participants on the portals, however, emphasize that they felt good when they saw they were not alone.

¹⁸ Here, I refer to analysis of everyday media.

THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND COWORKING PRACTICES

The idea of cultivating a creative self with entrepreneurial drive, understood as a bundle of useful and marketable assets, also forms the central part of the creative industries concept. The creative industries were presented as a social innovation on a postindustrial basis, but they were also a political project that built on the commodification of talent, skill, intellectual property, knowledge, and precarization. The critique of the political economic neoliberal agenda behind the creative industries project is significant, but it is also important to pay attention to how creativity is experienced¹⁹ by its protagonists, the people in the creative industries.

My aim is not to grasp experiences in the creative industries at large. I refer to interviews with protagonists in two creative laboratories, Poligon and Punkt. Poligon and Punkt are not presented as representative cases. I chose them because there were the first and the largest grassroots initiatives in Slovenia practicing coworking practices as new models of organization encouraging creativity. I also chose them because of their differences; Poligon is in Ljubljana, in the capital city, and Punkt at the periphery, in Trbovlje and Zagorje ob Savi. In addition to nourishing coworking practices and communities, they also strive for distinct goals: Poligon especially aims at individuals and unifying them, and Punkt also at reviving its region.

Tadeja, the leader of the creative community Punkt (a laboratory for the creative industries), sees creativity as a form of collaboration. When I visited her for an interview in February 2017, she had invited others to participate in our discussion. As claimed by Snaša and Kaja, who joined us, Tadeja is a person with the capacity to pull creativity out of a person. My interlocutors enthusiastically explained that Punkt, their autonomous platform and coworking community, nourished and stimulated their creativity. In contrast, “the outside world,” the broader society, actually hindered it. All three of them worked as freelancers that at that time were registered as active job searchers (i.e., unemployed).²⁰ Tadeja stressed: *We had to create this space, to build our relations, the conditions for our creativity; we see it as an autonomous place that is our inner community.* By referring to the “autonomous place,” all three of them pointed out they had to create the place and set their own structure to design it as a place that encourages creativity.

¹⁹ For more on the creative industries in Slovenia (including literature on the topic), see Poljak Istenič (2015); on spatial distribution and the creative industries in Ljubljana Uršič (2016); on the creative industries and city branding Bajič (2015) and Poljak Istenič (forthcoming) for Ljubljana, and Jelinčič and Vukić (2015) for post-Yugoslav space; and on creativity in relation to place-making and the production of locality Kozorog (2011).

²⁰ They challenged such notions of nonproductivity and being seen as nonproductive in society due to their status. *This is absurd*, commented Kaja. They felt they were very productive and creative in their work and exploration of new organizational forms, as well as working in and for the local community.

Snaša explained how creativity is (mis)used in neoliberal conditions and how the creative industries and creative class are in reality *a new labor force living in precarity, in exploitive conditions that raise GDP and ensure growth*. However, she added that creativity can be something else too; *a spiritual category or a characteristic that everybody has*, as all three of them claimed.

Punkt nourishes creativity, but it also gives us moral, ethical, and financial support; it works as a safety net. We can't rely on our (state) institutions, but we can rely on our inner community. I feel goosebumps when I say this. At the moment, five of us are trying to help someone who can't pay his bills. We take care of each other. Due to such relations, I believe, no one will die alone in the street. Yet someone with a job—he can. In the end, the institutions aren't on your side, but on the side of a system, bureaucracy. A bureaucrat can look into your eyes and feel sorry for you, but he can't do anything. (Tadeja 2017)

On the one hand, the creative industries are felt to be neoliberal exploitation, and on the other hand they are understood as the coworking community, as a safety net, “our DNA,” a community that enhances creativity. Punkt was launched as a nonprofit organization in 2013 and it has just recently opened a new coworking space in Zagorje ob Savi (in 2016). It is perceived as a work in progress. Because it is located in a particular area of the Central Sava Valley, once a mining and an industrial region that is currently marked by high unemployment, its aim is also to bring new life to the deteriorating factories and warehouses, and a new opportunity for the people living in the region.²¹

In Slovenia, a coworking initiative²² developed *gradually, organically, and spontaneously as a bottom-up project* (Eva 2014). Eva, one of the co-managers at Poligon (the first creative center), stated that their community is based on the principles of trust, collaboration, and openness. At both Poligon and Punkt, their coordinators play a crucial role with their engagement, knowledge, and communicative skills in maintaining an inclusive environment and enabling shared aspects of coworking: communication, community, and collaboration management. Coworking communities are based on horizontalism, in which the role of the coordinator is important (for more on coworking, see Merkel 2015).²³ For some people I happened to talk to, coworking is a business practice, whereas others present it as an alternative. Coworking spaces are social practices; they can be different in nature and they

²¹ One of Punkt's goals is to work on common projects with and in the local community.

²² The first stage (when individuals met at the theater Kino Šiška in 2011) was about sharing, and then they developed the need for further connections and a common platform. The coworking community Poligon opened its doors in 2014 in Ljubljana as a non-profit organization for an already existing community.

²³ Not all coworking communities in Slovenia are structured in the same way. In this article I focus on Poligon and Punkt.

can change with time. Coworking spaces can be described as bottom-up solutions or collective strategies for coping with structural changes in the labor market (for the literature, see Merkel 2015: 125). Most often they offer communal space or infrastructure for work (instead of being at home or alone), but above all they build a community that fosters not only socialization, networks, and communication, but also a shared value system and collaboration. This article is limited to examining coworking in relation to creativity and to experiences by its protagonists.

Coworking is not a space but a work method, claimed Eva (2014), who sees herself as someone that puts concepts into practice. For Eva, coworking is a method that encourages creativity, but only when it is based on something more than merely working with each other:

a creative community is a process; it involves communication, a particular way that conflicts are handled. Common projects are tackled; it includes many levels. It is not about a particular profession. Everybody can be creative; a baker can be as creative as we can. (Eva 2014)

Snaša from Punkt challenged value systems that serve as the basis for socially recognized creativity and its exclusive character:

Who sets the values? Why is a burek [a pastry] worth one euro and counseling to the Bank Assets Management Company half a million euros per year? This is our value system! These are the required skills! And this is what we teach the next generation. (Snaša 2017)

Such criticism of values and meanings attached to our acts, skills, and work produces new ideas and concepts, and it directs creativity in designing new structures based on different principles and values, which is the focus of the next section.

Freedom is one such value for Snaša, Tadeja, and Kaja when talking about creativity. They explained freedom as being in contrast to the bureaucratic system that forces you into slavery and exploitive arrangements (when you work for a minimum wage in exploitive conditions merely to survive, by exhausting yourself at the expense of your health). Such bureaucratic work or a routine is characterized as *a technological formalization without a purpose that kills your creativity* (Tadeja 2017). *There is no meaning in working twenty-four hours a day to make money, and to diminish your quality of life and risk your own health* (Snaša 2017). There is no nostalgia for the past, a job for life, and working from nine to five, either. “Past times are gone, yet the question is what follows and how we will carry that out” (Bučar 2015).

SOCIAL EXPERIMENTATION

This section refers to distinct initiatives in nature, status, activities, and so on that are self-organized, share (some) values, and are oriented toward a common goal to create the new social world. I consider them social experiments. They share a common vision, which is to build a sustainable and inclusive community with responsibility for the planet, to put limits on growth, to use renewable resources, and to develop new or alternative (communitarian) economies. These practices can be different in form and focus, but in general they encourage active engagement. They are not merely reactive, but proactive. They direct people towards changing their living conditions and not merely their mindset. This aspect needs to be emphasized: initiatives do not merely aspire and strive to create a new world. Participants believe they create it through different practices, through living their everyday lives in a different manner. Creativity, productivity, engagement, and resistance (against existing institutions and systems) define those actions and practices in a particular way. They form new organizational structures, concepts, tools, and vocabularies, which aim to put the community first (and not an individual or an interest) and people before capital. They also form particular embodied experiences and identities.

Social experimentation involves exploring new forms of work and life, testing them in practice, and creating community-based solutions (e.g., sustainable parks, ecovillage initiatives, social enterprises or NGOs, coworking communities,²⁴ urban communitarian practices,²⁵ and cooperatives). The “new” is not an innovation that is entirely disconnected from the past. On the contrary, examples can be taken from another time (e.g., cooperatives, self-managed forms, and “traditional” skills and knowledge), “bridging past and future” (Nara 2017), or from another culture, thus connecting different spatio-temporalities.

These practices are based on learning by doing, retrospection, and self-reflexivity. Some concepts and ideas that derive from anarchic movements or permaculture, ecovillages, transition town initiatives, informal education, moderators’ and facilitators’ associations (on inclusive communication), and so on are integrated and implemented into new environments. Usually these initiatives are self-organized (or they started as such) and practice flat organization, decentralization, peer-to-peer review, and horizontalism (sociocracy or holocracy), which produces new governing forms and communication that requires much

²⁴ This article does not deal with a difference between the collaborative and communitarian economy. However, I do not treat them as the same; one is market-driven, defined by entrepreneurial logics, and the other is based on communitarian values and sustainability (they are based on different values and drives). Coworking is usually depicted as a hub for the collaborative economy; Tadeja and Eva, however, emphasized communitarian and sustainable values. For the purpose of this article (and because coworking is not the focus of my research), I do not address this discussion.

²⁵ For an anthropological analysis of urban practices (in Ljubljana) in the context of the EU, national, and local policies, see Poljak Istenič (forthcoming). The author shows how grassroots creativity is mobilized to fill the gaps created by austerity measures. The initiatives have revitalized brownfields, managed public spaces, organized social life, ensured a living, and also promoted the city’s brand.

tuning. Nara from Trajnostni Park Istra (Istria Sustainable Park), which is active in the international platform Ecolise,²⁶ emphasized that in these organizational forms communication and social relations are of key importance and attention must be paid to nurturing social dynamics and building inclusive communication. A great deal of energy is invested in exploring proper tools to encourage people and moderate communication for crystalizing ideas. Istria Sustainable Park was designed to test concepts and ideas in practice.

We, the grassroots initiatives dealing with social change, said Nara (2017); we follow good practices and try to implement them in our environment. Then we observe the results. As a writer, I observe our own example [Istria Sustainable Park], where we are successful, and where we are not. An exploration for the new structures follows the principle of organic growth and social dynamics. Forms and structures thus have to be open and adaptable, or fluid; *a structure that is like a riverbed, an organic form. It is designed, but not made concrete* (Nara 2017).

Such fluid structures are not entirely loose. They are grounded on a common purpose, on an intention that is based on common values. New scripts born out of such collaboration cannot be entirely predicted. However, that does not mean they are totally left to spontaneity; workshops, training sessions, websites, and manuals exist, created by other similar experiments, to help with experiences and recommendations. People also meet at conferences and international formal and informal events to share and exchange ideas, experiences, and also failures.

Social innovation is about experimentation and social learning. These processes involve unlearning contemporary social norms and freeing oneself from social pressure and the ideals of what a person has to be or needs to have. Nara characterized such initiatives as marked by *rebellious spirit and constructive thinking*.

Rebellious sentiments and social creativity generated through everyday practices mark social experimenters' experiences and identities in a particular way. This does not mean that social experimenters shape their lives in constant resistance. Rebellious spirit is an important part of their identity, a strategy of their empowerment and of creating different visions of the future. A rebellion is fused with sentiments of engagement and responsibility for one's own actions, responsibility and concern for other people, animals, nature, and the planet. It is about living the difference, not merely talking about it, through creating a society within society to eventually overturn existing models. Through creating different modes of production, distribution, and exchange, initiatives aim to transform social models and life. Social creativity is a collaborative search for an alternative. The people I have been talking to do not claim to live outside the system. They often present their activities in parallel with mainstream society. They wish to challenge contemporary ways of life and meanings attached to life by the contemporary hegemonic system.

²⁶ Ecolise is a platform for learning, action, and advocacy of community-based initiatives on climate change and sustainability in Europe. International connections are very important for an exchange of knowhow, for learning, and also politically for larger mobilizations, as a platform for collective action (e.g., for advocacy at the EU level).

Sharing new values set in opposition to existing ones grounds a collaboration. It involves rebuilding communal ties, which form new kinds of subjectivities. Social creativity is born out of such collaboration. Such a practiced difference generates optimism, hope, and affirmation that change is possible, that change is already here. In this sense, *the future is now present* (Nara 2017). However, practices also lead to disappointments, exhaustion, and burnout.

Some even explicitly see social experimentation as a transformative tool, based on practicing creativity. Creativity is directed towards actions that generate transformation of values and oneself. Being aware of one's own creativity is thus important.

Creative practices encompass making new connections, intersections, and encounters with a difference. As my interlocutors claim, creativity is interdisciplinary and it involves talking in a different language, connecting different kinds of thinking, relations, and horizontal connections. Particular techniques were developed to moderate creativity as a thinking process. In communitarian projects or business, creativity is considered a skill to be practiced and learned. Techniques were developed to direct and encourage creativity. Nara uses "Dragon dreaming" fused with other informal educational techniques to moderate creative processes. Tadeja from Punkt, who also works as a strategic creative consultant and a facilitator, integrated the de Bono method with design thinking²⁷ and informal education skills.

The first phase of the thinking process is about inspiration, which opens a different point of view by casting us away from the known. For me, de Bono is an ABC method. It completely changed my mental patterns. When brainstorming, I don't limit myself. Everything is possible. The second phase is about limitation. The key is not to think all at once, but to structure it by stages. (Tadeja 2017)

With increasing importance attributed to creativity in work and life, new methods developed to grasp creativity as a thinking process in order to encourage, direct, or moderate it. Such was not only the case for communitarian practices, but also for business. Different techniques also take into account its tacit dimensions, the fact that creativity is embodied and felt.

I can see or sense creativity when it is happening. It's like looking at a triumphal skier's ride—you can see it! It's ecstatic. But when I'm "in" myself. . . I feel it. I'm in the zone! As a facilitator I also follow that as an outsider. A group intelligence. . . it's in the zone. . . there are breakthroughs. This has to be a moderated process. (Tadeja 2017)

²⁷ In addition to de Bono's (six) thinking hats and lateral thinking, design thinking also became a very popular method, in particular after it was applied to business. Both of these techniques are also used for community projects.

CONCLUSION

This article explored different ways in which creativity is understood, framed, and experienced in relation to production and work in Slovenia today. Language that was usurped by economics, entrepreneurship, business techniques, and startup principles acts as a political rationale and marks the way creativity is narrated and experienced. I argue that a model of innovative entrepreneurialism, which acts as a magic remedy for treating any kind of social issues, reduces creativity to entrepreneurial drive, to innovation of new goods and services, or to organizational models in the service of the market. Creativity has been commodified as a labor, a skill, a capacity of one's entrepreneurial self to enhance productivity, excellency, competency, and growth. However, even in business or entrepreneurship, creativity should not be interpreted as dictated merely by capital and profit-making interest.

Although I argue that it is important to explore creativity in social and cultural contexts as set within power relations and political economic conditionality, it is also relevant to note how individuals live creativity in their everyday lives in many different ways. For individuals, creativity related to work means inspiration, passion, mission, internal fire, collaboration, and even frustration because it is claimed to be part of the creative process, and a broader responsibility. It is a process experienced verbally, such as creation or creating.²⁸ Creativity is sensed. It is an embodied experience, intensely related to identity formation. It is an intimate, internal experience, and at the same time it connects individuals among themselves and with other environments. It bears new sentiments of connectivity, proximity and distance, inclusion, and exclusion.

In relation to other forms of creativity presented in this article, I argue that social experimentation is generated by social creativity. It is not about personal work or personal creativity, but about social creativity. As I have already indicated, this does not mean that personal creativity should be understood as a work of an isolated individual because it is not even seen as such entirely, but as a work in collaboration and in connection with other spaces, times, people, and environments. However, one should note that personal creativity and social creativity are directed by different goals, aims, and visions. Social experimentation aims to create new forms of production, distribution, and exchange through practice in resistance to existing ones, through creating different social ties and relationships. Regardless of how successful they are in their endeavors, I claim that the experience of self-organization, the creation of new communities and experimentation with new social models, marks people's identities, experiences, relationship, and community ties in a particular way. Experimentation is not treated as a work of an individual, but is generated through relationships, communication, and practices that are born out of engagement with

²⁸ In an article that I wrote with the gender scholar Alja Adam (Vodopivec and Adam 2015), we opened a discussion on creativity through an interdisciplinary encounter. It was an experiment in which we emphasized the importance of an encounter and intersection that allows us to think beyond bipolarities (nature vs. culture, body vs. mind, etc.).

different people. These practices question social meanings that are otherwise taken for granted. Even though this article deals with many forms of creativity, and social creativity is discussed only briefly, I am interested in exploring this concept further in the future. I also see social creativity as a potentiality, a driving force that can inspire radical politics²⁹ and open space for new encounters.

This article examined creative agency that is emancipatory, empowering, and optimistic. Such creativity is generated through action that transforms values; this may be from the value of an idea and labor to the value of a commodity or involving the transformation of values attributed to social forms, institutions, and ourselves. Creativity is about imagination, and imagination works with transformative power and directionality.

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²⁹ In a similar manner, Ghassan Hage (2012) is interested in imaginary and critical anthropological thought that can inspire radical politics, or Gibson-Graham (2009) in socially creative thinking forming the imaginary that generates an alternative to the capitalist economy.

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INTERVIEWS

Eva from Poligon, interview, Ljubljana, November 2014.

Tadeja, Snaša, and Kaja from Punkt, interview, Zagorje ob Savi, March 2017.

Nara from Istria Sustainable Park, interview, Ljubljana, February 2017.

USTVARJALNOST V PRODUKCIJI IN DELU. IZKUŠNJE IZ SLOVENIJE

Prispevek obravnava ustvarjalnost v povezavi s produkcijo in delom v Sloveniji. Avtorica se osredini na družbena okolja, kjer se nastajajo ustvarjalne zamisli, in na različne pripovedi o izkušnjah ustvarjalnosti. V prvem delu obravnava ustvarjalnost v okviru širših družbenih določil – prestrukturiranja tržišča dela, politik zaposlovanja in socialnih politik v Sloveniji. Ustvarjalnost poveže s pozivi po preoblikovanju delavskih subjektivitet, s podjetniškim idealom in s paradigmo samoodgovornosti, po kateri naj bi posamezniki postali ustvarjalni podjetniki in sami poskrbeli za svoj obstoj, za širšo ekonomsko rast in družbeni razvoj. Avtorica se osredini na ustvarjalnost v organizaciji dela in v menedžerskih strategijah; najprej na konkretnem terenskem primeru – v industrijski produkcijski hali tekstilne tovarne, v nadaljevanju pa v poslovnih strategijah in tehnikah vitkega podjetništva in t. i. startup-ovstva. Ustvarjalnost poveže s poglobljenjem spretnosti, veščin in značajskih lastnosti posameznika. Podjetna ustvarjalnost ni povezana zgolj s produkcijo in gospodarstvom, temveč se ponuja tudi kot način reševanja družbenih problemov in preoblikovanega družbenega upravljanja.

V drugem delu se avtorica opre na pripovedi o izkušnjah ustvarjalnosti v kreativnih industrijah (izkušnje sodela v Poligonu in Punktu) in med družbenimi eksperimentatorji. S slednjimi se sklicuje na izkušnje raznovrstnih pobud podrasti ali organizacij, ki imajo skupni cilj ustvariti alternativno družbo, temelječo na drugačnih načinih produkcije, distribuiranja in izmenjav, družbenih odnosov in odnosa do narave. Pri družbenem eksperimentiranju poudarja pomen družbene ustvarjalnosti, ki nastaja v sodelovanju in v komunikaciji.

Jezik ekonomije, podjetništva, poslovnega sveta in vitkih načel deluje kot politična racionalnost in zaznamuje načine, kako doživljamo ustvarjalnost. Model inovativne podjetnosti, s katerim naj bi reševali tudi družbene probleme, reducira ustvarjalnost na podjetniško logiko, na inoviranje novih dobrin, storitev, organizacijskih modelov, ki služijo tržišču. Avtorica pa opozarja, da niti v podjetništvu ustvarjalnosti ne gre skrčiti zgolj na diktat kapitala in ustvarjanje dodatne vrednosti. Za ljudi je ustvarjalnost pri delu povezana v vizijami, misijo, radovednostjo, navdihom, s sodelovanjem, z notranjim ognjem in tudi s širšo odgovornostjo. Družbeno eksperimentiranje poganjajo drugačni cilji, nameni, vizije od drugih oblik ustvarjalnosti. Pobudniki verjamejo, da s praksami, z ustvarjanjem drugačnih odnosov in načina življenja, oblikujejo drugačno prihodnost, svet in družbo. Izkušnja samoorganiziranja, postavljanja novih družbenih modelov in skupnosti na specifičen način zaznamuje identitete vpletenih, njihove izkušnje, odnose in skupnostne vezi. Po avtoričinem mnenju ustvarjalnost v povezavi z delom, ne glede na njeno obliko, zajame notranjo transformacijo ljudi, transformacijo vrednosti in vrednot, zamišljanje in oblikovanje novih imaginarijev.

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