

Networking for Survival: An Ethnographic Study on an Artist's Passion for Existence

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Abstract— Artists have long been a topic for researchers, not surprisingly accepting them as an entrepreneur is not a new discussion for the academic world that were willing to understand their maneuvers in their lives. However, understanding the artists and following their path is very important and to uncover the realities of creative industries of the societies as the societies can survive with their creative capabilities. Naturally artists gain importance in the research agenda of academicians and practitioners with their original ways of surviving within their creative industries. Therefore, it is important for us to understand how artists can survive. The overall purpose of this paper is to understand that how an artist performs as an entrepreneur or in other words is an entrepreneur. In this paper our intention is to show that how a painter in fact performs as an entrepreneur, starting from the creation of the art work till the introducing it to the marketplace.

Keywords— Art, entrepreneur, management ethnographic study.

I. INTRODUCTION

CREATIVE industries are recently regarded as examples of new kind of economy that needs further investigation in order to form a new kind of base for our economic system and growth [1]- [8]. In this new kind of economic system, artists gain importance in the research agenda of academicians, since are accepted as an entrepreneurs, who are unique in their ways of surviving within the creative industries. The origin of this paper is grounded on a 3 year ethnographic of an artist, a painter who is able to survive in the market, a kind of success story might be while the paintings are sold before the gallery openings and more than half of the cultural products can be sold during the exhibitions. The things that are come into being from this study will try to be represented within this paper.

Ayse has been painting since her childhood as she grew up in a family involved invarious types of artistic activity. However, her professional career as a painter began in 1996 with her first solo exhibition. She was very successful at her education but, her family resisted her ambition to study art at the university because of the common belief that artists cannot

make enough money to survive. It is emphasized that first she should have an occupation in which she could earn money and if she wanted she could continue painting as a hobby. Therefore, she graduated from Biology where she took “painting”courses as elective which shows her never ending passion for painting. All through her academic studies, she gets some kind of painting lessons. After she got married to a diplomat, she finds a way to actualize her life long passion; “painting”. As the wives of the diplomats cannot work at foreign country assignments, she focuses on painting and decides to make a living through painting. In Rome she gets painting lessons and finally in Belgium she attends the Royal Art Academy. Belgium in fact feeds her desire for art. Then when they return back to Turkey, she continues her artistic activities and starts to teach painting at primary schools.

During this time in Turkey she completes her master's degree at Hacettepe University and currently rolled as a doctorate student at the same university.

Ayse provides a good example of a creative actor who finds ways to identify, engage and create social relations that support her artistic needs. First of all, Ayse always has the advantageous position of being the wife of diplomat. She could easily capture the diplomatic social environment while opening up exhibitions or selling her paintings. This also provides her easier access to the international market. Her access to the international market in fact took the attention of her professors even at the entry exams for the master's degree as these people usually face difficulties in moving into the artistic world abroad due to financial or language difficulties.

The main advantage of her husband's diplomatic position is that she becomes o part of a social class who are highly educated and able to spend time and money for artistic activities. These people want to be in close contact with the embassy as they might need the support of the embassy for their personal interest. According to her husband, Ayse gets involved in many social activities which usually take place at her house or at the embassy which enables her to have access to the following national and international networks:

- The diplomatic networks of her own country and other countries
- The politicians of her own country and other countries
- The creative class of her own country and other countries
- Native or international business people who might have business potential with the embassy

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The role of Ayse mentors on her artistic success and survival came out to be immense depending on discussions with her colleagues. Ayse has 2 mentors one of which is a worldwide painter. They do not meet on regular basis with this mentor, but their first meeting was again made possible through her diplomatic network. This mentor in fact enabled her to make a vital decision about her career as an artist. Till their first encounter with this mentor, Ayse was trying to survive on her own and through the diplomatic networking activities. Her colleagues say that this mentor advised her to be a part of a stronger establishment like university rather than trying to survive in such a harsh environment all alone. The first question he asked was “who are your connections?” He then mentioned to her that she could easily be disappearing with such a great talent, if she keeps standing all alone in this creative industry. He further specified the very important problem in this type of studies that her work constitutes to be copied by other artists which she then probably be “swallowed” by the artistic world. Influenced highly from this conversation she then decided to move on with her painting career with a reputable university. She wanted to gain some kind of support from her style and efforts from this academic sphere and this was a kind of beginning for herself to the academic career.

This first mentor has caused another network to appear in her life that is her advisor Professor at the University. This advisor who is also a reputable professor in his field currently coaches Ayse in her career as a painter. This in fact can present that how relationships within the painting industry is formed which promotes commodification of creative products. Ayse highlighted the importance of being a part of larger and reputable establishment for her entrepreneuring activities. She asserts that she is now a part of a school of thought in painting and this protects her in that harsh competitive environment nature of creative industry. In fact in terms of artistic creativity she did not lose her independency but in the process of commodification of her work she fights together with the well known group of academicians on her side. She now knows that in the painting industry there is a monopoly and it is difficult to survive as an individual, although you are highly talented. With her Hacettepe identity, the access to galleries is much easier. When she mentions that she is one of the members of that academic community and even mentioning the names of her professors the doors of the galleries can open more easily. In other words, she can sell her work much more easily. She also mentions that in order to build up a reputation in the painting industry, one should open up exhibition in certain galleries which in fact forms a monopolistic approach in the industry at the moment. As an independent artist having access to these galleries is nearly impossible. Being a member of Hacettepe University and working with a reputable professor opens up the doors of these galleries much more easily for creative producers. The monopolistic power of these galleries is in fact wide spread in the industry. For instance to take part

in the Art Fairs, an artist have to persuade these galleries to represent their work. The professors of Hacettepe University are also helpful to artists in this sense as well. In addition to supporting Ayse in the access to galleries, her mentor also encourages her to show her work in every occasion. During our visit to her university, her advisor repeats his motto which is “who are you painting for? The beauty of the art has to be shared by everyone. You have to make people know your work”. So Ayse uses his advice and connections to open up exhibitions of her work in every possible occasion. Through our observations, another networking activity becomes apparent that the artists can benefit from the opening nights of the exhibitions and art fairs. At these gatherings, the artists have the opportunity to meet with the leading characters of artistic world and gallery owners.

Accordingly, Ayse’s mentor always advises her to go to as many exhibitions as possible. He says that by this way an artist can follow the developments in the industry and improve networking activities. In terms the place of competitions for painting industry, the importance of such competitive activities for the young artists can easily be observed. These competitions in fact can be seen as a medium through which young artists can show their work and introduce themselves to masses. In addition, older generation of artists can follow the developments, trends and creativity of the young artists through these competitions as stated by an experienced painter. These competitions are in fact taking the shape of business fairs which provide many people with the opportunity to see many artistic products. However, these competitions are market places for artists. They can create networks in order to survive. Ayse especially mentioned this uncomfortable feeling during her application to a local competition; “...these competitions do not fuel creativity rather these competitions are “business” part of artistic activity...” In addition to competitions there are also business fairs which Ayse defines as “supermarkets” which is also a typical expression among her friend we encountered. They say that these fairs are similar to any other business fairs that are done for any product like car fairs. The customers are bombarded with huge amounts of creative products and thousands of people are buying these creative products in huge quantities. They argue that in these fairs art is commercialized in a way that the customers are like buying any product from wholesalers. In addition, in several occasions Ayse always stresses that she does not like the business part of her creative process. She is well aware that in order to survive and earn money she has to act like an entrepreneur for each of her new series of painting. She uses all the resources in general and networks in particular she has got to continue her artistic career. It is observed that she obviously goes through the contradictory characters of a creative person and business women. She needs freedom of time and space in order to be productive and creative. On the other hand, she has to act like a business woman to sell her work and make a reputation [3]. Also mentions this conflict as the core divergence between art and business that many artists

face in today's world. In fact we can see from the example of Ayse that she can do it naturally although she complains about the business part. Therefore, Ayse is an example of an artist who is able to make transformation from her creative part to self-entrepreneurship that enabled her to survive. She can use and find resources in order to exploit and create even opportunities in the environment which a typical entrepreneurship process. The ethnographic data also showed that the means feeding her creativity change and most interestingly her networks are in the process of change. Her networks evolve over time with no beginning or end, in other words is not linear. Some of her networking activities feed her creativity like her university network some of them hinders it like the galleries. This in fact can be an indication of how networks can also be important contributors of creativity for the artists [9]. All these facts show that the artistic and personal success of a painter in her/his career is not enough (sufficient) for a reputation in the art market. It is to be noted that, famous painter Vincent Van Gogh who had a decision place in the art history became famous with the assistance of his brother Theo. Same is true for Peter Paul Rubens who was able to receive special permission to establish necessary commercial connections through his own studio and gallery in 1610.

However, a continuous relationship can be indicated when we think that Ayse found to the university network in order to escape from the heavy burdens of galleries.

As a last word, in this study we understood that art as a hobby did not create a system of its own but rather to survive in the art industry you have to play with the rules of managerialism. This part of art industry that bores and confuses the artists [3]. However, as in the case of Ayse she finds ways which are networks to solve these problems with managerialism. As emphasized by Staber [9]. Networks are important components of business in creative industries. Networks serve as a medium through which individual creativity is turned into collective creativity. In fact the networking activities that are carried out by Ayse carries the typical characteristics of entrepreneurial networks proposed by Johannisson [6]. It considers the networks of entrepreneurs as personal. These networks are called "personal" because it is the entrepreneur's individual connections that link his/her ideas with the marketplace. According to this view, entrepreneurs are individuals who act independently and engage in networking activities in unconventional ways [5]. Ayse's network activities are in fact good examples of this proposition.

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Dr. Poroy, participated more than thirty collective exhibitions in different countries. She has 6 solo Exhibition about painting & printing Techniques. She won international best prize at the "Best Three Paintings", Skopje-Macedonia in 1994. Currently she is researching interdisciplinary works in between art-management and art-museum presentations.