

Extended abstract: entrepreneurial learning in the university coworking space; insights from a case study.

authors: Prins, H. NHL Stenden UAS, Brouwer, A.E., University of Groningen; Van Diggelen, M.R. NHL Stenden UAS

ORCID number Harro Prins: 0000-0002-4396-0525

ORCID number Aleid Brouwer: 0000-0003-4024-5478

ORCID number Migchiel van Diggelen: 0000-0002-9582-2220

Introduction:

Coworking spaces can contribute to entrepreneurial learning, as spatial proximity fosters collaboration, knowledge transfer, motivation and inspiration (Bouncken & Aslam, 2019; Komorowski & Fodor, 2020). From educational viewpoint it is an attractive idea to use that potential learning capacity for student entrepreneurs. Especially where the educational philosophy is based on social constructivism, as for example in case-, problem- or design-based learning (Gómez Puente et al., 2013; van Diggelen et al., 2021).

The study focuses on the concept of university coworking spaces to enhance entrepreneurial output among student entrepreneurs. The assumption that coworking spaces contribute to entrepreneurial learning, does not yet mean that the concept can be copied 1-to-1 to education. The main argument is that the composition of the users is very important for the cluster effects (inspiration, knowledge transfer, motivation, wellbeing). University coworking spaces have a specific composition (homogeneous in many respects) and a rapidly changing composition when working in cohorts.

Research questions are:

1) What is the conceptual difference between university coworking spaces and the commercial coworking space and what are the consequences for application to the education field?

2) How does entrepreneurial learning take place within the university coworking space and does it differ from what the literature suggests about entrepreneurial learning from the commercial coworking space?

### Theory and contribution

The study interfaces with two domains, namely: entrepreneurship education, because it is examined as a tool for education. And economic geography: the effect of coworking spaces for the users (entrepreneurs) and the immediate environment (region). The creative sector is where the insights fit best.

Entrepreneurship, especially for management courses, is considered very important as a topic. Nabi et al. (2017) studied the impact of entrepreneurship education using 159 articles published over a 12-year time span (2004-2016). The goal was to see the relationship between pedagogical approaches and outcomes. The accompanying proposed research agenda stated that more research should be conducted on effective pedagogical methods, in order to get a better grip on entrepreneurial learning. Motta & Gelina (2023) also emphasize in their systematic literature review that experiential learning à la Kolb is very suitable for entrepreneurship education, especially if a business is actually started or run. But that this has rarely been researched. This study is a contribution in that respect.

Research in the economic geographical domain deals with, among other things, business location policies, effects of clustering for businesses and for the region. Whereby "A key issue in (...) is to determine the impact of geographical proximity on interactive learning and

innovation” (Boschma, 2005, p. 61). Research on coworking spaces has started recently, mainly because the phenomenon is still rather young. That coworking spaces are a place for knowledge transfer, innovation and entrepreneurship has been adequately demonstrated in the literature. The extent to which education can benefit from this fact, has not. The mostly positive effects reported are to be expected because they are the positive effects for the entrepreneurs themselves. If these positive effects were not felt, those entrepreneurs would probably not locate in coworking spaces. Therefore, there is certainly something to be learned if we are going to study the phenomenon from an educational setting where the location decision is not taken based on their own positive experiences. Some authors hint the coworking space to be the appropriate transition from education to the professional workplace (Wijngaarden et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurship has a very important function for the economy and employment. Schumpeter is the founder of the idea of creative destruction. Improvements (innovations initiated by entrepreneurs) to the status quo bring economic activity and ultimately prosperity to regions (Gordon & McCann, 2000). Governments at all levels, as well as the EU invest in entrepreneurship support for this reason. The research contributes to the quality of entrepreneurship, as the effects of coworking are used more widely than they are today. Porter's (1990) work on clusters also shows that clustering of firms makes regions stronger. This is because firms (read: entrepreneurs) become more innovative and creative when there is interaction with other firms. Interaction is encouraged when the physical distance from other firms is small. Another effect is greater efficiency. Transaction costs are lower, finding labour and suppliers is easier. Coworking is a form of clustering, the project contributes to clustering of businesses, with a positive effect for peripheral regions. This

promotes liveability. Liveability of regions is an important social issue in the Netherlands, but certainly beyond. Research shows that coworking can be learned. If the research shows that university coworking spaces are used more often as a tool, then more entrepreneurs will also have learned from the study to reap the benefits of coworking, it is expected that companies will seek each other out more.

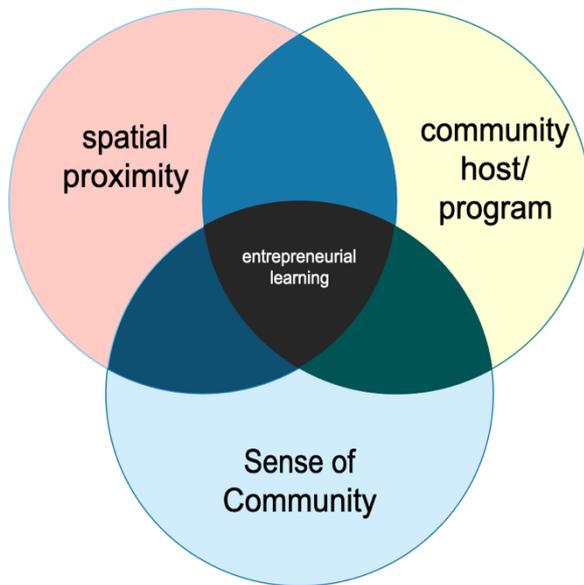
Research also shows that coworking spaces contribute to the well-being of users (Garrett et al., 2017). More knowledge about coworking spaces, especially university coworking spaces, means they can be made more attractive to users. This contributes to the number of entrepreneurs who want to use these facilities. The sense of community what is experienced within coworking spaces makes the often solitary working life enriched with entitlement, motivation, stimulating work pattern/regularity (Spinuzzi et al., 2019).

#### Method:

The study is inductive and qualitative in nature. A case study in which student entrepreneurs are observed and questioned about experiences with the work environment offered. A case study is most appropriate given that university coworkingplaces are not a common good.

The phenomenon is too little applied to apply quantitative research techniques. Moreover, an important part of the study is the learning effect of the environment. Interviews offer the opportunity to go deep into feelings, reflections, experiences. The iterative nature of grounded theory is applied. Literature is studied, specific data is collected to verify or deepen certain ideas. A literature review on coworking spaces is started. Here potential benefits that coworking spaces have for users are described. The interview guide used for one of those studies was retrieved, adapted and used for the first round of interviews. After

analyzing the interviews (first-order analysis), a conceptual model of the "anatomy" of the coworking space was created.



*Figure 1, conceptual model coworking space*

A coworking space is a furnished space (physical and organized) within which users experience sense of community (not physical and not organized). Although sense of community is not organized, it can be stimulated through the efforts of a community host/community management (not physical, but organized). This could include networking meetings, guest lectures, coaching, peer review sessions, events, etc. The model visualizes that physical proximity, sense of community and a community management are elements that collectively stimulate entrepreneurial learning. Following the interviews, three questions were submitted to the literature (second-order analysis): (How) does entrepreneurship learning take place because of physical proximity? (How) does entrepreneurship learning take place because of community host/program offerings? And:

(How) Does entrepreneurship learning take place because of the "sense of community.

Through interviews, the same themes are presented to the student entrepreneurs who use the specially equipped space. The interview technique is such that student entrepreneurs choose their own words to express the experiences. The interviews are coded and categorized using Atlas.ti. This helps to identify how the different elements relate to each other and especially how entrepreneurship learning takes place in the university coworking space. The differences between the literature and the analysis of the dataset (interviews and observations), are of particular interest. If there are clear differences, the university coworking space is conceptually different from the "public" coworking space.

The subject of the case study to be studied is the "startup community," part of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences. The startup community is a coworking space set up for (bachelor degree and associate degree) student entrepreneurs in the creative industry. After careful selection on motivation, business plan and receptivity to coaching, students are admitted for an internship ranging from 6 to 10 months. Within the internship, full time and space is provided to implement the business plan and develop as an entrepreneur. Not much is mandatory, except to use the coworking space as as their workplace (read: do not work from home), the individual biweekly meetings with the business coach and participate in the biweekly "meet & work session" where intervision takes place under the guidance of a business coach.

#### Preliminary results

Preliminary results are that an important added value in entrepreneurial learning from the coworking space for student entrepreneurs is that the business-like design and work attitude

of others motivates them to be productive. For users of university coworking spaces, the role of community host/program is of great value, not much has been written about this in literature. Suspected explanations for the differences are age, (limited) experience in business, (limited) dependence on the outcome from the enterprise, peer pressure, rapid (cohortwise) flow.

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