

Aalto School of Economics

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Towards entrepreneurial identity

Individual Assignment

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Abstract.

Wendy Brawer, founder of Green Maps, one of the “50 Visionaries Changing Your World” according to UTNE Reader, in her interview gives her personal vision of the world “*as a delicate network, all connected and humming with energy, love and life*”. Here the word *vision* is intended as a worldview of an individual, who sees opportunities and risks in a unique way related to his/her own background and environment. In the discussion this concept and its connection with entrepreneurial identity is analyzed by comparing chosen literature from Fayolle (2007), Fayolle and Klandt (2006), Fayolle and Kyrö (2008), Hägg (2011) and Bauer (2011) with Wendy’s history and the author’s own process towards an entrepreneurial identity. Kyrö (1997) in Hägg (2011) defines an entrepreneur *not only as a human being, who is an unique and free but also as a risk-taking, creative and responsible actor, who lives in a close relationship with his/her environment, culture and nature.*

Introduction.

An entrepreneur needs strong motivation to see an opportunity and bring people to believe in it, despite all the obstacles. As Sarasvathy (2008) suggests in her effectuation theory, we create opportunities which are peculiar to our vision as individuals, rather than reaching for something that is out there for everybody. Vision is something stronger than an idea; it doesn't need property rights to be protected, as it lives in us and exists because of our background and our evolving mindset. Our entrepreneurial behavior and identity is also a history of our vision. This is why I asked to share her story of entrepreneurial identity one of the "50 Visionaries Changing Your World" (UTNE Reader): Wendy E. Brawer.

Wendy was one of the first people to see sustainability as a global network; she was one of the first to connect the dots of individual green enterprises and creating the net, understanding the value of individual initiatives within a broader scheme.

'Creator of the Green Map System and its director since 1995, Wendy is a designer, social innovator, consultant, and public educator. Based in New York and focused on sustainable design since 1989, Wendy created an original map of New York's environment, the Green Apple Map in 1992.

A pioneer in collaborative internet-based development, Wendy has led the development of the nonprofit Green Map System, its acclaimed universal iconography, inclusive methodology and locally-led global network. Now in over 700 diverse cities in 55 countries, the NGO's most recent innovation is the Open Green Map, an interactive mapping platform that turns local information into global interaction. ' (Source: ecocultural.info)

I didn't know Wendy before asking for this interview; I knew her Green Maps project from the constellation of environmental networks which are part of my work and research as architect. Her answers were great inspiration to me, because of the directness by which they show development of entrepreneurial identity- what was very important to me, she gives dates, showing how long it takes to achieve your goals, depending on the times- and current challenges, as the necessary and constant upgrading of business models.

Interview with Wendy E. Brawer – Founding Director at Green Map System

1. Which would you say is the most distinctive trait of your personality?

My initials spell WEB and that word describes my perception - I think of the world as a delicate network, all connected and humming with energy, love and life. Although I have identified myself as an eco-designer since 1990, I was born an artist. I work to protect creative freedom especially when it's applied to restoring/regenerating natural systems and well being for all species and people. Mapmaking was not in my history, but interestingly, promotional merchandise - specialty advertising - small but useful items to give away - was my family's business.

2. Was the decision of starting Green Maps influenced by any special event in your life? If yes, which one?

December 13, 1991 - Realizing I knew a secret side of NYC that would inspire and inform hundreds of NGOs and delegates who were coming to UN headquarters for 5 weeks to prepare for the Earth Summit (which took place in Rio, June 1992). Decided I could make a map that highlighted signs of progress toward sustainability, and that the map could be universally understood, resource efficient and fun to make and use.

I realized there was little press about these greening initiatives, and they needed to be mapped to become part of people's daily life. Within 24 hours, the concept was snowballing. It had a brand, a network of contributing eco-design and cyclist colleagues, seed money and a donation of 10,000 copies. It was the response to this original Green Map of NYC that sparked the global network, iconography and adaptable framework.

3. How it all started- how did you get the first important clients on board for the first time?

In 1995, I was invited to the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen to speak about the greening of NYC. I showed a wide variety of sites we had put on our first Green Maps.

The O2 eco design network met in parallel. With people from a dozen countries gathered together, we all put ideas on the table that could 'move the mountain'. Mine was about co-developing an iconography and framework that would link a locally-led global network of sustainability mapmakers. The concept that grew into Green Map System meshed well with the group's general aims, the new collaboration tool we wanted to test out – the internet – and upcoming events in Amsterdam (Eco Info at Doors of Perception) and Kyoto (O2 Japan's national gathering) that would bring diverse voices into the conversation.

Some of the first ‘clients’ came on board at that O2 meeting and through the O2 network - Copenhagen, Kyoto, Utrecht, Montreal and Adelaide were among the first cities with published Green Maps. Each new edition attracts more participants, media and local response, and more for us to learn from and model.

4. How were your goals concerning sustainable enterprises affected by changing times and people’s reaction to your ideas?

In my opinion, there was a plateau in progress toward sustainable development that started around 1995 and lasted almost a decade. Many enterprises failed or failed to scale and what should have been a period of great accomplishments and serious industry/government/community initiatives to address climate, social inequity and biodiversity was quite hampered. Now, the trajectory is moving upwards again, but we have entered the Age of Uncertainty. We need far more investment, collaboration and creativity, and we must move with alacrity and resolve. I feel we can even help industry make and measure more change with Green Mapmaking – see the examples at <http://GreenMap.org/csr>

We created the Open Green Map social mapping platform to address changes in how people work and to encourage more participation at a lower cost as the recession took hold. OGM has proven its value, and we have about 250 maps with about 20,000 sites on the platform. Now, we are moving toward adding OpenGEO standards, and vastly increasing data sharing and collaboration potential. We evolve our tools, iconography and policies continually.

5. On your website you state that “Mapmaking is our medium for fostering inclusive participation in sustainable community development”. How would you summarize the strategy behind the great success of Green Maps?

We try to give local leaders the support they need to manage in(ter)dependently, and share successful experiences others have had that might inspire them to do more. We try to take some of the stumbling blocks out of the way, smoothing the road for an enjoyable journey. We collect and assess outcomes, tools, and ideas and keep things moving forward.

There is a great thirst for information about the environment of home, so Green Maps are naturally attractive to a wide range of residents, decision-makers and visitors, sharing a world view that’s immediate, actionable and a step in the right direction.

6. In accepting your prize for Netsquared Invitational, in a characteristically modest way you point out the importance of making social and green enterprises self-sustainable. Which business models do you regard as successful in this field? And how have you been developing a business model for Green Maps?

It's a struggle – and an evolution. We really do need new income flows, for resiliency's sake. There are interesting constraints that make change slower to arrive, but hopefully, when it does its in a socially inclusive way.

Regarding an aspect of our non-profit's business model - we have adjusted the Mapmaker's fee from Free to 2% of funds raised locally to an annual sliding fee that's based on the type of organization and country's average income (we have a calculator that includes multi year discounts). We've always accepted service exchanges instead of fees, which helps us translate, outreach, and mentor new Green Mapmakers in distant parts of the world.

In a time when climate and environment are reaching an intractable stage, do we expect our model to change again? Definitely!

Discussion.

Seeds of what we will become are always in our family history: in my case, although neither of my parents are entrepreneurs, both have always been strongly involved in social matters, and this probably influenced my sense of responsibility and my need of “making change”, that first led me to study architecture.

I thought I realized my dream when I was working in one of those architectural practices which are strongly influencing the change in a country; in that case, Malta. But after a while, I came across “problems” to solve and “obstacles”, and I found there were more things I wanted to change- I thought it was needed- and I couldn't do it in my position as an employee. I tried to, but the environment was just not the right one.

I started to do research- this was what I learnt to do during the university years. In few months, I would quit my job, change almost everything in my life and relocate myself in Finland.

As Bauer K. (2011) points out, women who leave a male dominated job environment are more likely not to go back to that path again in their life. Interestingly, the article states that there's a higher number of women entrepreneurs in those fields where higher are the constraints of old-world rules, usually referred to by the euphemism “glass ceiling”. Those fields are professional services, technology and construction: all fields related to my interests (and obstacles I found). Technology and professional services are also the fields where my guiding figure, Wendy, had chosen to operate as a radical innovator.

I found myself in that dead-end situation: I couldn't change things from inside. I had to change everything by myself.

Any entrepreneur who believes in a vision thinks it will change the world. Before changing the world, that vision will probably be part of a radical change in the

entrepreneur's personality. This phase is what Hägg (2011) indicates as "*phase of liminality*" when the person is temporarily beyond the normative social structure and doesn't identify in the past self, facing the rising of many *possible selves*.

I totally found my history in this description. I really had to question everything, and in few months I had experienced so many radical changes that I could have never foreseen in my life. I think my entrepreneurial self was an important part of it. I guess I was becoming aware of something I've always been, but because of environment and university education I had "removed". I had to learn how to cope with the notion of "risk" too; or better, I was learning to enjoy it.

I enrolled the Entrepreneurial Behavior course. Even in this case, I could find myself in the "ritual experience" Hägg describes: education as a way to sanction a change rather than producing it. During the classes, concept of risk was examined, and how this appears to be critical to the world of women entrepreneurs.

Kyrö and Tapani (2007) analyze the idea of risk by making a distinction between uncertainty and insecurity; thus highlighting how notion of risk is linked to the extent we can control and we perceive obstacles, whether coming from the outside (uncertainty) or from inside (insecurity).

It made me think of something my father, former firefighter, used to say: "risk is within us".

Now, as a wannabe entrepreneur, I was realizing that yes, risk is within us, and opportunities too. By connecting all the dots in our personal scheme of things, we would create strengths and weaknesses of our enterprise.

Whilst objective of my pursuit is clear in my mind, the way I want to achieve my goals is still in a phase of development. This is probably influenced by my education as an architect; reading Verzat and Bachelet's article (2006), I realized my education, while developing design and strategy skills, has in its later phase, during the university years, discouraged that *entrepreneurial spirit* that informed my way of thinking on an earlier stage.

I see this as part of a bigger problem. The article was enlightening. Why engineering students (in my case, why an architect) would be less likely to develop an entrepreneurial attitude? Especially since their specialization has a lot to do with technological innovation, one would expect from them entrepreneurial proactiveness. I could confirm by my own experience: University in Italy is dominated by a mindset that I could summarize by quoting one of my teachers, constantly reminding us how one of the most influential architects of our era "didn't start building anything before he was 50". The message was clear: you will never have studied enough for taking responsibility (again, *risk*). Italian society doesn't allow young people to take an entrepreneurial role, resulting in unemployment and high number of expatriates.

Wendy Brawer addresses such constraints, part of a global crisis, with her vision: "we have entered the Age of Uncertainty. We need far more investment, collaboration and creativity, and we must move with alacrity and resolve." Here one can really see the positive approach of the entrepreneur and web-weaver, who thinks "of the world as a delicate network, all connected and humming with energy, love and life".

Entrepreneurial mindset lies inside all of us, as the possibility and will of creating one's future (Sarasvathy, 2008).

As Kyrö pointed out during her lectures, Italian high school promotes this mindset by the study of ancient Greek and Latin, that enhance critical thinking and innovative attitude. Traditionally, most Italian change-makers come from those studies.

University, though, seem to have lost that capacity to promote entrepreneurial mindset.

Education can make such a huge difference in our lives and in our society. I find here the concept of *ritual pedagogy* in entrepreneurial education of great help. Hägg (2011) supports this concept with those of entrepreneurial learning (Gibb, 2005), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), collaborative learning and learning by doing (Dewey, 1938). By implementing various methods, (entrepreneurial) teaching should always serve the aim to *become* entrepreneurial (Akola and Heinonen, 2007).

Cader H. A. et Norman D.W. (2006) highlight the key tasks of entrepreneurial education: "I can't teach students the personality traits necessary to take risks, but I can teach them to analyze those risks, to be analytical about their choices and to learn from mistakes made in the past". The same book chapter, by studying the African informal sector, offers examples of how entrepreneurship and alternative business models can help when the established ones are failing.

Informal sector in Africa, in this case, is indicated as one of those able to "absorb" employment, particularly during times of crisis.

Crisis could be identified as one of those "push factors" essential to the motivation in starting a business, together with ambition for freedom and need for self realization, according to a study conducted by the Estonian Institute of Economic Research.

The survey highlights how entrepreneurial spirit becomes entrepreneurial action only when the need for independence, the will of taking risk and profitability are higher than the best non-entrepreneurial option (Venesaar and Jakobson, 2008).

As to personality traits, those which are regarded as the most important among acting entrepreneurs are, according to the survey, risk tolerance, creativity, ability to plan, negotiating skills, determination and cooperativeness. The latter echoes so much the way Wendy describes herself and her way of seeing the world as a web.

In her answers, Wendy also points out how a special event in her life triggered entrepreneurial action during changing times. Whereas the event that made the entrepreneurial spirit translate into action is in the past, ever-changing environment keeps on challenging the achievements: "*It's a struggle – and an evolution*", Wendy says.

Grande (2008), examines how linking Entrepreneurial Orientation and Dynamic Capabilities is necessary to renew and sustain competitive advantage. Entrepreneurial orientation can be identified by innovativeness and taking on risks, whereas Dynamic Capabilities are networks, alliances, learning and decision making processes. The DC approach is an extension of the resource based view, and it focuses not on people and resources but on how are they used (the firm's ability to change). Dynamic capabilities help, providing a long term strategy, to maintain the "first mover advantage", due to proactiveness, innovativeness and risk taking.

Linking EO and DC is important to value creation and competitive advantage.

Conclusions.

I think the most inspiring readings during the course were Hägg, that helped me to analyze development of recent events in my life, and the interview to Wendy, that sheds a light onto a possible future. Examples of what others have done in the past give us the confidence to overcome our insecurity. I would trust a firefighter in defining risk, so I will regard it as the insecurity that lies within us, together with the opportunities: something peculiar to our vision, unique and impossible to steal, our strength and our weakness.

And, from my good and old Italian school, I will treasure what Giacomo Leopardi said: “*Il più certo modo di celare agli altri i confini del proprio sapere, è di non trapassarli*”, that could translate in the Sarasvathy’s “counting on what I know and what I am” to take on my entrepreneurial action.

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