

Lenita Nieminen, Kärt Summatavet, Arja Lemmetyinen

### **Co-creating experiences in enhancing entrepreneurial learning**

The aim of our research is to study the changing roles of educators in a learning community in which the enterprises in cultural tourism can be supported to develop entrepreneurial opportunities by providing 'learning partnership' (Gibb, 1997). This demands that educators become more deeply involved in the authentic context of micro and small enterprises. The role of the educator is suggested as a matchmaker and co-creator of the learning community in which teaching and learning is based on the real-life issues of cultural tourism businesses.

Entrepreneurs are assumed to be action-oriented and to learn primarily by doing, that is to say their learning is based on experience. Previous research also suggests that new experiences and even failures are a source of entrepreneurial learning (Cope and Watts, 2000; Rae and Carswell, 2000). Shepherd (2004) claims that emotions and feelings can also be practised and he suggests experimenting with various pedagogical methods that offer emotional experiences. Raffo et al (2000) encourage educators to provide a space of interaction where practitioners and learners can learn through reciprocal exchange of ideas in more informal settings.

The expectation is that art-based methods can engage people in the ways other methods cannot fostering capabilities such as trust, creativity, and collaboration. We gathered the empirical data during workshops for enterprises in the cultural and tourism business in Finland and Estonia. We aimed at activating entrepreneurs' creative imagination in new product development and service ideas on the basis of their personal experience and tacit knowledge which is highly personal and hard to formalize (Nonaka et al. 2000). This type of knowledge is deeply rooted in action, procedures, routines, commitment, ideals, values and emotions. The interactive workshops applying art-based methods allowed the participants to do, say and make (cf. Sanders, 2002) offering social experiences that encouraged individuals to share emotions and thus engage in co-creation. (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

The preliminary findings in our two case studies showed that the entrepreneurs liked to be imaginative and emotional, and learned how to get personalized feedback on promising ideas from the members of the learning community. The key factors of their opportunity creation process focused on their personal experience, skills, capabilities and motivation, which had a direct impact on idea generation. Our data show that new entrepreneurial propositions and innovative ideas are not created into a void environment but they are supported by an entrepreneur's earlier experiences. The traditional role of the entrepreneurship educator has been that of expert. However, our research into micro and small businesses in the cultural and tourism sector provided evidence of the need to change that role. Being embedded in a community of practice, the educator not only transmits knowledge but preferably also acts as a co-creator in the learning community. However, further study is needed in order to develop a framework that encompasses change in the traditional roles of the learning environment.