

## Seminar on Artistic Entrepreneurship

*Speech given by Lotta Lekvall at the Seminar on Artistic Entrepreneurship arranged by the Region of Västra Götaland, Sweden, at House of Sweden in Washington on May 13 2008.*

First of all I would like to thank Västra Götalandsregionen for inviting me to this seminar. I am very happy to be here! I would also like to thank the hosts at House of Sweden for this opportunity.

Nätverkstan is a cultural organisation, a business, owned by cultural journals and with the objective of working towards the small-scale cultural sector and civil society. We do several things. The main focus is training programmes like our two-year programme Kulturverkstan, a project management course within culture, and several other both short and long training; like marketing for dancers, project management for youth organisations and so forth. We offer subscription services and bookkeeping for journals and small cultural organisations. We have a network of media workshops where artists of all areas, for a small amount of money, can use hard- and soft computerware and project places.

We do surveys and have done organisational overviews. We put forward issues we find important and that we think need to be looked at. We published, for instance, in 2002 a report, based on a study where we put forward the situation for entrepreneurs within small-scale cultural- and media businesses. We have worked internationally from the start and are active in different mainly European networks. One of those is Encatc.

Nätverkstan started in 1996 with an Internet server, and an idea of doing a training programme in digital media for artists. We had one person hired part-time. The idea was to make the new phenomena – in 1996 this was very new – of Internet accessible for artists. Today we are around 15 people on full or part-time.

We are a project-based organisation and I would like to mention two of the projects we started just to give you an idea of how we are working. In 2003 we started an international Project Management Training Programme, called Globalverkstan, for people from all over the world

within civil society. This project was one of those crazy ideas that no-one believed was possible to do: Why would people from Africa, Asian countries, Europe and even US come to the small, pretty grey, and 8 months of the year cold, city of Göteborg to study a one and a half-year course in Project Management that didn't even have an examination-degree that people understood? But we started and ran it for three years. Our last students graduated last summer and a survey we did shows that 80% have jobs within the field they educated for and are working at positions all over the world.

We have also just now finished a small study of Cultural Leadership where we have worked with partners in London and brought ideas back to Sweden. It's an idea of how leadership within culture could be developed.

We are cultural entrepreneurs. But if you would evaluate us as businessmen and women I am afraid I have to admit that we have done just about everything wrong.

1. We have never written a business plan. We are run by ideas, intuition, initiative and drive. We have objectives that are extremely wide and difficult to evaluate. Still, our goals are wide enough to be open to initiatives and narrow enough to keep us on the right track, but it needs a constant discussion.
2. We have never done a market survey, to find out if the market is interested in our services. We have been active in the cultural field for a long time in different ways we are ourselves practitioners; we talk to a lot of people and have a large network. When you talk to people and listen, you find out needs and where there are room or gaps for initiative.
3. We have never done a proper marketing strategy. And it's even worse than that. We don't have a graphic communication plan. We have one logo, but colours, size and setting vary. Each project is marketed separately through Internet, e-mail lists, attending seminars and travelling. And we talk a lot about that perhaps we should have a strategy...
4. Our main target group is one of the poorest groups in society –artists, editors, poets musicians, dancers, theatre people.... So they don't have a lot of economic resources to pay for training, seminars, bookkeeping and other services that we provide.

So how have we done, then? I think a few things have been important.

We combine large-scale ideas and visions with... worst-case scenarios. When we planned for Globalverkstan, our visions were enormous, but we didn't put it in a budget until we knew we had money to run it.

It's run by practitioners, people who themselves are active in culture.

We have a combination of skills among all of us that work at Nätverkstan: analytical, organisational, creative skills.

We also combine an inside knowledge of how the sector works with skills from other fields

It's very flexible and we have the idea that you should "put your eggs in many different baskets"

We have been working internationally since start. Inspiration, exchange, knowledge gives you new ideas and solutions. And a better outside view of what your own organisation is achieving.

When talking about artists becoming entrepreneurs and also how the Art Universities and Training Programmes should prepare students to become better entrepreneurs I have a few thoughts...

The trend in Sweden today is entrepreneurship. Artists don't survive, so they should become entrepreneurs. I don't believe this is the solution to every problem in the field. It's a complex problem, which need lot of different solutions and initiatives at different levels.

But I do believe that for those who do want to start a business, there need to be an infrastructure that can provide knowledge, advise, business skills and so forth run by people who know how the cultural field works.

You need also to discuss what it is you want to achieve. I have this unfinished thought, so I don't know if it's true or not, that you need to make a distinction of entrepreneurship and business skills. If you look at the meaning of entrepreneurship it's about initiative, drive, creativity and high risks. While if you want to teach artists to run their own company, it's

business skills, calculated risks and market strategies that needs to be taught. The line is not as strict as I put forward here, but the key issue is: what should be taught? What is it we want to achieve and what are the successful key factors to reach that?

I also think it's a link between how open we are towards the multicultural Sweden and entrepreneurship. As we learned yesterday by Mr McNulty, 40% of immigrants in US start new businesses. In the Art field we need to better take care of new trends and initiatives.

Training in business skills and entrepreneurship for artists should be tailor-made with the specific conditions in the sector in mind. It has to be done with a combination of skills, both inside knowledge of how the sector works and knowledge from other areas.

Lastly I do believe that this is not only about business skills and entrepreneurial ideas. It's about confidence. There is a huge lack of confidence in art and culture; many artists and cultural entrepreneurs do not trust that their knowledge and experience count as something valuable.

This is not an issue that is addressed very often in training or at Universities. But to get people become more entrepreneurial I think you need two things; you have to believe in your idea or work – and you need confidence enough to feel that you know what you are doing.

Thank you!



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