THE SOCIALLY CONSTRUED NATURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: THE CASE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CROATIA

Ksenija Vuković¹, Kristina Detelj² and Tamara Šmaguc³

¹PhD, associate professor, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb, Croatia, ksenija.vukovic@foi.hr,
²PhD, teaching assistant, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb, Croatia, kristina.detelj@foi.hr,
³MA Econ., teaching assistant, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb, Croatia, tamara.smaguc@foi.hr

*Corresponding author

Abstract

In this paper we take Bourdieu’s approach of field, habitus and capital in the analysis of higher entrepreneurship education in Croatia. We apply a critical analysis of institutional influence over shaping perceptions and social construction of entrepreneurship education, as well as influence on the perception of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship.

The research is based on identifying and analysing the qualitative data: policy documents on entrepreneurship education at the national level (strategy for entrepreneurship education, curriculum) and the scientific papers on the topic of higher education concerning entrepreneurship education in Croatia. We identify the main categories of discourses which may impact students’ entrepreneurship desirability and feasibility beliefs.

Using the critical discourse analysis we identified the dominant discourses related to the subjects of entrepreneurship education: entrepreneurs, students, teachers and the institutions of higher education that offer education programs for entrepreneurship.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, higher education, Croatia, discourse analysis, Bourdieu

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent scientific papers on the research approaches and methods used in the area of entrepreneurship highlight the potential of using a scientific approach based on the work of French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu's methodology—unlike all methodological monisms, which attribute ontological primacy to either structure or agency, system or agent, collective or individual—insists on the primacy of relationship and is therefore a relational methodology (Fanuko, 2008, p. 11).

A Bourdieusian research framework encompasses both the qualitative and the quantitative domain, and at the same time allows for an equal expression of empirical and interpretative sensibilities. In this manner, a
multilevel analysis can be performed in a particular research project to obtain a more complex and accurate picture of social phenomena (Bourdieu, 2011). Bourdieu's works indicate an active effort to merge empirical specificities and theoretical developments. This paper uses a Bourdieusian approach in the research of entrepreneurship education in Croatia's higher education institutions by implementing discourse analysis, and thus contributes to the understanding of relations among the subjects of the field of entrepreneurship education.

2 BOURDIEU'S CONCEPTS OF HABITUS, CAPITAL AND FIELD

In his social theory, Bourdieu uses the basic concepts of habitus, field and capital.

2.1 Habitus

Habitus is a common term for a variety of individual experiences that form a particular type of subjectivity (Sorić, 2012). A person that spends time in a particular field (environment) gradually builds a habitus through interacting with other people, whose habitus has already been established. Over time, a legitimacy is gained in the field that makes one a full-fledged member who then pursues personal interests and influences new members. Habitus is defined as a set of dispositions embodied in an individual through the cognitive and bodily structures of perception, thought and action (Fanuko, 2008). Bourdieu emphasizes the collective basis of habitus and claims that those individuals who internalize the same life circumstances share the same habitus (Swartz, 1997). The concept of habitus can also be useful as a means of active analysis of societal functioning through empirical research (Maton, 2008).

2.2 Capital

According to Bourdieu (1997), there are four forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. One engages capital in order to pursue and manage one's life projects. Economic capital refers to money (financial income), as well as other financial resources and property, or all possessions that can be transformed into money. Obviously, the creation of economic capital carries significant weight in the entrepreneurial process. It is worth remembering here that the motivation for entrepreneurship is usually connected with economic wealth creation as an initiator of entrepreneurial activities. In the context of social entrepreneurship, motivation can also be connected with social wealth creation.

Cultural capital has several forms, but this notion primarily refers to formal social recognition in the form of the type and degree of education acquired.

Social capital refers to the system of connections and relationships that an individual establishes with other people in the close or wider environment. Symbolic capital is not a separate type of capital but is derived from economic, cultural, or social capital, meaning that these three types of capital may (or may not) be transformed into symbolic capital when they are noticed and recognized as legitimate.

2.3 Field

Bourdieu defines the field as a relational and dynamic social microcosm which constantly changes and is therefore described using relational and dialectical notions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The field is not a set of empty spaces but a field of play that exists only if entered by the players who believe and actively strive to achieve the stake, and the habitus does not exist without the structure that enables the organized improvisation of agents (Fanuko, 2008, p. 12).

There is a multitude of fields, some of which are marked better than others, but all fields exist in a certain hierarchical relationship. For example, the field of business tends to be more powerful than the field of arts (Bourdieu, 1985).

In short, Bourdieu's theory can be described as an effort to explain different types of resources (capital) that an individual uses when implementing a strategy, and the way in which this strategy is a result of negotiating and creating a habitus in the logic of the field (i.e., social structures), which brings about changes to the field under the influence of individual's actions (Tatli et al., 2014).

Bourdieu (2011, p. 95) illustrates this relationship by using the following formula: habitus x capital + field = practice.
3 METHODOLOGY

Adapted Brine’s approach (2008) was used for analyzing the textual meaning. It consists of: 1) pre-text stages (understanding the general context, identifying the texts, locating the texts), 2) reading the text, 3) post-text stages: moving beyond the text (thinking more about the discourses) and theorizing (drawing on existing knowledge/literature).

In the research of the development of entrepreneurship education in Croatia, we used scholarly and professional articles from Croatian scientific database HrČak, and the national strategic documents. We have identified 79 papers that are relevant for the analysis of entrepreneurship education in Croatia. Out of official national documents, two publicly available documents were identified: the Strategy for Entrepreneurial Learning 2010-2014, and the National Curriculum Framework. All texts are listed in the literature section.

After initial remarks and discussions about the reviewed papers, the authors proceeded with identifying the subjects and their activities. Discourse analysis was used to identify the relations among the subjects and to observe the social structure constructed in the text. This was based on Fairclough’s (2003) view about discourses representing different ways of structuring knowledge and social practices.

4 RESULTS

We identified the dominant discourses related to the subjects of entrepreneurship education: entrepreneurs, students, teachers and the institutions of higher education that offer education programs for entrepreneurship.

4.1 Entrepreneur as homo economicus

The mainstream of entrepreneurship research still often portrays a typical entrepreneur as homo economicus who is totally detached from affects, intersubjectivity, personal narratives, basic discourses and the complex intertwining of different areas of activity and influence (Tatli et al., 2014). In the documents on entrepreneurship education, this view of entrepreneur as homo economicus can also be found and is even taken a step further with claims that everyone is homo economicus in some sense (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Strategy for Entrepreneurial Learning 2010-2014, 2010). Entrepreneurs are regarded as economic agents whose power continually grows.

4.2 Entrepreneur as a role model

In the context of promoting the active methods of learning in entrepreneurship education, existing discourses stress the importance of direct interaction between students and entrepreneurs. Some of the suggested modalities of this active relationship include: organized visits to successful entrepreneurs, guest lectures of reputable entrepreneurs, interviewing entrepreneurs, and serving an internship under the mentorship of successful entrepreneurs (Miljković Krečer, 2010; Senegović et al., 2011; Šutalo, 2011). In this process, the entrepreneur is presented as a role model that conveys the “real entrepreneurship” to students and potentially strengthens their entrepreneurial self-efficacy through the process of social comparison (Miljković Krečer, 2010).

4.3 Entrepreneur and teacher as two incompatible worlds

A more intensive networking between teachers and entrepreneurs is generally regarded as an effective way of increasing mobility, interculturality, multidisciplinarity, and the transfer of knowledge and good practices (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Strategy for Entrepreneurial Learning 2010-2014, 2010). Guided by the struggle for positions in the field of education, occasional discourses negate the bidirectional benefits of such cooperation, stating that, by “researching entrepreneurship from their cabinets”, teachers are unable to directly experience and understand the world of entrepreneurship, which means they cannot optimally transfer knowledge to “generally undereducated” entrepreneurs (Ožanić, 2011, pp. 205-210). It is possible that this instilled sense of culture clash between the world of scholars and the world of entrepreneurs could leave its mark, both in higher education policies and in entrepreneurship (Jones, 2014).

4.4 Enterprising higher education institutions

Relying on Bourdieus work, De Clercq and Voronov (2009) examine the practical aspects of entrepreneurship, viewing it as a process of outstanding social inclusion that is related to entrepreneur’s positioning in the structures and relations of power. In their examination of the practice of entrepreneurship, the authors focus on new entrants to the field and the entrepreneurial action of gaining legitimacy. They
investigate how new entrants form the ability to gain legitimacy by using their cultural and symbolic capital, and how the interaction between their legitimacy and success influences the degree of strengthening and transformation of the field structure. Croatian institutions of higher education that offer entrepreneurship education programs struggle to gain legitimacy, which can be observed in the texts authored by their employees. These authors present and promote their programs, teaching methods, and the ways of achieving such learning outcomes that enhance the employability of their students.

4.5 Student as an ideal recipient of entrepreneurial mindset

Regarding the accumulation of symbolic capital through entrepreneurship education, the need for a permanent approach in the process of acquiring entrepreneurial competency is emphasized. Besides knowledge, entrepreneurial competency includes skills, abilities and attitudes (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Strategy for Entrepreneurial Learning 2010-2014, 2010). In this process, the student is seen as an agent that is influenced by the existing sociocultural framework and thus aware of the high regard for transversal competencies in general, as well as for entrepreneurship (Pavić, 2008; Jovanovski, 2012). This tendency towards the idealization of students can also be seen in ascribing to them such characteristics as creativity, optimism, achievement orientation, technological savviness (Jovanovski, 2012), enthusiasm, long-term perspective (Jovanovski, 2013), good education, dynamism, innovativeness (Pavić, 2008), and high awareness of social responsibilities and business ethics (Hunjet and Kozina, 2013).

4.6 Female students need additional support

Although the current discourses show that students have positive attitudes towards entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship in general (Pavić, 2008; Hunjet and Kozina, 2013), in their self-assessments of entrepreneurial characteristics and abilities, significant gender differences can be seen. Concretely, the studies concerning students’ propensity to identify themselves with entrepreneurial characteristics (Bilić et al., 2011; Živoder and Kolega, 2014) or their preparedness for engaging in entrepreneurship (Pavić, 2008) show that the nature of entrepreneurship is more alien to female students, which points to the influence of symbolic ties between entrepreneurship and masculinity (Živoder and Kolega, 2014). Kolega et al. (2013) start by assuming that these symbolic ties are communicated through textbook discourses and examine the gender characteristics of the language used in the course materials for teaching entrepreneurship. They claim that the roles of female and male characters in the analyzed textbooks fit the historically embedded gender stereotypes. Men are associated with ventures, visions, ideas, processes, and given the roles of business managers and owners, while the roles of women are marginal and sometimes even derogatory (Kolega et al., 2013; Živoder and Kolega, 2014). Besides these textbooks, similar tendencies can also be found in journal articles. For example, Jovanovski (2012) discusses the topic of the development of generation Y's entrepreneurial skills and careers, and lists the examples of successful young entrepreneurs without mentioning a single female entrepreneur.

4.7 Teacher as a passive observer

From the discourse that calls for the strengthening of entrepreneurship education, arises the construct of teacher as an agent of future changes who, guided by the current structure of the field of education (Fanuko, 2008), retains the passive and submissive role in certain areas. This passivity is reflected in teachers’ inertia when they are required to implement new teaching methods (Šutalo, 2011), in conformist attitudes towards institutional rules that diminish their internal inspiration (Vican, 2012), and in their tendency to take a fragmented instead of systematic approach to teaching entrepreneurship (Baranović et al., 2008; Vojnović and Manojlović, 2011).

4.8 Teacher as future agent of change

On the other hand, there are proposals of a “new state” in which the teacher figures as a central agent of building the entrepreneurial spirit in school environments (Vican, 2012; Vojnović and Manojlović, 2012), as a competent creator of teaching materials for entrepreneurship, and an effective implementer of active learning methods (Brčić et al., 2011; Ćorić et al., 2012; Tkalec, 2012; Vojnović and Manojlović, 2012). Also, more comprehensive tasks are put before teachers, such as to uphold the partnership between educational institutions and the institutions that support entrepreneurship (Vojnović and Manojlović, 2012), as well as to initiate and support the processes of incubation at enterprising educational institutions (Singer and Oberman Peterka, 2010; Kos et al., 2011; Oberman Peterka and Salihovic, 2012).
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Before the preliminary analysis, the authors had assumed that the main social constructs in the analyzed texts were related to the three main agents of entrepreneurial education: the entrepreneur, the student, and the teacher. But, the analysis placed the focus on yet another important subject—the institution of higher education. In Croatia, there are several study programs that offer entrepreneurship education. Besides public faculties, there is a decent number of polytechnic schools (mostly created due to local government initiatives and partially financed from the budget) and a number of privately owned business schools. The authors of the analyzed texts mostly come from these institutions, with a few authors from the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, and the Agency for Science and Higher Education. Generally, their articles present the programs and teaching methods of a particular institution and reflect the field of entrepreneurship education, its subjects and relationships between them. The entrants struggle for the legitimacy of their institutions. There are some examples of co-authorships of new entrants with persons from government bodies such as ministries and agencies, which indicates entrants’ need for networking with important agents of the field of education. Fairclough (2003) says that the main aspects that show the meaning of a text are action, representation and identification. Information, advices and warnings that exist in texts are a way of acting. The second major aspect of text meaning are representations: they create meanings and transfer them to others through space and time.

The dominant premises which shape teachers’ perceptions refer to the sense of entrapment between their responsibility and the role they have as key figures in the reform of educational system, and the concrete limitations in fulfilling their multiple roles (such as the insufficiencies of their own entrepreneurial education, poorly defined expectations of more dominant agents, and the existing power relations in the field).

As these discourses reveal, the gap between the notions of passive (but aware) observers and the active agents of change can be bridged by increasing the self-efficacy of entrepreneurship teachers in their work through enhancing their own entrepreneurial knowledge (Šutalo, 2011; Vojnović and Manojlović, 2011; Pavić and Novosel, 2012; Tkalec, 2012; Vican, 2012; Vojnović and Manojlović, 2012; Ljubić et al., 2013). Nevertheless, with somewhat mechanistic insistence on improving (all) teachers’ entrepreneurial education, it should not be forgotten that they are not mere particles controlled by external forces (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Discourse analysis implies that expectations from an entrepreneur and a student do not seem to be realistic. The framework established by policy-makers and scholars may be a problem if the students’ capital and the students’ social construction of entrepreneurship differs from the frames. It may have impact on student’s perceptions of their self-efficacy (especially female undergraduate and graduate students) and feasibility of starting their own business. This phase of investigating entrepreneurship education in higher education is the base for the further phase of research that will encompass interviews with students and teaching staff in order to prepare and implement student-focused learning activities.

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