



Interaction in the artistic knowledge creation process: The case of artists in Finnish Lapland



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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the need in economic geography to understand temporal interactions and sources of new knowledge in such interactions in the knowledge creation process. The focus is on eleven international artists who live in peripheral locations in Finnish Lapland, where spatial and temporal disconnections easily evolve. The paper considers the meaning of such disconnections, as well as human–object interaction. The processes are analysed through the spatio-temporal framework of object, communicative and cognitive spaces, and linear and relational times.

The empirical research into knowledge creation in economic geography lacks views of peripheries, artistic knowledge and the consideration of the process in the 'here and now'. These views are needed to meet the challenge of understanding knowledge creation processes in various fields and contexts. The main materials of this ethnographic case study – interviews, observation and videotaping of the artists working – are analysed using content analysis.

The results show the central position of objects in interactions of artistic knowledge creation. The two main modes of temporal interactions are (re)searching and (dis)connecting. In the early stages, continuous and wide (re)searching includes returning in time that addresses the framework for developing artwork. The artists living in peripheries benefit from disconnections based on geographical isolation. The moments of (dis)connections between the field and artist, object-cognitive spaces and dimensions of time are sources of new knowledge. Some connections might prevent knowledge creation. Therefore, objects, temporality and the cognitive space of interpreted messages are important to acknowledge when studying interactive knowledge creation.

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Introduction

Interaction is the basis of knowledge creation, where a preliminary idea is processed into a concrete result, such as a painting (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Sources of knowledge are found through interactions (Almeida, 1996) that also glue together communities, networks and collaborations for knowledge creation (Wenger, 1999) and are considered keys to the analysis of economic development (Glückler, 2007). Interaction is formed of partners, message, time and space. Interacting with partners, people and objects, is required for learning (Latour, 2005; Lundvall, 2010a; Howells, 2012; Rutten and Boekema, 2013). Messages mediated through interaction are interpreted into knowledge. It takes time to interact but the moments of interaction are temporal. Interactions are spatial and for instance geographical, cultural and organisational spaces have an effect on ways of interacting and interpreting.

Growing attention to knowledge creation processes in economic geography requires taking interaction seriously. However, for three reasons this requirement is not met, and there is a need to understand interaction in knowledge creation further (Leeuwis and Aarts, 2011; Bessant et al., 2012). First, objects are not taken seriously as partners of interaction, or sources of new knowledge (Faulconbridge, 2010). Second, most empirical attention is paid to proximities and connections, while possible distances and disconnections in interactions and knowledge creation processes require further research (Grabher and Ibert, 2014). This paper brings out two such (dis)connections: geographical and temporal. Empirical research in economic geography focuses on knowledge creation in centres (Gibson, 2012), even though important knowledge is also created in peripheries (e.g. Petrov and Cavin, 2012). Centres and peripheries are very different arenas for interactions. Disconnections may easily evolve in a peripheral geographical space that lacks employees, companies, schools, infrastructure and connections to knowledge networks, when compared to centres (Fitjar and Rodríguez-Pose, 2011, p. 555–556). Economic

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geographers are only starting to specify the temporality of knowledge creation processes: setbacks, slow times and uncertainty (Hautala and Jauhiainen, 2014), and the meaning of intensive temporal gatherings (Henn and Bathelt, 2015). Knowledge creation processes and related events can be unpacked further with temporality of interactions, for instance, through avoidance, passivity and disconnections.

Third, messages of interaction are often considered objectively transferred, which ignores the cognitive space of interpretations. This repeats the problem of a rather narrow understanding of knowledge and its creation in economic geography. Knowledge is not seen as individually interpreted (Hautala, 2011), but it is transferred unchanged between people and organisations. In this paper, a constructionist-cognitive perspective of knowledge is adopted. In brief, individually interpreted knowledge (cognitive perspective) is created through interaction (constructionist perspective). Artistic knowledge is a justified and interpreted idea (a vision of a new painting), object (a painting) or practice (painting), and exists in the tacit–explicit continuum (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998). While such definition of knowledge is wide enough to be applied in many fields, differences unfold in knowledge creation processes. Artistic knowledge has an aesthetic logic of reflexivity (Müller and Ibert, 2015). In contrast to plausible arguments or utility products, aesthetic knowledge takes the form of symbols, signs, embodied feelings and experiences (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2009, p. 689). Even though artists systematically research their topics (McNiff, 2009), artistic knowledge allows more space for different interpretations than scientific knowledge aiming at generalizations or business knowledge aiming at widely understandable and usable products, for instance. The artistic knowledge creation process is context-specific, uncertain and open-ended (Martin and Moodysson, 2011; Yau, 2012; Lê et al., 2013).

The meaning of disconnections in knowledge creation differs between the fields of knowledge and stages of knowledge creation processes. Education and opportunities for developing experience draw early-career artists to cities. Topic-focused information can be shaped into knowledge in several kinds of virtual communities with complete face-to-face disconnection (Grabher and Ibert, 2014). Whereas for software engineers, long-term affiliations in firms and networks allow face-to-face disconnection, even for long periods of time, in the advertising field, face-to-face sociality forms the background of ‘learning-by-switching’ projects, clients and employers in the creative field of advertising (Grabher and Ibert, 2006). The artists in this article create knowledge around the theme of their career, Lapland, being connected to a remote location while temporally disconnected from their peer networks.

The growing interest in symbolic knowledge creation including art and design (Sunley et al., 2008) suggests that creative industries and art are more and more often seen as ‘major triggers’ of economic transformation (Guile and Okumoto, 2008, p. 252). The cognitive perspective of knowledge as interpreted is salient for studying symbolic fields, where knowledge is created by withdrawing from ‘the real’ into the imaginary (Brinck, 2007, p. 407). Artists are part of the economy, directly and indirectly. Artwork is sold, and in addition, many artists are entrepreneurs (Swedberg, 2006). Artwork is not only worth money, but its value also lies in experiences, memories and feelings, and it affects the wider atmosphere of society (Aspers and Beckert, 2011).

By focusing on eleven international artists living in the peripheral area of Finnish Lapland, it is asked, (1) Through what kind of (temporal) interaction is artistic knowledge created, and (2) what are the sources of new knowledge in such (temporal) interactions? The results show that artists living in peripheries find sources of new knowledge from disconnections in interaction; therefore, geographical isolation can benefit international and interactive knowledge creation. This conclusion requires us to notice the temporality

of interaction, epistemic objects as partners of interaction, and knowledge creation processes as unfolding in several dimensions of time and space (Hautala and Jauhiainen, 2014). The role of objects is intensified for the artists living in peripheral areas, who might even avoid interacting with humans temporally and focus on interacting with materials and tools. Disconnections can be sources of new knowledge in certain phases of knowledge creation processes. Two modes of temporal interaction that match different phases in knowledge creation processes illuminate this finding. First, interacting by (re)searching aims at a coherent framework for the developing work of art through *connections* with various partners and topics. Second, when the idea of the artwork has become quite clear, knowledge is created by (dis)connecting. Temporal *disconnections* between field and artist, object and cognitive spaces and simultaneous dimensions of time are sources of new knowledge for artists: they result in starting, finishing, abandoning or changing the artwork dramatically.

The article starts with the theory, which first considers the knowledge creation process from a constructionist-cognitive perspective and through the spatio-temporal framework. The second part of the theory looks into the understandings of interaction in current economic geographical research and identifies how they could be taken forward. The theory is followed by a presentation of the artists of Finnish Lapland, their materials and methods, and a presentation of the results. The final part presents the conclusions and a discussion.

Constructionist-cognitive perspective of spatio-temporal knowledge creation processes

Knowledge creation in the short term means how a preliminary idea is developed into a presented result. Over a longer time period, these results inspire further knowledge creation through interpretations of new people in new contexts, or spaces and times. Knowledge is considered from a constructionist-cognitive perspective (Hautala, 2011): it is created in interaction (constructionist perspective) and it is individually interpreted (cognitive perspective). Knowledge is a justified and interpreted idea, object or practice, and it exists in the tacit–explicit continuum (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998). All knowledge has a tacit dimension that we cannot simply tell to others (Polanyi, 1983, p. 4). However, some parts of knowledge can be expressed through systematic codes such as writing (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, p. 59). The degree of such explicit elements varies in different kinds of knowledge. Practices of doing art are embodied and connect body and mind (Johnson, 1987, p. xiv–xvi; Borgdorff, 2007; Brinck, 2007, p. 407). This knowledge is largely tacit (Hosea, 2010, p. 354) and in art it is also known as experiential knowledge (Niedderer and Reilly, 2010, p. 5). Artists have detailed tacit knowledge of how to use tools with fine-tuned movements of their bodies (Hosea, 2010, p. 354). In order to create knowledge, artists need to justify their material artwork, the practices and interpretations in relation to their peers and the ‘art world’ (Dickie, 1997, p. 9), local people and the audience. Thoughtful justification requires deep knowledge: artists research the themes of their developing artwork and they are aware of current styles and scenes of their peer-communities. Justified work of art has symbolic value to its audience (Aspers and Beckert, 2011, p. 13).

According to the *constructionist perspective*, a close look will be taken at the interaction defined as a responsive action or thought in relation to person(s) or object(s) (see Krueger, 2011, p. 649). The basic building blocks of interaction are participants, messages, space and time. Along with the participants, interaction can be divided into three types: human–human, human–object, and human–object–human interaction, where objects mediate the

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