

Embracing Entrepreneurial Paradoxes in Liminality. The Case of the Collaborative Space Le Square

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Abstract:

Although studies converge to describe tolerance for ambiguity as a strength for entrepreneurs, few, if any, portray ambiguity as contributing to a supportive context. Answering a call to recontextualize entrepreneurship, our research explores how a liminal space, as inherently characterized by ambiguity, is conducive to entrepreneurship. We conducted a 2-year case study in the open collaborative space “Le Square,” combining 52 days of observation, 43 semi-structured interviews, and over 500 pages of internal and external documents. We depict Le Square as having three major liminal characteristics - an unconventional community, an ephemeral physical embodiment, and a trust-based rudimentary structure, and present how each allows entrepreneurial paradoxes to be embraced. Our study therefore clarifies three main liminal features (social, physico-temporal, and cultural) fundamental to a context supportive of entrepreneurship and demonstrates how entrepreneurs can leverage these features to embrace entrepreneurial paradoxes.

Keywords: Case study; collaborative spaces; entrepreneurship; liminality; paradoxes

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INTRODUCTION

Steve Jobs' garage and Jeff Bezos' road trip to California are two iconic images of entrepreneurship. They illustrate a call for greater focus on the spatial dimension of entrepreneurship (Hortj, 2004), a field still largely decontextualized (Hjorth, Jones, & Gartner, 2008) and dominated by a psychological focus (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017). Indeed, a recent review of the determinants of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, Wennberg, Suddaby, & Wiklund, 2019) suggests a bias toward individual factors in entrepreneurship studies at the expense of external factors, such as context. Given this void, our research answers a call to re-contextualize entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2010; Welter, 2011).

The few studies exploring the role of context in entrepreneurship have largely focused on traditional places such as established organizational or institutional contexts. Burgeoning research explores alternative places, as in self-storage facilities (Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016), pop-up shops (Niehm, Fiore, Jeong, & Kim, 2004), or science parks (Salvador, Mariotti, & Conicella, 2013), thus reconnecting with the liminal condition of those iconic images—the road and the garage. Liminality, broadly defined as a temporary and intermediary space or state (Van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1967), has recently emerged as a lens to capture entrepreneurial dynamics taking place at the margins of dominant spaces (Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Garcia-Lorenzo, Donnelly, & Sell-Trujillo, 2018). Indeed, characterized by ambiguity, liquidity, transition, and becoming, liminality naturally echoes the inherent in-betweenness of entrepreneurship, depicted as a border region, a practice situated “entre,” at the interplay (Steyaert, 2005). This liminal turn is puzzling as it blurs long-term, established dualisms in organizations between “capital and labour, man and woman” (Bardon, Clegg, & Josserand, 2012: 351), employed and unemployed, present and absent, etc. Consequently, with liminality, paradoxes succeed dualisms; you can be both at the same time.

Given this spatial turn (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006), our research explores how liminality in organizations supports and nurtures entrepreneurship. More specifically, our research question is: “In what ways does a liminal space support entrepreneurship?”

We first depict entrepreneurship as an in-between process of paradoxical nature, and then situate liminality in regard to organizations and entrepreneurship. Second, we describe our research methodology and context—a two-year case study of the French collaborative lab Le Square where we conducted 52 days of observation, 43 semi-structured interviews, and collected over 500 pages of internal and external documents. Following are our results: Le Square appears as a liminal space through three main characteristics: an unconventional community, an ephemeral physical embodiment, and a trust-based rudimentary structure. And each of these three characteristics helps embrace entrepreneurial paradoxes. Finally, we discuss how a liminal space such as Le Square offers a social, physico-temporal, and cultural context conducive to entrepreneurship by allowing entrepreneurial paradoxes to be embraced.

1. ENTREPRENEURSHIP, LIMINALITY, AND PARADOXES

1.1. ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A PARADOXICAL IN-BETWEEN PROCESS

1.1.1. An in-between process

Right from its etymology, entrepreneurship locates in-betweenness at its heart. Indeed, entrepreneurship, from the French word “entreprendre,” comes from the Latin phrase “interprehendere,” meaning “seizing with the hand” in the sense of “physically mastering something” (Boutillier & Uzunidi, 2016: 1). The entrepreneur is thus someone “who acts” or “who behaves actively” as the usages of the word in the 16th century indicate (Boutillier & Uzunidi, 2016: 1). Therefore, a few centuries later, it has become natural to see entrepreneurship captured in organizational studies as an “in-betweenness in itself” (Steyaert, 2007; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018), with recent developments encouraging the portrayal of entrepreneurship as a process (Anderson, 2005; Henfridsson & Yoo, 2014; Steyaert, 2004), a “process of becoming” (Anderson, 2005: 591), or a dynamic interaction between space, time, and people, rather than the unique static property of an individual (Cropley & Cropley, 2014). Several voices (Anderson, 2005; Henfridsson & Yoo, 2014) even question the appropriateness of the words “entrepreneur” and “entrepreneurship.” As nouns, they are misleading: they convey an idea of an objective state of being (I am an entrepreneur) or an objective thing (I do entrepreneurship), reifying an ongoing “transitive, transitory and ephemeral” (Anderson, 2005: 592) activity that is all about transformation and creation. Against this crystallization, a growing number of voices call for the use of the verb “entrepreneurship” (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Henfridsson & Yoo, 2014; Steyaert, 2007) to better reflect the inherent processual dimension of the activity. In fact, entrepreneurship can be portrayed as “multifaceted” (Shepherd, et al. 2019: 160), a process in-between a set of multiple tensions, contradictions, ambiguities, given the

“paradoxical demands of the job” (Miller & Sardais, 2015: 489). Building on the literature, we suggest that three main paradoxes characterize entrepreneurial dynamics.

1.1.2. The paradoxes of entrepreneurial dynamics

First, the conformist/disruptive paradox. Entrepreneurship is this intangible activity located in-between absence and presence, nothing and something, here and there. The would-be entrepreneur has to be convinced and convince his or her surroundings that tomorrow there will be something where today there is nothing. As Anderson (2005) reminds us, Schumpeter (1934: 85) envisions entrepreneurs as having “the capacity [to see] things in a way which afterwards proves to be true, even if it cannot be established at the moment.” The forward thinking of entrepreneurship (Kuratko, Fisher, Bloodgood, & Hornsby, 2017: 123) often requires being more open than others to exploring new options (Burmeister & Schade, 2007), challenging traditional ways of seeing the world (Shepherd et al., 2019), even constructing “a new social context by creating new rules, norms, values, scripts, beliefs” (Kuratko, et al., 2017: 124). This can rely on counter-discourses and resistance (Egan-Wyer, Muhr, & Rehn, 2018), as well as rule breaking (Brenkert, 2009). Overall, these behaviors are supported by specific psychological and emotional states (Shepherd et al., 2019) and traits such as a higher degree of optimism (De Meza & Souzey, 1996; Millet & Sardais, 2015), moral imagination (McVea, 2009), or moral disengagement (Shepherd, Patzelt, & Baron, 2013). Countering this disruptive nature of entrepreneurial dynamics, some studies however conclude that entrepreneurs are “hard-nosed realists” (Miller & Sardais, 2015: 489; Liang & Dunn, 2010), full of doubts and risk-averse (Xu & Ruef, 2004). Therefore, entrepreneurship requires a certain amount of conformity—notably to the capitalist logic (Egan-Wyer et al., 2018)—to fit into the preexisting ecosystem (Kuratko, et al., 2017; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

A second paradox of entrepreneurial dynamics connects to the role of intuition versus having a methodical process. Several studies depict flexibility (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004), improvisation (Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Zheng & Mai, 2013), and bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Johannisson, 2011) as key to entrepreneurship, in order to face surprises and make do with existing resources and conditions. Entrepreneurship is partially accidental (Shah & Tripsas, 2007), made of serendipity (Dew, 2009), and reliant upon an ability to “play” with the unexpected (Horjth, 2004) and to be comfortable with ambiguity (Scherer, 1982). Overall, the ability to follow one’s intuition seems key (Baldacchino, Ucbasaran, Cabantous, & Lockett, 2015) with entrepreneurs typically displaying more positive emotions than the general population (Tata, Martinez, Garcia, Oesch, & Brusoni, 2017). At the same time, entrepreneurship relies on established routines (Shepherd et al., 2019) and systematic

exploration anchored in purposeful activities (Dew, 2009; Fiet, 1996). Entrepreneurs demonstrate judgment selectiveness (Uygur & Kim, 2016) grounded in cognitive processes such as causal maps.

Finally, a third paradox that we are proposing is autonomy versus collaboration. Autonomy (Shir, Nikolaev, & Wincent, 2018; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996) and the ability to act independently appear to be critical factors. Some research also documents the role of hubris (Hayward, Shepherd, & Griffin, 2006), overconfidence (Busenitz & Barney, 1997; Navis & Ozbek, 2016), and narcissism (Navis & Ozbek, 2016), especially to explain perseverance after failures. On the other hand, entrepreneurship equally relies on a collective (Shepherd et al., 2019), anchored in a supportive ecosystem (Kuratko et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship also takes place in teams (Beckman, 2006; Ruef, Aldrich, & Carter, 2003) that leverage external advice networks (Vissa & Chacar, 2009) and would benefit from social learning (Shepherd, 2015).

After having captured entrepreneurship through three main paradoxes (conformist/disruptive; methodical/intuitive, and autonomous/collaborative), we next situate liminality in regards to organizations and entrepreneurship research.

1.2. LIMINALITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In contrast to the micro-focus that has long prevailed in entrepreneurship studies, more and more studies are emphasizing the macro-level by looking at contextual factors (Hjorth et al., 2008; Welter, 2011). In this effort to contextualize entrepreneurship, a few studies have connected liminality and entrepreneurship. Next, we first introduce liminality, and then depict how the literature has connected it to organizations and entrepreneurship.

1.2.1. Liminality

Current organizational approaches to liminality build on two major references: the original work of the European ethnographer van Gennep (1909) and the British cultural anthropologist Turner (1967). van Gennep elaborates his original conceptualization of a “liminal period” in the context of “rites de passage” accompanying “every change of place, state, social position and age” (van Gennep, 1960, cited by Turner, 1967: 359). This liminal stage, also referred to as a “margin,” follows a “separation” from an initial social context—or pre-liminal stage—and precedes the “aggregation” back into society upon the endowment of the new status—or post-liminal stage (van Gennep, 1909). In his analysis of van Gennep’s concept of liminality, Turner emphasizes that liminality fundamentally denotes a “transition,” “a becoming” (Turner, 1969: 46) between two “states,” i.e., relatively fixed or stable conditions. He also points out the “condition of ambiguity and paradox” (p. 48) of liminality, given that the liminal individual is

“neither this or that, and yet is both” (Turner, 1967: 49). Indeed, if, as he argues, our basic model of society relies upon a “structure of positions” (Turner, 1967: 46), consequently the “liminal persona” or “transitional-being” (p. 47) is fundamentally in an interstructural situation. Thus, liminality is often associated with “hav[ing] nothing” (Turner, 1967: 49), which goes with “statuslessness” (Turner, 1969: 97) and “invisibility” (Turner, 1969: 95). Behaviors are portrayed as humble, simple, and likely to support “reflection” (Turner, 1969: 53) because the “liminar” (Beech, 2011: 362) is “isolated” and thus “divested of previous habits of thought, feeling, and action” (Turner, 1967: 53). While isolated from the rest of society, he or she still belongs to the “communitas” of liminars, which is marked by comradeship, a strong friendship that transcends distinctions of “rank, age, kinship position” (Turner, 1967: 50), where “strong ties...persist after the rites are over” (p. 50), and people thrive to common wealth.

1.2.2. Liminality, organizations, and entrepreneurship

Increasingly, management scholars look into this specific in-between position, applied to a variety of contexts from temporary workers (Beech, 2011), project workers (Bjorg & Söderlund, 2015), consultants (Sturdy, Clark, Finchen, & Handley, 2009), customers and visitors (Izak, 2005), academics (Bamber, Allen-Collinson, & McCormack, 2017), to knowledge-sharing communities (Swan, Scarbrough, & Ziebro, 2016) and corporate entrepreneurs (Lô & Fatien Diochon, 2018). Often, liminality is imposed by virtue of the structure of a profession or a role (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018), such as in the case of contractual workers (Tempest & Starkey, 2004), management consultants (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Sturdy et al., 2006), and temporary staff (Garsten, 1999), and connoted negatively, as something the employees have to cope with. For example, in the specific case of entrepreneurship, Daniel and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) identify a series of threats and obstacles of liminality to entrepreneurship. The inherent absence of structure and norms in liminality can be unsettling (Küpers, 2011), and a source of exacerbated anxiety, increased isolation, and fear of failure. While the temporary nature of the space certainly breaks routines and reduces mundanity, it can result in stress caused by the unknown and a sense of emergency. Additionally, the unusual location of liminality can damage perceived legitimacy since the entrepreneur does not inherit the authority granted by an established and socially recognized entity. However, some recent studies emphasize the potentiality of liminal spaces for entrepreneurship (Anderson, 2005; Brooker & Joppe, 2013; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018). Liminality has thus been portrayed as an environment conducive to creativity given the potential freedom and lack of constraints provided by a space with fewer social routines, behavioral norms, and expectations from others (Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Ryan, 2018).

Also, the transitional or transitory aspect of the place potentially alleviates concerns about property costs (Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Our research builds on this emerging literature exploring whether and how liminality can be conducive to entrepreneurship. Next, we detail our material and research methods.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. APPROACH AND CONTEXT

We conducted an exploratory and descriptive single case study in an open collaborative space called Le Square. This 3000-square-meter space situated in the center of Paris was initiated by the multinational car manufacturer Renault but has been co-constructed by 20 different organizations of the Parisian entrepreneurial ecosystem. This structure is composed of organizations of various sizes, of public or private actors ranging from start-ups developing mobile applications to large public organizations supporting entrepreneurship. By coming together within a collaborative space of innovation as Le Square, the 20 entities seek to benefit from complementary resources and skills and to develop specific relations conducive to interorganizational benefits. The place itself is composed of a wide co-working space (on 2 floors), meeting rooms, living areas and relaxing corners (a kitchen, comfortable areas, a piano available to all), and a large conference room to host events. Entrepreneurs developing their start-up and corporate entrepreneurs developing a project meet in this in-between space situated at the borders of the Parisian entrepreneurial ecosystem and Renault, a corporate ecosystem. The only request structuring the activities of this heteroclite community is to lead joint projects focused on two major subjects: “the future of mobilities and new ways of working” as encapsulated by its founders. Our research is thus based on a “revelatory case” (Yin, 2012: 18), i.e., a kind of single case study relevant for “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a ‘case’), set within its real-world context.”

2.2. DATA SELECTION, COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS

Renault was selected as a case for studying liminal space and entrepreneurship for several reasons. First, to our knowledge, it is one of the first open, collaborative physical spaces situated at the frontier of large companies and an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Indeed, Le Square is co-governed by employees from large groups and different start-ups in the Parisian entrepreneurial ecosystem. Second, the diversity of the members regarding their core activity juxtaposed with their common engagement to work together as a community brought a counterintuitive and contemporary aspect to this case. Currently, diverse new forms of partnership between large groups and start-ups are emerging; thus, Le Square seems to represent an original case in that

sense. Third, given that the first author worked for several years with Renault Group and more specifically with one of the employees who was involved in the initiation of the Le Square project, we had privileged access to the data.

The data collection process was held between December 2016 and December 2018, with two monthly visits to the site on average. We followed the principles of triangulation and data saturation, which can be summarized by three statistics: 52 days of observation, 43 semi-structured interviews with an average duration of an hour, and over 500 pages of internal and external documents.

As the researchers were aware of the project from the beginning, we could stay and work in the co-working space alongside all the other members. We participated in various workshops, governance committees, and events at conferences. Hence, observations were gathered in that “natural” context in which we were able to analyze everyday gestures and behaviors, but also the atmosphere, the methodologies used by employees, and the nature of informal interactions between people. Observations also included more informal data collection as the first author was immersed in the everyday work lives of employees and engaged in informal conversation during breaks (coffee breaks, lunch breaks, etc.), events (cocktails, after-work get-togethers, etc.), and impromptu encounters. Discussions tackled various topics, many of which allowed for better contextualization or acquisition of new information.

The data analysis started in tandem with the data collection process, following an abductive reasoning (Dunne & Dougherty, 2016) made of iterative loops between gathering empirical evidence and studying the literature, which facilitated the categorization of themes. In this process, the second author engaged in a critical and reflective discussion with the first author who was immersed in the field. The exchanges notably gave birth to the issue of paradoxes in connection with liminality. Through an inductive coding process using a codebook (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), we captured Le Square’s liminality via three major characteristics (an unconventional community, an ephemeral physical embodiment, and a trust-based rudimentary governance). We then connected each of these liminal characteristics to the three entrepreneurial paradoxes that also emerged from the study (conformist/disruptive; methodical/intuitive; autonomous/collaborative). These results are described next.

3. RESULTS: A LIMINAL SPACE TO EMBRACE ENTREPRENEURIAL PARADOXES

Le Square appears as a supportive context for entrepreneurship through three main characteristics of its constitutive liminality: an unconventional community, an ephemeral physical embodiment, and a trust-based rudimentary structure. More specifically, it appears that

each of these three characteristics helps to embrace the paradoxes of entrepreneurship; this is what we review next and is synthesized in Table 1.

3.1. AN UNCONVENTIONAL COMMUNITY TO EMBRACE ENTREPRENEURIAL PARADOXES

3.1.1. An unconventional community: diversity, serendipity, and ambiguity

Le Square is composed of an unconventional community in that it combines a great diversity of actors; it appears as a nodal point where actors, from different backgrounds and pursuing different goals, get to meet and collaborate to develop their products and activities. At least three types of actors can be distinguished in Le Square. First, the “classic” entrepreneur who is developing a start-up and trying to find a competitive business model in a market. Second, social entrepreneurs who conduct an entrepreneurial activity centered on social missions. Finally, corporate entrepreneurs: several employees belonging to large companies—mainly Renault Group’s employees but not exclusively—come to Le Square to meet external actors and develop exploratory projects for their company. This diversity of classic, social, and corporate entrepreneurs was built in a serendipitous way and allows for serendipitous encounters; several members decided to join Le Square’s community “without knowing exactly what to expect,” (Start-up 3) but with the trust and willingness to be part of the community. Once integrated, the new entrants started participating in the co-construction of the community by bringing their contributions to a neighbor whom they might never have met otherwise. Therefore, we can see that this serendipity goes along with a high tolerance for ambiguity where members are trustful that “[they] will get along with everybody and start moving forward together” (Start-up 3).

Therefore, the first aspect of Le Square’s liminality thus manifests itself through this unconventional community characterized by a high degree of diversity of entrepreneurial actors and based on an open mind to the unexpected. Next, we describe the elements of such liminal spaces that enable entrepreneurs to embrace entrepreneurial paradoxes.

TABLE 1. The ambiguities of the liminal space and associated entrepreneurial paradoxes

Entrepreneurial paradoxes / Ambiguity of the liminal space	Conformist / Disruptive <i>[Strategic level]</i> <i>WHAT do you aim to achieve?</i>	Methodic / Intuitive <i>[Process level]</i> <i>HOW do you do it?</i>	Autonomous / Collaborative <i>[Relational level]</i> <i>With WHOM do you do it?</i>
Unconventional community <i>[Social]</i>	C: Being among other entrepreneurs “who knows the difficulties of the job” supports the effectiveness of the usual activities of entrepreneurs.	M: The community shares advices and experiences on legal and useful procedures for entrepreneurs.	A: As entrepreneurs, the community acknowledges that the first and foremost goal of each of the members is to develop their own activity.
	D: The diversity of the community creates unusual and fortuitous meetings, which are sources of new and unexpected opportunities.	I: Each member makes sure to share their respective network with one another + the collective intelligence increases the possibility of finding support for exploratory processes for all members.	C: As members of the community, entrepreneurs are embedded in a dynamic ecosystem and benefit from new knowledge and business relationships.
Ephemeral physical embodiment <i>[Physical & Temporal]</i>	C: The physical embodiment of the community gives entrepreneurs the opportunity to gain credibility and legitimacy vis-à-vis clients.	M: The physical embodiment offers a place to encounter the same people on a regular basis and a stabilized context to make strong ties with various actors and to develop interorganizational routines.	A: The ease of integration into a place with such resources, lacking formal, long-term commitments, enables members to benefit from a valuable place while maintaining their own objectives.
	D: The flexibility and the possibility to maintain non-explicit objectives and to stay open for new opportunities come from the ephemerality of the place.	I: The ephemerality of the place allows for improvisation, experimentation, and trial-and-error processes.	C: The pooling of specific and valuable resources and capabilities to foster collaborative activities is enabled by the physical place.

<p>Trust-based rudimentary governance</p> <p><i>[Cultural]</i></p>	<p>C: The lightness of the structure and the lack of constraints permit members to stay in a comfort zone, less confronted to uncertainty.</p>	<p>M: The shared values of respect and mutual trust and the lack of formal rules create a context in which individual work constraints can be easily respected.</p>	<p>A: The lack of rules purposefully enables a claimed autonomy for all members.</p>
	<p>D: The co-governance based on a rudimentary set of rules creates an informal context characterized by a culture of trust and reciprocity that is conducive to the emergence of problem-solving and breakthroughs.</p>	<p>I: A trust-based rudimentary governance allows members to rely on the community to seize emerging and unplanned opportunities along the way, without any established process.</p>	<p>C: The nurtured sense of belonging and the culture of reciprocity have developed a collaborative dynamic fostering interactions between different entities.</p>

3.1.2. Embracing the conformist/disruptive entrepreneurial paradox

One of the benefits entrepreneurs find in Le Square is the supportive context, which helps them to conform to their usual activities and, at the same time, to find a supportive context to challenge the business model of their start-up or projects. This is clearly expressed by one of the classic entrepreneurs:

The goal in coming here is not only to work as usual but to be able to build and carry out disruptive projects. (Large Company B)

First, Le Square's unconventional community, composed of actors sharing common interests and possessing various experiences, supports the development of the entrepreneurs' usual exploitation activities. Indeed, "being with entrepreneurs who know the difficulties of the job" (Start-up 2) represents an opportunity for them to develop and to be more effective in their usual activities. However, the diversity of this community creates unusual and fortuitous meeting opportunities between individuals, which constitute a source of new and unexpected opportunities potentially upsetting the ventures' strategies. One of the founders of a young start-up who arrived at Le Square two weeks before our interview gave an example of the reconciliation of the conformist/disruptive paradox in this unconventional community:

During the last [collaborative session] we met [Startup7] who is the Startup working right next to us but with whom we had not really exchanged yet, except a 'hello' here or there...and in fact they are interesting because they work a lot on making companies more attractive, so now we work together [to help us all gain appeal]... But beyond that, there is another attractive side, which is to put us in contact with their prospects or customers, and for us, it can be very interesting to work on new offers. (Start-up 1)

In the same interview, the entrepreneur added a more explicit illustration of the disruptive activities becoming possible because of Le Square's unconventional community:

Typically, we are next to the members of [Large Company A] which is an automotive equipment manufacturer, and for several weeks we have been discussing [what] to do between our two businesses, which are, a priori, very different. But why not integrate a micro-nap service [the core business of the interviewee's start-up] in future autonomous cars? Well, ...there are things that we absolutely didn't imagine at the beginning and that are being created thanks to the place and the members of this place and that's very rich! (Start-up 1)

3.1.3. Embracing the methodical/intuitive paradox

Le Square supports each of the actors to engage in both methodical and intuitive processes, as it constitutes a supportive context in which to conduct activities characterized by a structured rationale

framed by rules (as in entrepreneurial administrative activities) and to adopt an intuitive and explorative posture for more creative processes. Le Square's unconventional community of diverse entrepreneurs provokes fortuitous encounters, giving members the assurance that they will find help for many issues. Moreover, besides the fact that all of the start-up's members offer their services in collaborative creative processes, they each share their respective network with the others, which thereby increases the possibility of finding support for exploratory processes for all members.

This is one of the only places where you can unleash your creativity, even your idealism I may say!...Here, whenever I want to develop an app or something, there is always someone new or just passing by to help me really go further with my ideas. (Start-up 4)

The members hence stay open to seizing unexpected opportunities to conduct intuitive and collaborative activities, but also for more methodical ones. Indeed, being part of a community of such diverse entrepreneurs also means benefiting from the experiences of co-members by sharing advice about legal and useful procedures of entrepreneurial venturing.

I wanted to know if my idea already existed or not, so thanks to Le Square and the team that guided me, I was able to follow all the steps to participate in many programs, in competitions for entrepreneurs that I didn't even know about. (Start-up 2)

3.1.4. Embracing the autonomous/collaborative paradox

When conducting their activities, members claim the need to pursue their own goals without leaving out, at other times, the necessity to collaborate with external actors. Indeed, as entrepreneurs, the community acknowledges that the first and foremost goal of each member is to develop their own activity:

[In Le Square,] each brand, each organization, each start-up has its own goals, its own strategy, we know that. (Start-up 6)

In addition, Le Square's unconventional community ameliorates the members' capacity to conduct their entrepreneurial activities in collaborative ways, because of the variety of the actors and their unexpected networks enhancing the desire to belong to a dynamic ecosystem:

[Le Square] was a great opportunity...You can meet a lot of people, reconnect to an entire ecosystem. By being focused only on the growth of our society, we grew and closed ourselves up a little bit...By joining Le Square, there was this desire to reconnect with different people (Start-up 10).

Therefore, through Le Square's unconventional community characterized by a diversity of entrepreneurs and a serendipitous dynamic, the members found a supportive social context to embrace their entrepreneurial paradoxes.

3.2. AN EPHEMERAL PHYSICAL EMBODIMENT TO EMBRACE ENTREPRENEURIAL PARADOXES

3.2.1. An ephemeral physical embodiment

The physical space dedicated to Le Square's community is a fundamental aspect of its liminality. Situated inside a former Renault dealership, this place represents the frontier of two ecosystems. Situated neither exclusively inside the Renault Group, nor exclusively inside the Parisian entrepreneurial ecosystem, it represents the overlapping of both. This place, still displaying the Renault brand at its pediment, shows that Le Square's identity as a place and a community is complex, unusual, and corresponds to a gray zone between Renault and the other members. One of the members of Large Company B highlighted it: "[At Le Square,] we are not really at Renault, although without Renault the place wouldn't exist." Besides, Le Square is a fragile place. The two-year rental agreement constitutes an ephemerality confirming its liminal nature. Indeed, at the end of these two years, the top management will have to decide whether the project will continue or not. However, at the same time, the physical place embodies Le Square, and in doing so, anchors the existence of its community and its dynamic towards others.

3.2.2. Embracing the conformist/disruptive paradox.

The physical embodiment of Le Square created an opportunity for entrepreneurs to gain credibility and legitimacy vis-à-vis prospects. Instead of operating as isolated individuals, the entrepreneurs are part of a larger network composed of a diverse group of actors, among which include successful start-ups and several MNCs. Thus, when physically welcoming prospective partners and clients to Le Square, the entrepreneurs build a stable image, based on the community. An entrepreneur declares:

Being [in Le Square] gave us a legitimacy, a credibility that we didn't have before with the premises of student entrepreneurs." Another member further added "I think that being here has a kind of impact on the prospects and clients... You show that you are not alone, that you are part of an ecosystem. For the clients it is important. It shows that you are part of the long-term; you are stable...although it's an ephemeral place! (laughs). (Start-up 14)

In parallel, the ephemerality of the place can be the source of uncomfortable positions and anxiety for some members, but it also induces benefits that wouldn't be possible otherwise and that support disruptive and experimental activities. For several entrepreneurs, the flexibility, the possibility to keep non-explicit objectives and to stay open for new opportunities comes from the ephemerality of the place:

We were told that it was temporary, but temporary for two years on the scale of a start-up like us—it seemed very far away! And that suits us because it allows us to deal with a lot of things as they come. And if it doesn't work, it's not a problem because it's temporary. (Start-up 8)

3.2.3. Embracing the methodical/intuitive paradox

In addition to offering a place to encounter the same people on a regular basis, Le Square's physical embodiment undeniably offers a more stable context to make strong ties with various actors and to develop interorganizational routines.

For example, we created a small taskforce with other members to collaborate on an exciting project that we have set up in Le Square...We meet every Wednesday, in the room upstairs so that everyone can share their findings. It's funny, we work a little bit like a start-up between our start-ups. (Start-up 12)

The physical embodiment hence constitutes a context conducive to methodical activities, implying routines. However, on the other hand, the ephemerality of the place offers a context conducive to improvisation, experimentation, and trial-and-error processes:

As we come to a very frugal place, as we come to a temporary place, we are not going to invest a lot in this place, nor put gilding everywhere. We are just testing out some activities...We do with what we have, as things come and we get by on a logic of DIY, frugal. (Start-up 2)

3.2.4. Embracing the autonomous/collaborative paradox.

The ephemeral physical embodiment of Le Square also constitutes a context facilitating the individualistic dimension of the entrepreneurial activities and, at the same time, enhancing the opportunities for useful collaborative activities among members. For instance, the pooling of specific and valuable resources and capabilities fostering collaborative activities is enabled by the physical place:

[Start-up 5] has made this Fab Lab available for all and they trained us to use it properly. We use it a lot, as well as the space dedicated to experiments. [In Le Square], we have a lot of space; we have storage space, too. In the Fab Lab there is everything we need [for our activities]: a laser cutter, 3D printer, and even a stapler, etc. (Start-up 9)

On the other hand, the ease of integration into a place with such resources, lacking any formal or sustainable commitment due to its ephemerality, enables members to benefit from a valuable place while maintaining their own objectives:

The advantage is that it's ephemeral. We take no commitment, we sign almost nothing, we don't set up a lab, we don't buy walls, we don't own the thing, we don't set up anything, we benefit from the ease of access to the place, so convenient, we come to learn, and if it doesn't work, we just have to rotate. (Start-up 8)

Therefore, the reconciliation of entrepreneurial paradoxes is also enhanced by the spatiotemporal dimension of Le Square's liminality—the ephemeral, physical embodiment.

3.3. A TRUST-BASED RUDIMENTARY STRUCTURE TO EMBRACE ENTREPRENEURIAL PARADOXES

3.3.1. A trust-based rudimentary structure

Le Square is organized through a lightly structured and democratic mode of decision-making characterized by full equality between members: a co-governance. A co-governance meeting takes place once a week to make the necessary decisions, whether they concern logistic issues or strategic ones. Participation is open to all members but not mandatory for anyone. In such meetings, the decision, for example, to co-opt a new member in Le Square is submitted to a vote where the role of Renault is no different from the others. That is, Renault's vote is equivalent to any other vote, neither more nor less. Such equality and non-structure are based on the trust, freedom, and reciprocity existing between the members of the community. One of the founders of Le Square states:

From the beginning, I wanted to sow the seeds of co-governance...because I knew that the people we were asking to join [Le Square] were people we trusted, and that's the key: the trust! If you trust the people who are with you, you can invent anything...And also, I knew that they were real workers who will be creative whatever happens. (Founder 1)

Similarly, because of this trust-based community, Le Square's objectives are voluntarily nonspecific. As a common objective, only two broad themes have been selected to guide the collaboration between members: "the future of mobilities and new ways of working." This rudimentary structure (as in Turner, 1969: 96) is conceived of to facilitate the continuous co-creation of the place with all members. The co-founder added:

Very quickly I stopped saying what Le Square should be. I said, 'we should find a Why together.' I laid a base—we have a place—but the rest should be done together. So, my proposition [with Le Square] was to co-construct something together. (Founder 1)

Finally, a last aspect of liminality can be underlined in the few rites of interactions that exist informally. We noticed three main rites developed to facilitate the social interactions and resulting from the common engagement to co-construct Le Square. First, every first Friday of the month, members gather around food and drinks, integrating newcomers and getting to know each other better. Second, every event [conference, workshop, presentation] that is organized by a Le Square member is open to all by default. The aim is to increase the probability of finding common interests between members and eventually between members and guests. Third, one of the start-up members, an expert in animation of creative workshops, regularly organizes a creative session for all to boost interactions between members. These rites are informal initiatives that are integrated into the culture of the community showing that the informal sphere is fundamental to the dynamic of this liminal space.

3.3.2. Embracing the conformist/disruptive paradox

Through its lightness, Le Square's structure of governance permits entrepreneurs to stay in their comfort zone when needed. It cultivates a culture of trust and reciprocity enabling the emergence of unexpected problem-solving, and this trust-based rudimentary governance helps reconcile the entrepreneurial conformist/disruptive paradox in Le Square.

Co-governance enables each entrepreneur to participate in building the place and hence ensuring the compatibility between their own core activities and the new activities emerging through the collaborations in Le Square. A member says:

Governance is not just Renault; it's all the [members], Renault is one of the members although [the two founders] drive a lot of things...But if it had been a simple lab opened by Renault, with simple coworking places, we would feel more obliged towards Renault, whereas here, we feel like co-builders of the place and therefore we make sure to run our own business before trying to innovate together. (Large Company A)

On the other hand, co-governance based on a rudimentary set of rules creates an informal context characterized by a culture of trust and reciprocity that is conducive to the emergence of problem-solving and breakthroughs. As a member explains it:

Links are often made informally...In fact, the whole point is to create informal moments to create synergies...Typically, at [our social gatherings], we get to know people better each time...In the governance committees, as well. We realize that some people have problems that we didn't necessarily notice and so we realize that it could be interesting [for them and for us] to work on these new issues, too. There are many other small encounters like that that make us get to know each other better, learn to understand other people's issues and find solutions. (Start-up 8)

3.3.3. Embracing the methodical/intuitive paradox

The trust-based rudimentary governance present in Le Square opens ways for members to conduct both methodical and intuitive entrepreneurial activities. The shared values of respect and mutual trust and the lack of formal rules creates a context where individual work procedures can be easily respected:

We are all very respectful of each other, which is not always the case in other co-working spaces. We have never fought for a meeting room when the meeting rooms are always taken. We always work things out which allows us to always respect our schedule when clients come by. (Start-up 11)

At the same time, such trust-based rudimentary governance allows members to rely on the community to seize emerging and unplanned opportunities along the way, without following any procedures:

If we are confronted with a problem that we can't solve, the first thing we do is to look around us to see if we can't get help [by involving someone in the project]. So, in this sense we are a community of mutual aid and common interest, which is evolving at the pace of the creation and dismantling of projects. (Start-up 13)

3.3.4. Embracing the autonomous/collaborative paradox

At the relational level, entrepreneurs also find benefits to reconciling both ways of conducting their activities based on Le Square's cultural dimension. The cultivated sense of belonging and the culture of reciprocity have developed a collaborative dynamic, fostering interactions between different entities:

I think many things are shared here. [We all wonder] what we can bring, what the others can bring to us—can they help us do this or that? For example, there is [Start-up 6], a media start-up, which is helping us to communicate better. We also help others [with our expertise]...That's how it works in here. (Start-up 4)

However, such collaborative projects coexist with the claimed autonomy of the members, permitted because of the voluntary lack of rules:

The freedom we have here—I think it works very well! There are no strict, restrictive guidelines...The idea of an 'ideal anarchy' is perhaps something like what we have here in Le Square: a total autonomy with a willingness to do together. (Start-up 7)

The cultural context present in Le Square characterized by a co-governance creating a constraints-free context combined with an informal culture of trust and reciprocity enables members to reconcile their entrepreneurial paradoxes.

4. DISCUSSION: EMBRACING ENTREPRENEURIAL PARADOXES IN LIMINALITY

Building on a call to recontextualize entrepreneurship (Hjorth et al., 2008), our research explores how a space, here a collaborative space, can be supportive of entrepreneurship. Our findings show that such a liminal space as Le Square offers a social, physico-temporal, and cultural context conducive to entrepreneurship by allowing entrepreneurial paradoxes to be embraced. The social context, referring to the ties that entrepreneurs can leverage to access either financial capital, information, or emotional support and understanding (Welter, 2011), are represented in our data by an unconventional community of entrepreneurs. The physico-temporal context, corresponding to where entrepreneurship takes place, within certain temporal boundaries, takes the form of an ephemeral physical embodiment. Finally, the cultural context, i.e., a collective understanding serving as a basis in a society for behaviors (Welter, 2011), appears as a trust-based rudimentary governance. And our results show how each of these three characteristics supports entrepreneurial paradoxes (conformist/disruptive; methodical/intuitive; autonomous/collaborative) to be embraced.

By showing how entrepreneurs can leverage the features of a liminal space to embrace entrepreneurial paradoxes, this paper makes two main contributions. First, it shows that the constitutive paradoxes of entrepreneurship can find a space to be embraced; it therefore puts the emphasis on the spatial dimension of entrepreneurship, i.e., its “how” (Welter, 2011). Second, while the negative qualities of liminal contexts are often highlighted, our research demonstrates their fertility. We detail these two contributions next.

Let’s start with our first contribution, articulating the interplay between entrepreneurship, space, and paradoxes. In our literature review, we have portrayed entrepreneurship as constituted by a set of paradoxes, more precisely three: the conformist/disruptive; the methodical/intuitive; and the autonomous/collaborative paradox. Our research suggests that specific spaces can help to hold entrepreneurs. This spatial perspective therefore defocuses from the dominant micro-level lens of both the entrepreneurship literature, with its emphasis on “psychological properties” (Cropley & Cropley, 2014) as well as of paradox theory literature (Smith & Lewis, 2011) with an emphasis on personal strategies, to consider instead their interplay; it depicts how contextual conditions are supportive for entrepreneurs and of entrepreneurial paradoxes. From this spatial perspective, entrepreneurship is an embedded phenomenon (Welter, 2011), anchored in a specific context. And while context is often approached as an external objective feature of reality to which people react, our research supports views on the dynamic aspect of context: context does not appear independently of entrepreneurs, but is shaped by them in a recursive way (Anderson, 2000; Sarason, Dean, & Dillard, 2006; Welter, 2011). Contexts and entrepreneurship co-evolve so that context appears as both the medium and the outcome of entrepreneurship (Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014). Context is where things connect as depicted by the Latin origin of the word, i.e., weaving together or making a connection (Welter, 2010). Additionally, while each of these characteristics individually helps the entrepreneurs embrace the paradoxes of their activities, they also have an overlapping effect (Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014). These results illustrate that “contexts are intertwined and cut across levels of analysis” (Welter, 2011: 174).

Second, our study suggests important insights into how a liminal space supports entrepreneurs to reconcile their paradoxes. While liminality and its requisite ambiguity appear in management and economic science as hindering the decision-making of rational actors, we portray entrepreneurs not only as tolerant to ambiguity, but as positively influenced by it, using it as a resource and as a place for action. Our findings illustrate such positive influences of ambiguity on entrepreneurial activities through the paradoxes constitutive of the entrepreneurial path. Indeed, specific ambiguous contexts

enable entrepreneurs to find support for activities considered in institutional contexts as contradictory, thus resonating with the entrepreneurial paradoxes.

CONCLUSION

Answering a call to re-contextualize entrepreneurship, our paper depicts the inherently ambiguous features of a liminal space as conducive to entrepreneurship by embracing entrepreneurial paradoxes. More specifically, our study clarifies three main contextual features (social, physico-temporal, and cultural) necessary to embrace entrepreneurial paradoxes. By depicting an ambiguous context as supportive of entrepreneurs, we provide insights into the relationship between entrepreneurship and ambiguity. We hope our study will bring attention to topics situated at the crossroads between space and entrepreneurship and invite reflection on the contextualization of entrepreneurship.

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