

PhD title: Entrepreneurial Identity as Emerging in Innovative Relations

### **Abstract**

In entrepreneurship research, generic models have become the norm to understand and depict entrepreneurial processes. Most models of entrepreneurial process assume a rational understanding of the notion of process, assuming that an entrepreneurial process can be managed, according to the principles depicted in the model. Models of entrepreneurial processes most often focus on the discovery or formation of opportunities, towards exploitation of these opportunities. There is currently an overload of theoretical models representing entrepreneurial processes from different perspectives and in different contexts, but none of these models have accomplished to recognize how ongoing, human interaction constitute these processes. Mainstream literature assumes, that a process is an unfolding of something already enfolded in a system. Similarly, research on entrepreneurial identity is distinguished by either rational or formative perspectives, which assume that entrepreneurial identity can be defined and captured, in frameworks or generic models. These perspectives are most often based on the analysis of entrepreneurs, from questionnaires or interviews or from analyzing autobiographical accounts of their entrepreneurial experiences. Either represented as quantifiable items which constitute identity. Or as archetypes, used to distinguish entrepreneurs based on narrative accounts of entrepreneurial processes. Neither of these perspectives accomplish to describe the notion of entrepreneurial identity as transformative, as ongoing interaction of the individual and the social. From a complex responsive process perspective, this PhD dissertation presents a transformative understanding of the notion of entrepreneurial process, opportunity and entrepreneurial identity.

Through five research papers, the author presents an autoethnographic inquiry into his own experiences, as an entrepreneur and from participation across different entrepreneurial contexts. With an autoethnographic approach, the author has analyzed narratives from his own involvement. To make sense of moments of breakdowns in his own understanding, and to investigate notions of epiphanies as a departure for inquiry into past experiences of interactions, constituting relationships which became enabling for novelty to emerge. Drawing on three different perspectives on self, the author discusses the notion of identity as represented in mainstream literature and in relation to his own research.

This dissertation contributes to the entrepreneurship research community with a transformative perspective on notions of entrepreneurial process, opportunity and entrepreneurial identity. From a complex responsive process perspective and based on his research across different entrepreneurial contexts, the author conclude that entrepreneurial process should be understood from relational perspectives of knowing each other, in the gestures and responses in our ongoing interactions. The author argues that opportunities, from a complex responsive process perspective, are temporal themes taking form in the living present. The author claims that entrepreneurial identity is an interaction of the individual and the social, which calls for future attention to the local, everyday interactions of entrepreneurs. Future research on entrepreneurial identity needs to move from assuming finite understandings of identity, towards methods which can provoke the readers understanding of entrepreneurial identity. As a way to approach this challenge, the author suggests how autoethnography can be utilized as a method in entrepreneurship research, from two different perspectives. As a situated or as a successive approach.

Frederik Gottlieb, 2017