HOW DO EXPERIMENTAL SPACES SHAPE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTISTIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP? EVIDENCE FROM FRENCH PERFORMING ARTS

ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue that the development of performing arts projects can be facilitated by the creation of experimental spaces, which foster practices of artistic innovation and entrepreneurship. Based on a qualitative study of seven experimental spaces in the French performing arts sector, we show that experimental spaces constitute "bounded social settings" and an organizational *place* that allow artists to experiment and develop emerging projects, but also to actively engage in practices of artistic entrepreneurship and the construction of their journey as arts entrepreneurs. Our contribution is threefold: (1) Experimental spaces thus provide crucial support to "maverick" and outsider artists that would otherwise lack resources to sustain their performances overtime and thus face marginalization; (2) we show how these experimental spaces constitute "entrepreneurial spaces" in the sense that they enable artists to develop entrepreneurial practices; and (3) we highlight the dynamics of experimental spaces in the fields of performing arts: the experimental spaces we analyzed show a constant plasticity and adaptation to arts entrepreneurs, in a co-evolution process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, an ever-increasing number of academic articles have been published on the topic of cultural, creative and arts entrepreneurship mostly in specialized arts and creative management journals, such as *Journal of Art Management, Law and Society*, *International Journal of Arts Management*, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, or the *Journal of Cultural Economics* (for comprehensive literature reviews, see Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Hausmann and Heinze, 2016), but also in generalist journals such as for the special issue of *Creativity and Innovation Management* in 2018 (McKelvey and Lassen 2018).

Cultural and creative entrepreneurship has become a topic of interest in debates around innovation and growth in the context of the creative industries, and an emerging field in the wider entrepreneurship scholarly business agenda (Konrad and Vecco, 2020). Recent management research does not hesitate to conceptualize the artist as an entrepreneur (Albinsson 2018): the difficult context of cultural and artistic sectors urge artists to be self-employed (Menger 2001) and the scarcity of resources oblige them to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to reach long-term success in their field. In this stream of research, scholars also increasingly study the skills of artists as entrepreneurs and acknowledge the growing role of organizations – such as incubators, accelerators, innovation and collaboration spaces – in the arts entrepreneurship process (Rentschler, 2003; Hagoort, 2007; Preece, 2011; Beckman and Essig, 2012; Chang and Wyzomirski, 2015).

However, little is known about such spaces and collective settings, their specificities, and the ways they support artistic and entrepreneurship processes. Regarding that, we would like to unpack how the development of performing arts projects can be facilitated by the creation of

experimental spaces, which foster practices of artistic innovation and entrepreneurship? Based on a qualitative study of seven experimental spaces in the French performing arts, we will show how performing arts projects can be facilitated by the formation of an "experimental space" (Bucher and Langley, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019), here defined as a space where envisioned artistic performances can be prototyped, tested, and adapted by artists, their peers, and their audience. We will argue that such experimental spaces constitute "bounded social settings" (Bucher and Langley, 2016: 7) and organizational *place* that allow artists and cultural entrepreneurs to experiment and develop emerging projects and performances, but also to actively engage in practices of artistic entrepreneurship and the construction of their journey as arts entrepreneurs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The conception of artists as entrepreneurs highlighted the struggling journey of artistic creation in the long run for artists always seeking resources to survive (2.1). Soon collective spaces as resourceful support for art entrepreneurs start being investigating (2.2). To unpack what would collective spaces be like in the artistic field, we use the literature space in organization (2.3) and especially how space fosters innovation by insisting on the literature on experimental spaces (2.3.1) and entrepreneurship spaces (2.3.2).

2.1. THE RISE OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: ARTISTS AS ENTREPRENEURS

Artists are increasingly conceptualized as entrepreneurs (McKelvey & Lassen, 2018; Preece, 2011; Albinsson, 2018), as current research explores the question of how entrepreneurial activity is developed in the cultural and creative industries, and how the particularities of the cultural setting may trigger specific patterns of entrepreneurship. Artists as entrepreneurs are granted a renewed identity. For instance, Albinsson (2018) builds on a longitudinal study of entrepreneurs in performing arts in Sweden to investigate how freelance musicians in the non-

profit scene represent a type of creative entrepreneur: they recognize the need for entrepreneurial skills and increasingly accept the "entrepreneur" label for themselves. However, this entrepreneurial identity mostly emerges "*out of necessity*" (Albinsson, 2018) and results from financial pressures. Academics have thus acknowledged the increasing need for artists "*to seek a more entrepreneurial approach to supporting their artistic work*" (Beckman and Essig, 2012).

The existing research also recognizes the specificity of art entrepreneurship, compared to other sectors. First, the focus is put on artistic value, more than on economic value: the success of artistic venture is not measured by profitability but rather by artistic objectives. In his 2011 article, Preece insists on the fact that performing arts organizations are mostly non-profit organizations. As a consequence, arts entrepreneurs are mostly *"motivated by self-fulfillment within the execution of an artistic organizational mission"* (Preece 2011:108). According to Preece (2011), other motives of performing arts entrepreneurs might include producing art that has a particular quality standard, pursuing a performance niche that requires refined taste, or spreading art to the largest number of people possible (2011: 108). Second, artistic entrepreneurship seems to be turned around a succession of projects rather than a linear trajectory of activity growth, as for most for-profit entrepreneurial trajectories. Paris and Ben Mahmoud-Jouini (2019) point the specificities of the creation process that can influence the entrepreneurial journey of artists. Artistic work is mostly project-based (Davenport 2006) and creation process necessitate connecting temporary organizations with more permanent ones like production organizations or distribution ones (Stjerne et Svejenova 2016). Third, cultural entrepreneurship emerges in a very fragmented sector – a few large organizations capture a large part of the resources, and the others form a 'constellation' of micro-enterprises.

According to Patriotta and Hirsh (2016), artists' network positions thus influence the trajectory of their projects: they label these different positions as 'mainstreamers', 'mavericks',

'conventional novices' and 'outsiders', depending on their conformity or distinctiveness within the field and if they are at the core and at the periphery. During their entrepreneurial journey, artists may change category: from outsiders, they can become mainstreamers (Patriotta et Hirsch 2016). But this journey is nonlinear, an artist can move back and forth from a category to another.

To sum up, the literature dealing with artists as entrepreneurs shows us how chaotic and unstable is the entrepreneurial journey of artists constantly seeking more resources. That's why, scholars on art entrepreneurship start looking at collective spaces could bring resources to artists.

2.2. BRINGING BACK THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE SPACES IN CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The necessary role of a network of stakeholders and support actors in the collective process of arts entrepreneurship has recently gained scholarly attention. For instance, Bergamini et al. (2018) show that *"stakeholders who recognize artists' potential provide support through networking/gate-keeping activities and mobilize resources that are instrumental in staging artists' early productions."* (2018:6) either in the inception and growth phase of artistic venture. Montanari et al. (2016) explain that a network can bring several benefits such as legitimacy, reputation or consecration. These authors explored *how artists engage in specific relational actions (broadening, bonding, embedding and dis-embedding) with producing organizations, and how these actions lead to innovation over time. In this process, a long-lasting relationship between the artist and a specific organization may 'pivot' artistic innovation"* (2016: 797). They call "pivot organization" the place where a long-time relationship with the artist is established that particularly supports the development of new projects over time.

However, as Preece advocated in his seminal paper in 2011, "*a systematic analysis of how, why, and when new performing arts organizations emerge has been substantially missing in the literature"* (2011: 103). According to Preece, the formation of organizations is key not only

because it signals arts entrepreneurship but also because it can explain why performing arts entrepreneurship sustains overtime: organizations and collaborative spaces are formed to "*gain efficiency*" and "*develop effectiveness*" as activities are repeated over and over. This incorporation enables the performing arts entrepreneur to take on part of –or the whole—value chain.

When exploring the "spaces" that contribute to arts entrepreneurship, the "art incubator" appears as having already received some attention from the academic field. For instance, Thom (2016) study shows that *"fine artists are not educated to successfully meet market requirements and that professional arts incubators could be a promising alternative or useful addition for fine artists' vocational preparation.*" (p. 51). *For this reason, arts incubators could help them further develop their sets of skills, to recognize and realize art business opportunities, and to increase their chances to attract attention on the market",* Thom ads.

Furthermore, Essig (2014) explains that these incubators fulfill different goals *"from revitalizing local economies to supporting individual artists, to provoking public dialogue, and more"* (2014: 170)*.* These spaces contribute to providing artists and arts organizations with financial and other types of assistance to help develop new plays and productions during all phases of the production process, thereby enhancing their sustainability.

To help us understand how space contribute to the artistic journey we go through the literature on space in in organization studies and more specially we take interest in experimental and entrepreneurial spaces.

2.3. THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF SPACES IN ORGANIZATION STUDIES

The concept of space, defined as a "*bounded social setting in which interactions among actors are organized in distinctive ways*" (Bucher and Langley, 2016: 595), has recently attracted considerable research interest from organizational scholars.

Many categories of spaces have been identified in previous studies. For instance, discourse scholars have identified "plenary speak" or "corridor talk" as *discursive spaces* in which alternative cognitive models are discussed by organizational actors with distinctive properties that may help explain change and multiplicity in institutional fields (Hardy and Maguire 2010, Zilber 2011). Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) showed that cultural change in organizations could occur in *liminal spaces* such as "meetings", "training events", "hangouts" or "workshops", bracketed from, yet connected to, the everyday activities in the organization. Furnari (2014) suggested the concept of *interstitial spaces*, defined as small-scale settings where individuals from different fields interact occasionally and informally around common activities, and showed how such spaces, e.g. a "fablab", could enable individuals to temporarily break free from existing institutions and experiment collectively with new activities and ideas. A growing research stream specifically focuses on *innovation spaces* (Vignoli et al., 2018; Caccamo, 2020), such as coworking spaces (Capdevila, 2015), incubators, accelerators and science parks (Cirella & Yström, 2018). Innovation spaces are characterized by a material side and a social side that facilitate the emergence of collective innovation (Caccamo, 2020): they provide multidisciplinary actors with a shared workspace, tools and equipment, as well as a thriving sense of community (Schmidt & Brinks, 2017). Capdevila (2015), for example, argues that coworking spaces provide a spatial platform for existing communities to meet and interact. At the same time, they may also stimulate the emergence of new knowledge communities by fostering the convergence of previously unconnected knowledge practices (Cohendet et al., 2014). Overall, these studies have attracted a growing scholarly attention on how the spatial dimension of organizations may foster a new way to imagine, work, co-produce and innovate.

2.3.1. The specificities of experimental spaces

The importance of experimentation has recently led organizational researchers to identify specific *experimental spaces* and to link these spaces to experimentation processes in and

around organizations (Bucher and Langley, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019; Garud and Karunakaran, 2017). Experimental spaces have been defined as "*transitory social settings where field actors experiment with alternative action models*" (Cartel et al., 2019: 67). They refer to all temporary situations of interaction in which a restricted community of actors' experiments with new solutions, and engages in prototyping and testing new products or services (Bucher & Langley, 2016; Canales, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

This literature has noted the generative potential of spaces in creating novelty. For instance, Bucher and Langley (2016) showed how experimental spaces offer a setting where organizational actors perform routines according to new concepts and understanding. The authors demonstrated that symbolic and temporal boundaries protect interactions in experimental spaces from excessive interference with other parts of the routine or other routines. This protection is not perfect because experimental performances are nested within existing routines, but symbolic boundaries, such as labels (e.g. "test" and "pilot run"), signal that the performances are intended to be – and are allowed to be – different from the original routine performances (p. 610).

As the name indicates, experimental spaces host experimental interactions. In experimenting with alternative models, organizational members are able to assess the efficiency of the alternative model compared to the existing situation, before demonstrating it to others. Participants experiment with prototypes, often fail, then learn from their failure and iteratively develop effective solutions (Canales, 2016).

2.3.2. Towards entrepreneurial spaces?

In their study of entrepreneurship in the space industry, Lamine et al. (2021) proposed a novel concept, *entrepreneurial space*. Building from the argument that institutions shape enterprise by building or lowering barriers to practice, they argue that institutions can also determine the "scope for enterprise", also referred to as the room for entrepreneuring (Gartner et al., 2016).

They demonstrate that entrepreneurial space is the locus where "entrepreneurship has the freedom to operate" (Lamine et al., 2021: 334). This research is useful to appreciate how the change-making power of entrepreneurship and innovation is "*institutionally bridled and reined in to shape this entrepreneurial space*" (p. 335).

Inspired by the literature introduced above, we examined what made those settings important for performing arts entrepreneurs and how they influenced their creative process and entrepreneurial journey. Based on this, we formulate our research question as follows: how do experimental spaces foster the development of performing arts projects through practices of artistic innovation and entrepreneurship?

3. EMPIRICAL CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

To answer our research question, we study a sample of experimental spaces dedicated to the performing arts and located in Paris and the Paris region in France (see Table 1 for the exhaustive list of experimental spaces included on our study).

Name of the experimental space	Location (city)	Date of creation (and closure)
La Loge	Paris	2005
L'Echangeur	Bagnolet	1996
L'Avant-Rue	Paris	2000 (closed in 2016)
Théâtre-Studio	Alfortville	1996
Studio Théâtre	Vitry	1986
Main d'Œuvre	Saint-Ouen	2001
La Générale	Paris	2007

Table 1: Sample of Performing Arts Experimental Spaces

Although all devoted to the support of performing arts projects in the Paris region, these experimental spaces emerged independently, in bottom-up and spontaneous ways, without clear incentive or deliberate public policy, nor real coordination between them. While not a dedicated program, a steady growth in the number of these "spaces" in the Paris region could be observed, and at the turn of the 2000s emerged the awareness that many of these places exist and that they share common objectives.

These experimental spaces have many common characteristics (Lextrait, 2001; Parigot, 2019). First, they have often been created by professionals with a similar profile or previous careers: performing arts professionals who were neither unwilling – nor unable– to return to the institutionalized circuit of public subsidized theaters nor to enter the commercial logic of private theaters. Thus, these spaces often emerged from the initiatives of single individuals rather than of public authorities, and often claim a "total autonomy" from both state- and markets-constraints. As a consequence, all these experimental spaces tend to welcome projects and artists that depart from institutionalized forms of performing arts, and thus tend to support more radical forms of artistic innovation. In addition, these experimental spaces all carry a strong "social" ambition. They openly express their purpose to reintegrate societal debates into the heart of their artistic project, and the individuals who lead these places regularly question the impact that performing arts can have in the broader society. As a result, they wish to have a strong territorial anchorage to develop a project (e.g., artistic education, animation of debates or workshops of theatrical practices) in relation to the inhabitants. From then on, networks began to form, and a "white paper" was drawn up collectively and shared common ambitions: the Lextrait report (2001) made a detailed study of it for the first time. This report also highlighted the heterogeneity of these spaces. Their creative context, their functioning, their precise objectives, their name, their organizational identity, their audiences… are all different: "*The diversity of experiences is reflected in the origins, the modes of organization, the presence*

of the different artistic disciplines, the relationship between productions, populations, public authorities, markets, and, of course, the size of each project." (Lextrait et al., 2001: 4).

The number of experimental spaces quickly increased, and more than 40 experimental spaces supporting performing arts projects now exist in the Paris region. In this research, we included these seven experimental spaces in our empirical sample, because we expected that their role in the creation process and entrepreneurial venture of performing artists, the physical configuration of the space, and the long-term evolution of these spaces themselves would slightly differ from one space to another, and thus provide us with empirical contrast and diversity.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was intensive and involved both rich secondary data and primary data (see Table 2). We first collected qualitative primary data on seven experimental spaces located in Paris and its suburbs. The first author spent 8 months on the premises of these organizations and was able to conduct interviews with people involved in these experimental spaces and with hosted artists. The first author also gathered direct observations of how performing arts projects are experimented and developed within these spaces: for instance, we could directly observe working sessions, workshops, successive rehearsals and live representations of a performance. To gain insights on the how space was used and mobilized, we complemented these observations with pictures (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Working session at the Théâtre-Studio

Figure 2: Entrance of La Générale

These observations enabled us to concretely witness what artists and organizational members of the experimental spaces actually *do* in practice. We also attended several public debates during which the founders of these artistic experimental spaces discussed stakes they have in common and how to collectively respond to the evolving institutional and environmental context. For instance, they evoked their ability to gain subsidies from the regional public authorities and questioned themselves about their identity (who they are, what their missions are and how they would sustain their activity). These discursive elements allowed us to better

understand the reflexive perspective of these spaces and organizations. In all, these primary sources provided detailed descriptions regarding how each experimental space functions, its relations to the artists, the main issues it faces and also how these spaces perceive themselves. To complement this primary data, we collected a rich set of secondary data. This dataset includes numerous press articles, interviews of the founders of these experimental spaces, and documents published by the organizations themselves, such as "white books" or "manifestos". We also collected field-level data (e.g., open-access reports, policy briefs, and minutes of public debates) to gain a better understanding of the general context and the external perception on experimental spaces. The exhaustive list of secondary data is presented in the Table 2 below.

Type of Data Collected	Details
Primary sources	
Interviews	20 interviews (17 interviews with members of the collective of artists; 2 interviews with residents' stage-director, 1 interview with a representative of the city in charge of cultural affairs)
Observation	Total of 30 hours observation and detailed field notes Observation included: Shows and performances, audience events, on-site visit, and rehearsals, on-site visit
Other primary sources	Photographs taken during interviews, visits and performances
Field-level primary sources	4 public meetings on the functioning of experimental spaces 6 recordings of public debates (total of 7 hours)
Secondary sources	
	Around 400 press articles relating to the organizations from 2008 to 2018 Internal 'manifestos' Website contents

Table 2: Primary and Secondary Data Collected

3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The information gathered was interpreted and contextualized in the light of the first author's intimate knowledge of the experimental spaces. We followed a three-stage process, and as usual in studies informed by ethnography, data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection (Van Maanen, 1979). To understand what these experimental spaces do, we started by looking at the different services they offered to performing artists to support them in their creation and innovation processes. We coded the different practices we highlighted.

Our first stage of analysis began as the author who conducted the fieldwork noticed the importance given to the preservation of the autonomy of artists. Tellingly, many observed practices aimed at providing space that would eventually allow performing artists to freely explore new scenography options, to try and change the physical set of the performance, such as light or decors. Further, when interviewed specifically about the contribution that experimental spaces have to artistic projects, the founders and organizational members often expressed their views about the necessity to remove constraints and to provide artists with freedom to explore and linked this exploration to the idea that performing arts projects are "*permanently evolving*" and "*never really completed or finished*". The centrality of artistic freedom in these experimental spaces was also visible during public debates where many participants insisted on the "unconditional" support that should be offered to artists. We rapidly acknowledge that preserving the autonomy of artists was a key element, and so we labeled these empirical elements "no constraints in the degree of innovation". While progressing in our "analytical induction" (Bansal and Corley 2012), we also realized that many interviewees were mentioning other experimental spaces they knew. They would give numerous examples of artists who had worked within their space as well as within others. We seek to know more about the reason and the modality of this journey in multiple spaces, so we eventually coded this a "*navigation between spaces*". This stage of analysis also signaled that, as nonprofit

organizations, experimental spaces were paying tremendous attention to the sustainability of their "business model": multiple readings of our data confirmed that these spaces had "scarce financial resources" and that the founders were constantly preoccupied by the "future" and even the very "existence into question" of their organization. We realized that their support capacities were intrinsically related to their fragile resources, urging them to be particularly flexible, and so we decided to code these elements as "*a fragile adventure*". By the end of this first stage of analysis, we structured our data around 14 first-order themes (see Figure 3). Each of them was validated when it was mentioned at least for four of the seven studied experimental spaces.
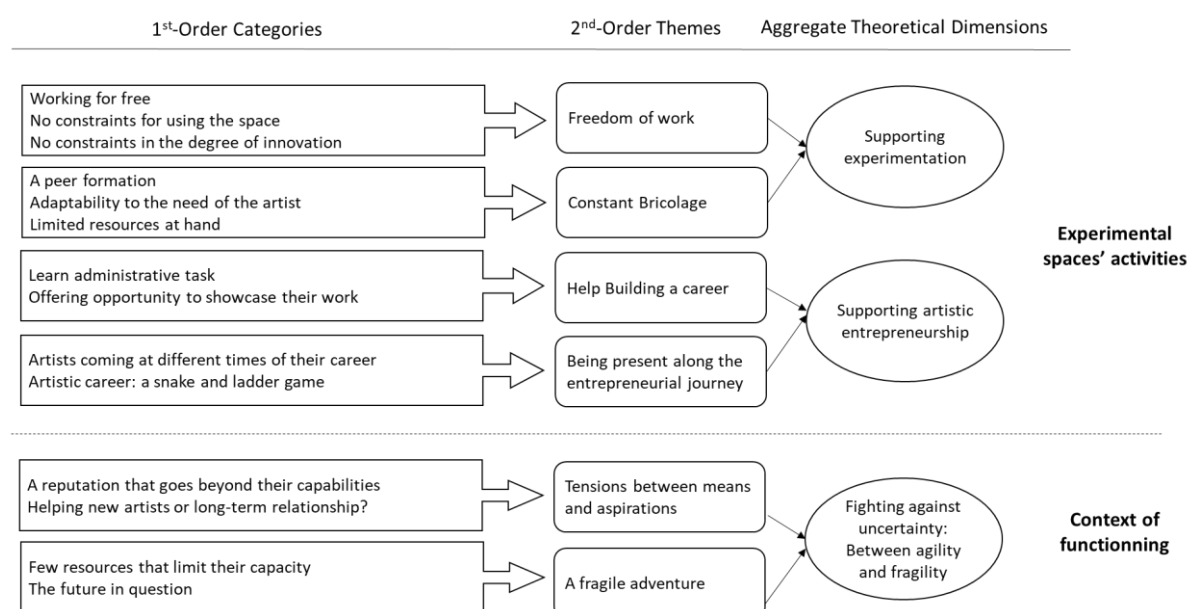

Figure 3: Data Structure

In a second stage of our analysis, we tried to gather our 14 first-order themes by looking for complementarities between them, especially by seeking to which type of mission they fulfilled. We first clustered "working for free", "no constraint for using the space" and "no constraint in the degree of innovation" into the broader category "freedom of work" as these codes appear to express the "spirit" of artist conditions within experimental spaces. Then, we realized that the codes "Artists coming at different times, "changing configuration with artists", "receiving

more or less advanced artists" were all about accompanying artists on a long-term basis at different stages of their career. We ended up with 6 second order categories.

We finally aggregate our second order categories into three aggregated dimensions. First, we find out that "freedom of work" and "constant bricolage" were directly dedicated to the support of the creation process of artists. The overwhelming presence of "experimentation" in and around artistic projects led us to draw on "experimental space" studies (Bucher and Langley, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019; Garud and Karunakaran, 2017), so we aggregated these data as "supporting experimentation". Then, as other second-order codes were pointing at activities and practices linked to the entrepreneurial aspects of the artistic life, we relied on the literature that increasingly depicts artists as entrepreneurs (McKelvey & Lassen, 2018; Preece, 2011) and gathered those activities under the code "supporting entrepreneurship". We finally noticed that the last second-order codes were not directly dealing with the activities conducted *inside* the experimental spaces but rather offered elements highlighting different constraints experienced *by* experimental spaces themselves. We observed for instance that data referring to "tension between means and aspirations" and "a fragile adventure" were actively shaping the organizational trajectory of the experimental space. We grouped these codes under a broader category which we labeled "fighting against uncertainty". The overall data structure (presented in Figure 3) provides a synthetic view of our three rounds of analysis.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1. AN EXPERIMENTAL SPACE FOR MAVERICKS AND UNEXPERIENCED ARTISTS

The first objective of experimental space is to provide a workspace for artists without prior access to the resource of the cultural field, either because they evolve at the margin of the field or because they lack experience. These spaces allow them to experiment in their creative artistic

process. As experimental spaces developed themselves as nonprofit organizations, their struggles providing significative support.

4.1.1. A free space to innovate

These organizations pay particular attention du support artistic innovation and creation by intervening in the early stages of the artistic value chain. For example, according to its website, the Studio-Théâtre of Vitry is a "*space for experimentation and research for performing arts*." The studio-Théâtre mostly accepts "*emerging projects*," i.e., the starting point of a new performance. Companies can perform their work on stage to experiment it. But they are not asked to perform a completed show. The team sees this performance as prototypes not as a finished product. The studio-Théâtre claims to be an area of "*experimentation*" to develop "*teamwork on theatrical problematic*" (studio-Théâtre website), not a place to showcase performances. They express the necessity of giving time to artists to create.

These experimental spaces insist on the innovative dimension of the artistic work that they support. They therefore mainly welcome artists at the very beginning of their careers and more advanced artists who wish to experiment with "risky" artistic forms, both types of artists *"could not integrate the traditional industry and so come to us*" (Camille, Echangeur*)*. A "risky" show can be either about a taught topic or about a specific aesthetic as the administrator of the Echangeur explains, they work with *"artists we know that they are not in an air of time. For example, Benjamin, that we welcomed in May, proposes a kind of satire which I think is not a current form. We are rather today on forms of ironic cynicism but not of satire"* (Johnny, Echangeur). In both cases, these types of artists experience difficulties to obtain funding from more established theaters which seek more conventional artistic forms. We could say that experimental spaces focus to support the mavericks and are ready to experiment failure, artistically speaking. A stage director explains about La Loge: "*they never dictate anything.*

Lucas [the co-director] *is a good man, he says, "I made a bet and if I lose, no big deal. Even if I don't like the show, I will support it until the end because I bet on it."* (Matthias, stage director) These experimental spaces want to give as more freedom as possible to the artists in order to put them into the appropriate creative atmosphere. They define themselves as tools for artists. *"We like being able to say to a company: of course, you are staying there for two months. They have the keys. So, if they want to work from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. they can."* (Laure, Théâtre Studio). During the time they stay in the experimental space, they can use the place as they want: "*We lend the place as soon as possible according to a very simple organization which is the putting at their disposal. I believe that we have 300 days of occupation. The place is rarely empty. It happens, but it is exceptional. On the other hand, we are involved in the hosting, we try to listen to and respect the team we are hosting. If they told us that they need us to be very withdrawn, we make ourselves available in a very discreet way, always with a technical accompaniment, it's the minimum."* (Juliette, Studio-Théâtre). The management team can help if necessary or on the contrary be almost invisible to let them be at ease.

These organizations have a common vision of their role among the artistic community: spending time in these experimental spaces is totally free. Contrary to some public creation spaces, these spaces don't ask artists to contribute to the life of the space. "Artists that are *coming for a residency, we ask them no counterpart. I don't understand theaters asking for public workshops. It is gross. Here there is no condition.*" (Christian, Théâtre Studio). They don't pay for the services we provide neither they must give counterparts such as making workshops with schools, for example.

4.1.2. Adapting to the different needs of artists

Experimental spaces witness that artists' needs through time. La Loge is trying to align its resources to stick with the higher degree of professionalization of the artists they have been following for several years. The first version of La Loge in 2005 was a 17-meter square theater

with 27 seats. Four years later they moved into a 100-seat theater. *"Artists had come to a higher level. They were playing on bigger stages and were more professional and we wanted to continue to accompany them. To do so we needed a bigger stage and more comfortable technical supports. Then, our stage was very small, only 27 seats. So, we wanted a bigger one and also a completely modular room so that the artists could appropriate."* (Alice, La loge). In 2020, La Loge is currently looking for a third place to settle. They would like to have a two-room theater. One big one to let more experienced artists they have been supporting for some time and a smaller one to keep supporting young artists, combining two objectives.

On the contrary, La Générale realize they were contacted by artists less experienced than before. Providing them just a working space was no longer enough. That is why they decided to create "Bureau 3" to help them with the logistic aspects of an artistic project: making planning, etc.

4.1.3. Fragile business models that limit the available resources for artists

By receiving artists for free, experimental spaces renounce to have a direct source of revenue from them. As a consequence, it limits the services they can provide them.

So, to sustain their activity over time, experimental spaces multiply their sources of revenues. Part of their revenues come from direct activity such as ticketing when possible. Sometimes, they also rent their space for activities unrelated to artistic work: for working seminars or filmmaking. As these direct sources of revenues are not enough, experimental spaces seek to obtain direct or indirect subsidies. They rarely obtain a full subvention to make the place running. They accumulate different funds such as subsidies for developing activities with social purposes using art or they manage to obtain a space for free from local authorities. Some spaces such as l'Avant-Rue, are run by a company which has its own revenues. So, the company may invest some of its own revenues to sustain the experimental space. They can also benefit from "subsidized jobs" where the State reimburses part of the employers' taxes in exchange for hiring

someone. The members of the experimental spaces can be benevolent, enjoying other personal sources of revenues. For examples, artists with unemployment benefits contribute to the experimental space's activity for free. Or the artists can benefit from personnel subsidies for their own artistic activities and share some of it for the space. For example, La Loge manages to survive thanks to multiple sources of revenues: 65% of the space's revenues come from ticketing (and marginally from the rental of space), but half of ticket revenue is then redistributed to the artists. The remaining 35% come from Paris municipality's subsidies. The director owns the space avoiding any rental fees. La Générale also managed to put together heterogeneous sources of income. In addition to the building (loaned free of charge by the State), the Ile-de-France region has granted them an operating subsidy and they supplement with occasional project subsidies. These funds allow them to employ three permanent staff members: a communication manager, an administrator, and a stage manager – all three are already members of the collective. The other members are volunteers.

This fragile business model as consequences on the support they can provide to artists. For example, the Théâtre-studio cannot afford to coproduce the performances of the artists. As for La Générale, their capacity to purchase new material is extremely limited. "*We need to invest 600€ for material; so, it's not huge but for us it's a lot. It is a problem. I wish we had more money so that it was not a problem*" (Rozenn, La Générale). At La Loge, artists can only present relatively short shows because of lack of space and time. These constraints impact the creative potential of artists.

4.1.4. Bricolage and solidarity: a peer perspective

The first limitation is that experimental spaces cannot afford to produce any show, so their support is mostly material or moral.

Regarding economic resources, to compensate the impossibility of financially helping artists, they split the incomes from ticketing with the artists who perform during their stay. The

repartition can change from 50/50 to 80/20 in favor of the hosted artists depending on the experimental space.

Most of the support is sharing experiences. For instance, the team of La Loge compensates for the lack of resources by providing a strong sense of solidarity: "*At La Loge, we have overcome the potential difficulty on the technical and financial limitations by having a reception that humanly tries to be optimal. I always insist on the fact that every team member must be nice with artists*" (Alice, La Loge). The profile of the founders is manifold, but they all share the same desire to help artists in their creation process by sharing their resources and experience. Indeed, these organizations have been created by either experienced artist wishing to share their artistic resources and knowledge, either by non-artist entrepreneurs ideologically driven by willing to support artistic creation and young artists. In both cases, they put their personal skills at the service of artists to compensate their resource (economic and material) limitations.

Then, to provide a functioning working environment, the members of the experimental spaces establish a collegial governance to optimize the resources at hand. They can't afford to have specific roles. Indeed, if each member tends to have a specialty, their limited resources oblige them to share responsibilities and tasks. The head of communication and public relations at Théâtre Studio explained that she often fills the job of the stage manager when he was not available. At La Générale, two members of the collective examine each candidate to select the artists they would host, and then report back to all the members at the weekly meeting. The group then decide together based on the opinion of the two reviewers whether the application would be accepted or not.

4.2. TO BE HERE AT ALL STAGES OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

Experimental spaces realized their role went beyond supporting artistic projects. They also help artists to build their career in the long run by teaching them entrepreneurial skills, giving them

the opportunity to perform their show and allowing coming back and forth during several years for different projects.

4.2.1. Teaching artists how to deal with their businesses

More than helping artists on artistic projects, experimental spaces teach them to manage their activity. Artists also needed help regarding administrative aspect of their work: how managing a project, how obtaining public support, etc. But they rarely have the skills to do so. To help these often young, inexperienced artists, La Générale created a small structure inside the organization named "Bureau 3." "We *created an artist support office called Bureau 3. By artists for artists. If we have a very young company, I will think of which type of financing which we could set up then I help them to make the application file. I help them to create a budget, a work schedule with a quick version because it's great and you have all the money and then the slower version because you will not have had all the money. Sharing the experience that we had with us.*" (Rozenn, La Générale). This problem was discussed with a stage director with an atypical profile, as he got a degree in Business Administration before becoming an actor. He explains why, according to him, this background helped him: "*Having a Degree in Business helped me to survive today. I know How to read a budget, I am not impressed by money issues, I know how to talk with people from public institutions*" (Nicolas, stage director). He wanted to stretch out this skill because few artists benefit from it. Most artists have an academic artistic background, but in France, the academic journey is focused on playing technic with few attention paid during their formation to the "entrepreneurial" part of their future activity.

Then, experimental spaces, more than giving advice, can in some cases becoming business partners, getting directly involved in the creation of the new project. For instance, some experimental spaces offer the possibility to play several nights in a row. More than visibility for professionals, it is also a boost to obtain certain types of subsidies that necessitate securing a minimum number of representations per year to be granted. For example, to obtain funding

from the DRAC (Regional direction of the Ministry of Culture) for a project, an artist must prove first he will perform at list 30 times. So, the Echangeur schedules 10 representations in a raw for each show because it can help artists to obtain some funding from public institutions.

4.2.2. Giving the opportunity to show their creation to an audience

These experimental spaces are interested in reworking the whole value chain caring to "*invent new form of performances, production and diffusion*" (Théâtre-studio website). Some of these organizations support the downstream of the value chain: the diffusion. La Loge sees itself as a place to showcase performances, i.e., a launching pad for artists that are provided a first stage to perform. The selected artists are offered a series of performances (between 4 and 8 performances) and 3 days of rehearsal prior to that. Performing on several evenings greatly increases the chances of getting a favorable word of mouth, allows more spectators to attend the show, and is likely to attract more industry professionals. To allow a maximum of artists to perform, La Loge schedules 2 shows per night. Over the year, La Loge receives about 150 theater companies and music groups for a total of more than 300 performances: "*At 7 p.m.: first show, at 9 p.m.: second show. Companies have one hour to pass the relay from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.*" (Alice, La Loge). To helps artists to gain visibility, if La loge decided to offer short-term series with two shows a night to increase the number of artists, The Echangeur adopted another strategy. They receive fewer artists during the year but offer long-term series, about 10 representations per shows.

A stage director says: "*I worked a lot at La Loge. It is thanks to this kind of place that audience and public funders began to come to see my work*" (Nicolas, stage director). His time at La loge enabled him to be spotted by public institutions that now subsidize his company.

4.2.3. Navigating between experimental spaces and maybe join the mainstream path

Artists can work in several experimental spaces while gaining more experience. Some are presented as easier to access for younger and less experienced artists without any prior

experience. La Générale hosts artists who are not yet integrated in the sector: *"We are the easiest theater to access in the network, but we are the most uncomfortable and there is a kind of move upmarket in the network. We don't plan in advance, so we are reactive while others anticipate. If you are going to see Collective 12* [another experimental space], *they have no spot until next year." (*Rozenn, La Générale). To meet the needs of these young artists, La Générale does not schedule the residency in advance. At this early stage of their career, they are not able to plan their workload several months in advance, so the organization schedules the residences quarter by quarter to correspond to their temporality.

A residency at La Générale can be perceived as a first step into the industry, facilitating future collaboration with experimental spaces more difficult to access. A stage director explained how he obtained a residency in an experimental space thanks to his previous work with another one: "*At Collective 12, the play was seen by the guy from Main d'Œuvre, He told me your show is great, come to spend 2 years in residency. […] Then, I worked a lot at La Loge. It is thanks to all these places that experts from the DRAC, the Ile-de-France Region, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis began to come to see my work"* (Nicolas, stage director). In this quote this director shows how his first experience in an experimental space allowed him to access other experimental spaces to develop his work through times. And how finally he had been acknowledged by public institutions granting subsidies to artists. Even if it is not the intention of these organizations, the navigation between the different experimental spaces is seen as a progressive professional track in the imagery of some artists.

As such, experimental spaces are seen as a springboard to mainstream theaters. The Echangeur worked with several artists who are presently associated with renowned subsidized theaters. The Echangeur even explained that the current director of a subsidized theater in Seine-Saint-Denis spent some time in the space before entering the mainstream network. "*It is giving time to companies to settle down, to find their audience, make journalists and professionals come*

and after allowing the show to be performed elsewhere. We give a space of visibility for companies that doesn't exist elsewhere. What is surprising is that professionals come to 'make their groceries.' Some performances are played at Avignon festival, Gennevilliers theater or at Bastille's." (Camille, Echangeur). This path can be long to achieve, a decade can be necessary to leave the network of experimental spaces as we will see it in the next section.

4.2.4. A nonlinear path

Every artist doesn't experience a progressive path among experimental spaces to be then launched toward the mainstream network. Artists must prove their value at each creation One failure can make the artist going down the ladder of success: *"Guys like Benjamin Porée are interesting. He was in Avignon IN this year. After he had no success in the IN at all, he got lambasted. He got lambasted at the Odeon* [a renowned theater]. *It will be complicated for him. And there he goes back to La Loge. It's like a snake and ladders games."* (Nicolas, stage director). For artists, being programmed once in the mainstream circuit does not guarantee they will stay in it. The verbatim above showed that the stage director Benjamin Porée created a show in an experimental space was propelled into the mainstream thanks to this show. But until a certain point, artists must defend their position at each creation. Some artists can spend all their carriers without reaching mainstream and still navigate through experimental spaces because they present forerunner work or develop controversial subjects, their work can be considered as too risky or too divisive for mainstream theaters. Nicolas, stage director explained how difficult it was to create his first show. "*I made a show that I had proposed to the municipal theater, they had said OK, I had started to work, and they had seen the posters and they had called me by saying finally we won't produce the show. Because it was about transsexualism and it was about a girl who had been a guy, who decided to introduce all her male students to homosexuality in her Hollywood acting school and rape them. It was a very vehement. If you propose that to public theaters, it doesn't work. And you're stuck because you can't get help*

from them because they're scared to death." Experimental spaces offer them time and latitude to experiment new things whereas mainstream would not. One experimental space even explains that, sometimes, mainstream theaters would ask them to host some of their projects, because they lack time and space to create it. Some settled mainstream artists can also occasionally come in an experimental to develop a risky project that was rejected by mainstream theaters as exemplified here: "*there is a show being performed at the Rond-Point* [mainstream theater] *that came to rehearse here because the team could not find a space. The creator is a female contemporary author, but it is not her first work, she is not very young, she is recognized, she has received subsidies.*" (Rozenn, Echangeur). But, as experimental spaces support risky projects, it can also happen that they never come into broad daylight either and that the artist decides to give up the project after some time experimenting it.

4.3. TO STAY PUT, STRUGGLING WITH FRAGILITY AND RECOGNITION

Experimental spaces are pressured by external factors that constraint their capacity to fulfill the different activities described in parts 1 and 2. Indeed, experimental spaces evolve under the combination of their changing resources, artists' demands and reputation. These dramatic evolutions create some tensions, urges them to question the missions of experimental spaces and even put their future into question.

4.3.1. Absorbing external constraints

Some experimental spaces suffer from external constraints. Their business model is shaky, and their resources can evolve quickly. Consequently, they have to redevelop a mission corresponding to their new pool of resources. "*When you have 9000m2 you can receive at the same time people who need a residence for a month, people who need a workshop, to show their work after a week, to make something thing in a workshop, etc. here we had to say that the one-month residence was going to be tense because suddenly we were going to have no room for the rest. That we could make people cohabit in rehearsal and others in writing but not*

at the same time rehearsals, construction of sets and writing. So, things were going to have to be planned. It is mainly what made that where we could receive 80 people in one month in Belleville, and there I am weak here we receive them in one." (Sidonie, La Générale). As said in this verbatim, La Générale transformed itself several times due to space constraints. They first, occupied a former hospital where they could host dozens of companies at the same time. Then, the city of Paris rented them a former warehouse. It was a single space building with a very high ceiling. They couldn't receive several companies at the same time. But thanks to this huge space, they could work with artists developing spectacular creation such as acrobats or horses show. Recently, the city of Paris announced they will have to move to another building, a former music school this time. It is made of several small classrooms. They won't be able to receive these spectacular creations anymore. They are thinking of which kind of mission and structuration they would adopt in this new space and still sticking to the initial plan "*offering a free working space for artists."* (Rozenn, La Générale)

Experimental spaces can also benefit from their growing reputation to obtain more resources and to adapt their mission. The Echangeur has been created in 1996 and is now well known to launch promising artists. They managed to obtain more subsidies from different public partners and with this funding they opened a second performance hall and a room dedicated to rehearsing. With this new space, they created long-term residency (1 or 2 years) for dance choreographers whereas they only supported theatrical artists for 3-4 months residency.

4.3.2. Dilemma between "emergence" and "long term relationship"

Artists can come back several times in the same space. *"I applied and they got interested. La Loge is interesting because they support people through time. Now, if I have a new show, they won't ask me to apply. They know my work, they know they like it, so it's OK for them*." (Matthias, stage director). This fidelity allows artists to be supported on a long run. Either to follow up on the same project or to develop a new one, experimental spaces like to support the

same artists during several years to help them to strengthen their reputation. On the other hand, experimental spaces can also decide to stop the ongoing collaboration, thinking they have nothing more interesting to offer to the artist and also to stick to their primary goal: working with unexperienced artists. The choice between loyalty to artists and sticking to their role of discovery can provoke a dilemma for experimental spaces: "*We sometimes struggle because if we say 'no' to a company we can jeopardize the future of the whole company.*" (Camille, Echangeur). Spaces at the same time desire to support the same artists for a long period of time while keeping their initial role of helping inexperienced artists. But as shown in the verbatim, they find more and more difficult to stay accessible to new artists because as artists that they already know are in fragile economic position, they feel the need to continue supporting them.

4.3.3. Staying true to the original purpose despite a growing reputation

Despite the fragility of the business model of experimental spaces, some of them manage to develop themselves and acquire a certain reputation within the performing art field. If this growing reputation signifies better legitimacy and resources, it goes beyond their expectations, putting into question their initial objective. Some well-known artists start solicitation experimental spaces to develop new projects. "*A guy like Alain Béhart, for example, or like Joachim Lafarget or Stéphane Orly are people supported by public institutions, they have important funding but even though they come in places like this [experimental spaces]. I question this practice.*" (Juliette, Studio-théâtre) As the cultural market is tough for artists and that apparently it exists few creation spaces for them, mainstream artists seek to come working in this experimental space dedicated to fringe artists. Experimental spaces wonder if these practices are still aligned to their original purpose, they should help less blessed artists instead of already famous one. On the other hand, they feel proud of working with these artists, it reinforces their legitimacy. While artist reputation is growing, the organization's reputation is growing too.

The growing reputation of experimental spaces also generates some expectations from the artists provoking a dichotomy between the material reality of these places and their symbolic reputation. *"The expectation is high. There is a dichotomy between our resources and the way we are perceived. This means that the companies that apply do not necessarily have a good idea of how we work. For example, there is no guaranteed public as in institutional theaters. There are a significant number of people who are interested in what's going on and who follow what's going on a little bit, but we always have to work hard to find a new audience. While companies might think that we are like an institutional theater where artists can take it easy."* (Johnny, Echangeur). If, the growing experimental space reputation can be followed by a rise of resources, the latter is not always proportionate creating a discrepancy between artists' expectations from this space and what they are really capable of.

4.3.4. A bottleneck for new creations?

We showed earlier that those experimental space business models were extremely precarious. "*We realized that we were all in an extreme and generalized precarity. [...] an organized precarity*. (Régis, Echangeur) and over time experimental spaces tend to close because of the lack of resources that exhaust them, according to an experimental space about to close '*they knew they could be in resistance during 3 whole years. It's too long, it's exhausting*' (Chloé, coordinator). The other consequence is the difficulty to survive, especially for experimental spaces initiated by companies. By sharing their space and resources with other artists, they sometimes jeopardize their own survival because of the scarcity of resources. It is what happened to the Avant-rue when the State foresee cutting into its subsidies. The director explains his dilemma: '*If the DRAC do that* [cutting of the budget], *the company cannot pay the rent anymore, can't maintain it and has to leave the place. The company experiences a dilemma: keeping the space and jeopardizing the company or closing it*" (Director, Avant-rue).

The Avant-rue finally decided to close their experimental space in order to save the company, feeling their first job was being artists and not artists' supports.

And so, it seems that fewer and fewer spaces are available for experimentation in the performing art field as told by some spaces. It seems public institutions are reluctant to support avant-garde artistic creation has seen in section 2.4, despite the call of experimental theaters: *"we begged the Ministry of Culture saying that fewer and fewer spaces were supporting artistic creation, that the ones still doing the job were overwhelmed by company's demands with potential. So, we need more economic support."* (Camille, Echangeur). The working spaces can't absorb the growing demand for artistic support and are obliged to decline some interesting proposition. They are concerned by the capacity of maintaining these experimental spaces through time and are afraid that innovation can't thrive anymore if they have no more space to be developed.

5. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In this article, we argue that the development of performing arts projects can be facilitated by the creation of experimental spaces, which foster practices of artistic innovation and entrepreneurship. Based on a qualitative study of seven experimental spaces in the French performing arts sector, we have shown that performing arts projects can be facilitated by the formation of an experimental space (Bucher and Langley, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019). We argue that such experimental spaces constitute "bounded social settings" (Bucher and Langley, 2016: 7) and organizational place that allow artists and cultural entrepreneurs to experiment and develop emerging projects and performances, but also to actively engage in practices of artistic entrepreneurship and the construction of their journey as arts entrepreneurs. The theoretical contribution of our research is threefold.

(1) We show that experimental spaces (Bucher and Langley, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019) allow artists and cultural entrepreneurs to build long-term collaborations, benefit from established

networks and communities, and engage in partnerships with a variety of peers and stakeholders. In such spaces, performing artists experience concrete changes in their projects, perform bricolage with available resources, and seek cultural innovation. Experimental spaces thus provide crucial support to "maverick" and outsider artists that would otherwise lack resources to sustain their performances overtime and thus face marginalization. While experimental spaces are defined as a way to experiment innovation "*before demonstrating it to others*" (Cartel et al, 2019; 67), we go beyond by studying spaces willing to make these innovations visible first inside the experimental space and then outside. We better understand this process through the dialectic between temporary and permanent organizing (Stjerne, Sandal and Svejenova, 2016). While the artistic project is a temporary form of organizing, the experimental space is permanent. The artistic project, by connecting to several experimental spaces or by connecting different times to one experimental space modify itself along the way. The artistic project is "marked" by the experimental space, acquiring some legitimation among the artistic field and eventually allow "maverick" artist to connect to "mainstream" organizations.

To conclude on experimental spaces, we at last highlight the construction of *'shared practical understandings'* of innovative models (Schatzki, 2001, p. 2). We realized that this shared understanding was something not only linking people together inside an experimental space but also between the different experimental spaces. Together, they create a common boundary by implementing the same alternative value, practices within their organization to allow the artistic projects to thrive.

(2) Our research also demonstrates how these experimental spaces constitute "entrepreneurial spaces" (Gartner et al., 2016; Lamine et al., 2021), in the sense that they enable artists to develop entrepreneurial practices and not only making experimentations. Experimental spaces are thus not only physical, cognitive, and social spaces, but most importantly, they shape artists'

practices as entrepreneurship. While previous studies on liminal and interstitial spaces (Furnari, 2014; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011) have suggested the potential of spaces in which organizational members are doing and experiencing change in practice and reflecting upon this experience, we extend this knowledge by showing the impact these spaces can have on arts entrepreneurship dynamics and arts entrepreneurs' journeys. Indeed, their interstitial attribute allows them to bring together actors from different positions within the fields and make them interact and artists can take advantage of this situation to progress in their entrepreneurial journey.

(3) Finally, we contribute to the literature on arts entrepreneurship (Patriotta et Hirsch 2016; Preece, 2011; Montanari et al., 2016) by highlighting the dynamics of experimental spaces in the fields of performing arts where artists are often confronted with an entrepreneurial journey dealing with precariousness and lack of resources (Albinsson, 2018). The experimental spaces we analyzed show a constant plasticity and adaptation to the needs of arts entrepreneurs they support, in a co-evolution process. These spaces also adapt to the nature of the performances they host, to the pitfalls of creative processes in a very competitive arena, and to the socio-economic environment of the fragile French performing arts scene. But while the artist entrepreneur is seen as fragile, our research also emphasized the fragility and instability of these experimental spaces for arts obliging them not only to adapt to artistic needs but also to their ever-changing capabilities forming a recursive process. To conclude this point, we could say that artists and experimental spaces are influencing each other in a recursive manner.

The study of these experimental spaces also uncovered the fact the latter not only give resources to artists to experiment but also act as an entrepreneurial space simultaneously (cf. section 2 above). But beyond teaching artists entrepreneurial skills, these spaces bring them reputation because they worked there and so symbolic legitimation to pursue their entrepreneurial journey.

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