

Young and Entrepreneurial?

Anthropological Perspectives on the Livelihoods and Ethics of Contemporary Youth

ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 21. 4. 2022



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From Coworking Kovačnica in Kranj,
foto: Miha Kozorog

Programme

9.00

Registration

9.15-9.45

Introduction:

Miha Kozorog

Young Entrepreneurs in Times of Uncertainty and Accelerated Optimism

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar

Mapping European Understandings of Youth Entrepreneurship

9.45-11.00

Keynote:

Richard Pfeilstetter

The Social Lives of Entrepreneurship: Ethic, Ethnographic and Otherwise

Moderator: Nina Vodopivec

11.00-11.15

Coffee

11.15-12.45

Capitalism, Policy, Ethnography:

Primož Krašovec

Accelerated Automation

Dan Podjed & Gregor Cerinšek

Putting the Planet at the Centre of Students' Entrepreneurial Initiatives

Maja Petrović-Šteger

Suspecting Success: The Ethics of Attention in Anthropological Writing

Moderator: Tihana Rubić

12.45-14.15

Lunch



Programme

14.15-15.45

Schooling Entrepreneurship:

Saša Poljak Istenič

Teaching Students How to 'Tycoonise' What is not yet 'Tycoonised'? Ethical Dilemmas of Entrepreneurship Education

Jaro Stacul

A Hard Work Ethic? An Anthropological Perspective on Working Students in Eastern Canada

Peter Simonič

Ideological and Managerial Constrains of Young Entrepreneurs in Maribor

Moderator: Marina Blagaić Bergman

15.45-16.00

Coffee

16.00-17.30

Youth's Entrepreneurial Ethics:

Sanja Potkonjak & Tea Škokić

The Entrepreneurial Futures: Emerging Community and Imaginary of Work after Deindustrialisation

Dragan Stanojević

Young Entrepreneurs - Between Idea and Realization: Clientelism as a Way to Improve or Maintain a Business

Boštjan Kravanja

Young Entrepreneurs' Ethos: Self-Promotion and Personal Happiness in Relation to Values of Entrepreneurship, Self-Initiative and Creativity

Moderator: Miha Kozorog

17.30-18.00

Discussion

19.00

Dinner



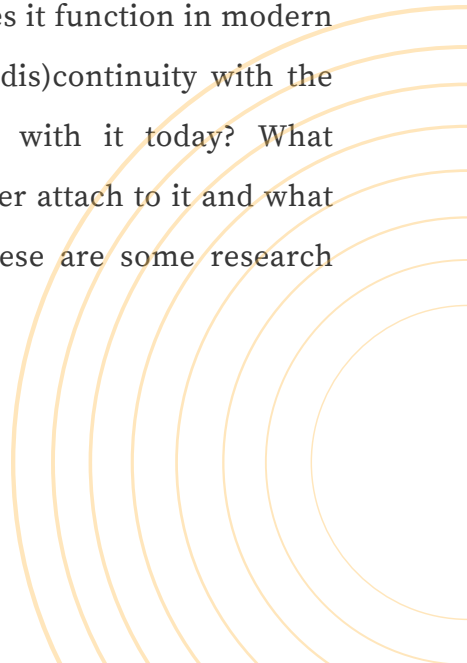
Young Entrepreneurs in Times of Uncertainty and Accelerated Optimism

Miha Kozorog

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In 2019, the Slovenian Research Agency endorsed the research project Young entrepreneurs in times of uncertainty and accelerated optimism: an ethnological study of entrepreneurship and ethics of young people in modern-day Slovenia. Our research team – Jurij Fikfak, Saša Poljak Istenič, Maja Petrović-Šteger, Tatiana Bajuk Senčar, Boštjan Kravanja, Daša Ličen, Peter Simonič, Dan Podjed and Miha Kozorog – focused on young entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship in Slovenia. The young entrepreneur was ethnographically approached as a historical subject in specific contemporary frameworks of (trans)national neoliberal society, the economy, the media and ethics, and as the creator of a specific youth culture. Until recently, the (self)attribution ‘young entrepreneur’ was not used in Slovenia, but today it is widely used in public and professional discourse. How did this category develop? How does it function in modern Slovenian society? How can it be understood in (dis)continuity with the past? How and why do young people identify with it today? What significance do agents wielding varying social power attach to it and what kind of aspirations do they associate with it? These are some research questions framing our research project.



Mapping European Understandings of Youth Entrepreneurship

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar

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This discussion will briefly present research on the formation of young entrepreneurs as subjects in EU policy and the roles ascribed to them in EU policy discourse. Working from the understanding of the breadth of young entrepreneurs as a policy category, the analysis maps out a genealogy of EU understandings of youth entrepreneurship and young entrepreneurs as policy subjects. This is done through the study of select policy documents that constitute the framework within which the EU's understanding of youth entrepreneurship as well as young entrepreneurs as policy subjects evolves in numerous policy domains – particularly the overlapping arenas of entrepreneurship and youth. The discussion also briefly examines the normative connotations ascribed to youth entrepreneurship in EU policy discourse, focusing on the links made between youth entrepreneurship and the economic crisis in EU policy.



The Social Lives of Entrepreneurship: Ethic, Ethnographic and Otherwise

Richard Pfeilstetter

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Is enterprising a universal human trait or is it a personality, space, time, or culture-contingent behaviour? What do exotic business practices from the past have in common with the call for corporate social responsibility today? Can academics study entrepreneurialism in an unbiased way, even if competition, inventiveness, and rationality are at the core of their own professional biographies? And: Is social Darwinism back through the advertising of creativity, innovation, opportunity, and talent? In this keynote, I explore these and other anthropological imaginations of entrepreneurship and how they can contribute to a better understanding of the world we live in.



Accelerated Automation

Primož Krašovec

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In my talk I will firstly outline the role of technological development in capitalism and the reasons for capitalisms' exceptional technological dynamism, i.e. the link between market competition, the necessity of productivity advances and technological innovations as the means of increasing productivity. Secondly, I will show that the form technological development takes in capitalism is increasing automation - from the early, 'stupid' automation in times of steam engines to today's, increasingly 'smart' or intelligent automation, involving the use of artificial intelligence. Lastly, I will also note some effects current stage of automation has on business and entrepreneurial culture.



Putting the Planet at the Centre of Students' Entrepreneurial Initiatives

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Gregor Cerinšek

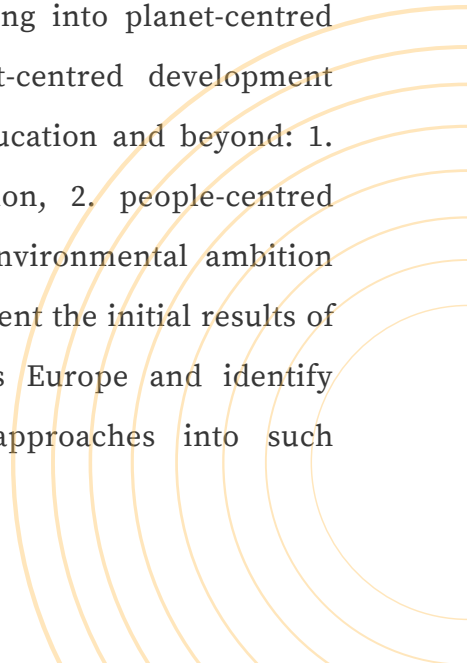
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Recent global movements show that young people's awareness, frustration, and eagerness to actively engage in securing a sustainable future are rapidly increasing. Although the need for an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to sustainability is increasingly recognised at the research and policy levels, this has been slow to be reflected in higher education curricula and learning approaches. Similarly, entrepreneurial initiatives for young people often focus on economic and social issues rather than the planet.

This paper presents how the shift towards sustainable entrepreneurship can be made through an EU project called Active8 Planet. The project aims to explore and test unconventional teaching and learning approaches that can empower and mobilise students to act sustainably and promote the transformation of university research and teaching into planet-centred innovation. The paper focuses on four planet-centred development principles that can be used in undergraduate education and beyond: 1. interdisciplinary and intergenerational co-creation, 2. people-centred design, 3. university-industry collaboration, 4. environmental ambition and action. The authors of the paper will also present the initial results of R&D activities of interdisciplinary teams across Europe and identify opportunities to incorporate anthropological approaches into such initiatives.



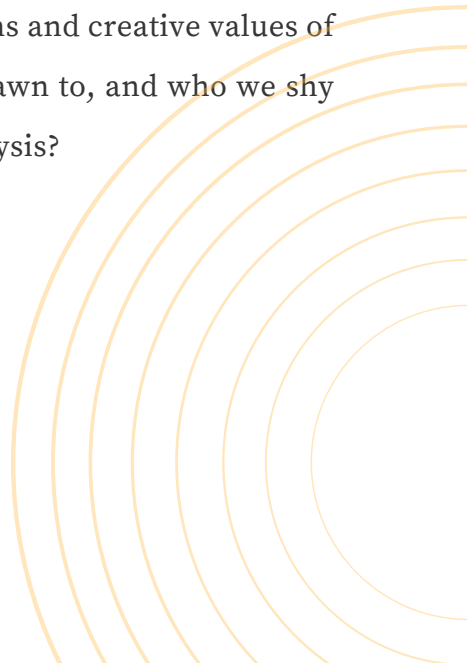
Suspecting Success: The Ethics of Attention in Anthropological Writing

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When ethnographers describe the excluded, socially marginal or suffering, empathy on the part of the anthropologist towards her interlocutors, particularly their stories, is often applauded, even de rigeur. Accounts of people's stories and lives are understood as a discursive genre, with the social scientist and her subject alike accessing a certain technology of the self, and certain narrative means of cultural reproduction. At the same time, there is an expectation of anthropologists needing to observe a spirit of critical reservation towards interlocutors taken as acclaimed, affluent or successful (e.g. experts, vendors or entrepreneurs); the norm, rather, is to establish a moral (that is, an ironic) relationship to them, especially when these people are articulate enough to tell (or 'push') their own story. The paper will enquire into this curious divide in anthropological ethics and attention by analysing the entrepreneurial ambitions and creative values of a Slovenian couturier. It reflects on who we are drawn to, and who we shy away from making subjects of anthropological analysis?



Teaching Students How to ‘Tycoonise’ What is Not Yet ‘Tycoonised’? Ethical Dilemmas of Entrepreneurship Education

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One of the aims of secondary schools in Slovenia, defined in the General Upper Secondary School Act, is to develop students’ “creativity, innovation and risk acceptance, and the ability to plan and manage projects to achieve goals” – i.e., entrepreneurial skills needed for modern business life. Despite that fact, entrepreneurship education is often regarded negatively due to promoting neoliberal ethos at the expense of humanistic values. Based on the case study of Slovenian secondary schools, the paper discusses whether a school can cultivate entrepreneurship education without also nurturing neoliberal values. It presents ethical dilemmas teachers tackle when introducing entrepreneurship education into regular programmes and the values students express when reflecting on their school life, extracurricular projects, and entrepreneurial attempts.



A Hard Work Ethic? An Anthropological Perspective on Working Students in Eastern Canada

Jaro Stacul

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The neoliberal economic reforms implemented in most countries from the early 1980s onwards resulted in workers' exposure to a new rhetoric that emphasizes self-discipline, individual responsibility, flexibility, and entrepreneurship. Such reforms, and the subsequent cuts in public spending, have affected higher education all over the world. As a result, undergraduate students have to work in order to cover tuition fees and living expenses, and many of them find themselves drifting from one dead-end job to the next in the face of increasing tuition fees and skyrocketing debt. Drawing upon recent research on working students in Newfoundland, in eastern Canada, this paper focuses on how working students conceptualize mental and manual (or practical) work in this time of economic crisis. How do they understand 'individual responsibility'? Although most of the students' statements recorded are very telling about their self-presentation as responsible individuals, their accounts also suggest that the perceived economic independence afforded by part-time or full-time work coexists uneasily with craftsmanship, namely, the attitude which entails doing something well for its own sake. The paper pursues the argument that while the students' constructions of work need to be understood in the context of a shift from a model of higher education as a public service for educating future citizens to one that increases students' upward mobility, the extent to which this vision of work will actually foster students' upward mobility still remains to be seen.

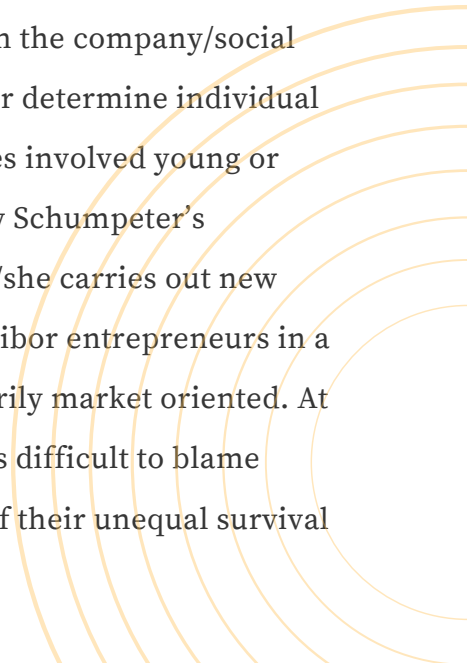
Ideological and Managerial Constrains of Young Entrepreneurs in Maribor

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The paper will present two economic models in the city of Maribor from the years after the global economic crisis in 2008. The first group includes young entrepreneurs who are united in the Start:up Maribor community with the support of the Faculty of Economics and Business (University of Maribor). This group of young digital creatives is derived from ideas of individual responsibility and the necessity of business associations (ecosystems). The second group is represented by social and cooperative entrepreneurs. Its ideologues are mainly sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and political scientists. In this entrepreneurial field, most of the actors are involved in the local nutrition, ecology, and culture. In both cases, we can essentially observe the emergence of various start-ups with different legal and philosophical foundations. The ethnographic work was devoted to different relationships between the company/social enterprise and other social institutions who together determine individual choices and possibilities. Both of the studied spheres involved young or younger people at the beginning of their careers. By Schumpeter's definition (1911), everyone is an entrepreneur if he/she carries out new combinations. In this sense, we can find young Maribor entrepreneurs in a very broad field of activities, which are not necessarily market oriented. At the level of creativity and innovation, therefore, it is difficult to blame anything on one group or another. The difference of their unequal survival and success must be elsewhere.



The Entrepreneurial Futures: Emerging Community and Imaginary of Work after Deindustrialisation

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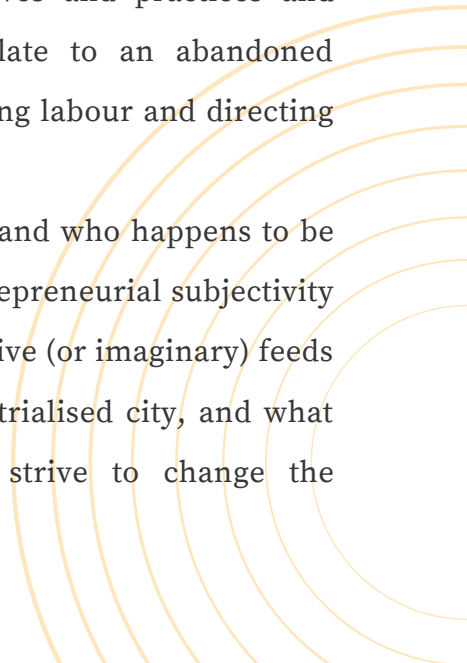
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Post-industrial ethnography and deindustrialisation studies have been focusing heavily at declining industries, suffering communities and ruined places. As labour scholars try to understand what comes after industry, especially where there is certainty that the process of re-industrialisation will not occur, they turn their interest toward emerging communities and new subjectivities arising from the ashes of economic transition and end of industrial cultures.

This paper focuses on a young entrepreneurial team, a group of people gathered around the first private business incubator called PISAK, located in the Croatian city of Sisak.

The paper draws upon interviews with the entrepreneurial team of PISAK to explore the emerging entrepreneurial narratives and practices and reviews how these narratives and practices relate to an abandoned industrial setting while working toward re-imagining labour and directing it toward the imaginary of post-industrial economy.

The paper tackles several questions: what it takes and who happens to be the game changer and bearer of the emerging entrepreneurial subjectivity in the city of Sisak; what socio-technological narrative (or imaginary) feeds into the image of the future of otherwise deindustrialised city, and what are the prominent entrepreneurial ideas that strive to change the workscape of the deindustrialised city.




Young Entrepreneurs - Between Idea and Realization: Clientelism as a Way to Improve or Maintain a Business

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In this presentation, I will present the importance of political and personal ties for the promotion or preservation of business among young entrepreneurs in Serbia. Political capitalism implies that the market is significantly influenced by the political decisions and informal networks, that the market does not fully regulate the relationship between supply and demand, and that it is often necessary for business to be part of clientelistic networks. Young people, entering the labour market, anticipate these mechanisms and create distinctive adaptive strategies with various transactions. These transactions include: membership in political parties, gathering secure votes, participating in political campaigns, financing a political party, and potential benefits are winning tenders and developing social capital. The example of two case studies will show the mentioned mechanisms and transactions, as well as various necessary skills that young people develop in this process.



Young Entrepreneurs' Ethos: Self-Promotion and Personal Happiness in Relation to Values of Entrepreneurship, Self-Initiative and Creativity

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Today, entrepreneurship is not only promoted as a know-how for self-employment, establishment of new business ventures or development of new products, but also as a source of happiness and the good life that requires self-change and a specific way of self-making. To achieve such self-sufficient subjectivity that implies specific social relations and way of feeling, one has to take life decisions that lead towards neoliberal flexibility and reproduce what Eva Illouz (2007) calls »emotional capitalism« and »self-help culture« (2008). The latter are impregnated with therapeutic discourses and notions of modern identity that denotes preoccupation with emotions, self-examination, feelings of personal crisis, suffering and more. However, the dramas of adjustment and continuous self-reformation to follow the entrepreneurial fantasies of the good life are not only filled with different mixed emotions and doubts, but also require heroic self-narratives and self-promotion. We can talk about the political economy of happiness or happiness industry where happiness takes the shape of cultural imperative.

Given that competences and values of entrepreneurship are expected to be implemented on local levels, the question that this paper addresses is how these processes of implementation are filtered according to the needs and established life practices of individuals, their social circles and communities.

For if entrepreneurship, self-initiative and creative stance towards everyday life can be learned and integrated into the lifestyle of anybody, than we can expect, that the personalities of the future will contribute to individual and collective well-being worldwide. But common well-being does not equal good life and happiness, which is focused on cultivation of emotional satisfaction, positive sense and an absence of suffering. Rather than that, the new entrepreneurial lifestyle produces fragmented, protean selves with corresponding serial identities. Even if these switching identities are masked with positive self-promotion within entrepreneurial environments, they are not a source of personal happiness, which can rather be found in products of positive psychology and industry of the above mentioned emotional capitalism.

The lecture is based on insights derived from ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2019 and 2021 among employees of various development, youth, pedagogic and employment institutions as well as among members of different entrepreneurial alternative groups, who shared their career stories and visions in different parts of Western, Eastern and South-Eastern Slovenia.



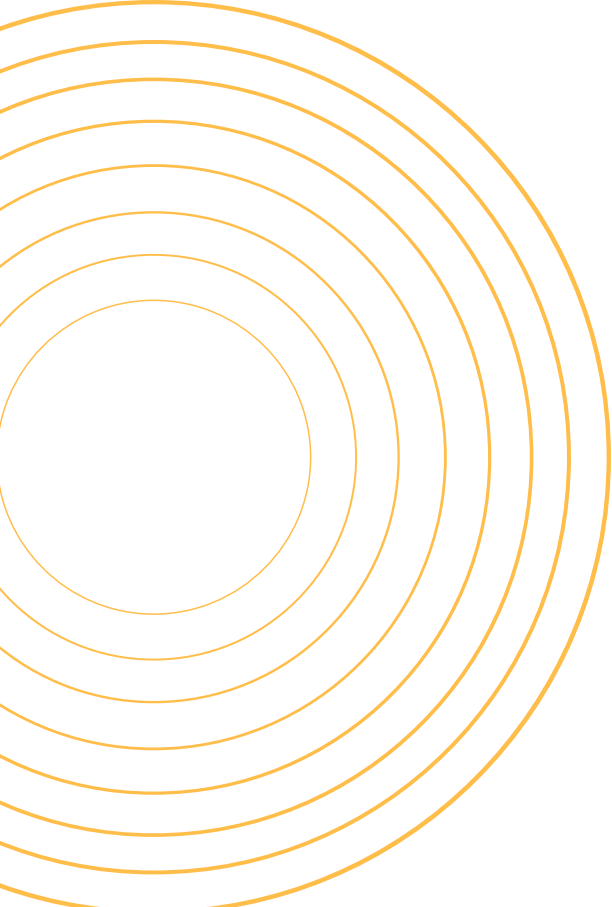


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The symposium is a result of the research project *Young Entrepreneurs in Times of Uncertainty and Accelerated Optimism: An Ethnological Study of Entrepreneurship and Ethics of Young People in Modern-day Slovenia (J6-1804)*, which has been financed by the Slovenian Research Agency.

We also acknowledge the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency - research core funding no. P6-0088.

Organising Committee: Miha Kozorog, Tatiana Bajuk Senčar, Peter Simonič, Anuša Babuder

Edited by: Anuša Babuder & Miha Kozorog

