Exploring the process of artistic creativity: Process in context

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to explore the process of artistic creativity. We conducted focus groups with artists from different fields of art. A total of 23 artists participated, who were divided into three focus groups (architecture and design, visual arts and performing arts). This qualitative research method provided us with an insight into aspects of creative process that artists perceive as the most important. In the analysis of their creative process, the artists described their approaches to artistic creativity, from the development of an idea to the production of a piece of art, emphasizing the biggest challenges they face in their work. In this paper, we present the most important insights into the process of artistic creativity.

Keywords: *artistic creativity, creative process, inspiration, motivation.*

Background

Creativity can be described as the process of development of something new, inventiveness, problem solving, originality, openness, speed of thinking. Creative individuals are unconventional, they do not conform to rules or customs, they are curious and always full of new ideas. Creativity is a very complex construct that is closely related to other psychological constructs, like intelligence, personality, and motivation. Among other disciplines, psychology deals with the understanding of creativity, its content, determinants, and outcomes, but also focuses on potential interventions that can be done to foster creativity. Creativity is an area of interest for many artists, scientists, managers, as well as other people who have creative everyday lives. That is why different theories of creativity have emerged in various domains of human activity. Kozbelt (2011) listed as many as 10 different theories of creativity: developmental, psychometric, economic, phase and component theories, cognitive,

problem-solving and expertise theories, problem-finding theories, evolutionary, typological, and systems theory of creativity, each focusing on its own issue.

Because of its complexity and wideness, as well as because of strong impression that creative products leave on the observer, the understanding of creativity has long been clouded by mystifications. Creativity has been identified with divine intervention, spirituality, or a construct that cannot be rationally grasped (Albert & Runco, 1999). In the middle of the 20th century, a scientific interest in measuring and defining creativity began to develop (Kaufman, 2009). The greatest role in this was played by the famous American psychologist Joy Paul Guilford, who was the first to emphasize the importance of creativity in his plenary lecture at a conference of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the 1950. He defined creativity as divergent thinking that is complementary to convergent. Unlike convergent thinking, which leads to finding the right solution (such as tasks in knowledge or intelligence tests), divergent thinking is the production of new options and ideas, such as tasks in verbal fluency tests. In recent years, more and more researchers are actively dealing with the topic of creativity and offer different explanations, but there is still no unambiguous definition of creativity. Equally, no instrument has been designed to provide a unique and comprehensive, objective, valid and reliable measure of creativity. The measurement instruments used so far mainly trivialize creativity (Runco & Albert, 2010), and the given definitions do not provide a comprehensive and precise interpretation of the term (Kaufman, 2009).

What is creativity?

Some researchers equate creativity with divergent thinking, such as Guilford and Torrance (Dacey, 1999). Divergent thinking allows the free production of numerous ideas, as opposed to convergent thinking that represents the cognitive processes underlying the reasoning beneath looking for concrete correct answers (Michael, 1999). Guilford distinguishes four components of divergent thinking - originality, fluency, flexibility, and elaboration. Originality refers to coming up with unique or rare ideas. Fluency is characterized by the easy and quick creation of several responses to a particular problem. Flexibility implies adaptability of opinion or quick finding of another solution, while elaboration is the production of many details about a given problem (Michael, 1999).

However, although divergent thinking is indisputably one of the key characteristics of the creative process, creativity cannot be identified with it because the creative process also includes the selection of the best conceptual solution, which then must be developed and realized. That is, the mere generation of ideas does not lead to a creative act, but the aspect of convergent thinking is also necessary in the creative process.

Cognitive theories of creativity focus on thinking skills and intellectual processes, so in this regard creativity has been studied in its relationship with constructs such as attention, perception, memory, information processing, intelligence, problem finding and cognitive style (Ward et al., 1999). However, cognitive abilities alone are not enough for

a person to be creative, but a certain level of motivation is needed, along with specific personality traits (Amabile et al., 1996). Therefore, an individual's creativity will depend on their characteristics and ways of thinking, but also on the social environment that should be conducive to the development of one's creativity (Amabile et al., 1996). The importance of social conditions is also emphasized by Csikszentmihaly in his system theory (Kaufman, 2009), according to which creativity depends on the interaction of the individual, domain, and field. Thus, an individual who acquires knowledge from a certain domain with the influence of the field will create innovative works. System theory places emphasis on the collaboration of creativity and social conditions that can best encourage genius (Kaufman, 2009).

Today it is known that creativity cannot be defined as an independent construct (Runco, 2007), and modern theories and approaches are aimed at combining various components of creativity (Runco & Albert, 2010). Thus, Sternberg and Lubert (1991, according to Cropley, 2011) present an integrative theory of creativity in which the key components of creativity are intelligence, knowledge, thinking styles, personality, motivation, and environmental influences, along with the ability to convince audiences of their own creativity and value. These components depend on other factors and, depending on their specifics, will behave in a unique way in different situations and affect creativity differently (Kaufman, 2009).

Creative process

Some theories of the creative process place the focus on its stages. Wallas (1962, acc. to Ghiselin, 1985) points out that a person who creates a new idea goes through four stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. In the preparation phase, the person gets acquainted with the content of the area. In the incubation phase, the information is "cooked up" until a solution to the problem appears, which means the third phase, the illumination phase. In the last stage of verification, a person evaluates ideas and decides which ones to keep. Some authors cite two additional phases - the communication phase and the evaluation phase (Kaufman, 2009). The phased model of creativity (Wallas, 1962, acc. to Kaufman, 2009) suggests that combinations of different cognitive and trait characteristics occur at different stages of the creative process. Thus, convergent thinking dominates in the preparation phase, divergent in the illumination phase, modesty in the verification phase, and self-confidence in the communication phase.

Furthermore, Finke et al. (1996) present the Geneplore model, which consists of a generative and an exploratory phase. The generative phase is the phase of generating many different ideas through knowledge, associations, analogies, and transformations. This is followed by an exploratory phase in which the generated ideas are evaluated, possible forms of these ideas are interpreted, the potential context and functions of the forms are reviewed, hypotheses are tested, and limitations are sought. During the creative process, cyclical movement between phases is possible, although sometimes a single sequence through the Geneplore is sufficient (Runco & Kim, 2011).

The second approach emphasizes the importance of the associative processes. Martha Mednick (1962) believes that creative individuals have faster association processes. Looking at an object will arouse a flow of ideas that will lead to a new creative solution. This theory emphasizes how ideas are generated and transformed in interaction with other ideas, and how creative and original ideas emerge from distant associations.

Also, a combination of associative and analytical approach is necessary for the development of a creative product, starting from the emergence of an idea to the finalization of a product. Thus, in understanding of the creative process, we can rely on two cognitive models: associative and analytical. The associative way of thinking reveals distant associations that are connected, followed by an analytical way of thinking that is focused on the analysis of causes and consequences. Creativity requires the ability of associative and analytical thinking, but also the ability to adapt the way of thinking that suits the requirements of the problem. On the other hand, Sternberg (1996, acc. to Runco, 2007) stresses the importance of an insight, or *aha experience*, as a key cognitive component of the creative process. He explains that when noticing new important information, it is necessary to find important connections and combine this information with analogy and metaphors to notice the connection.

Motivation for creativity

It is known that intrinsic motivation, i.e. engaging in activity for the sake of the activity itself, is very important for creative action (Amabile, 1983, acc. to Conti & Amabile, 1999). Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation can prevent creativity because an individual under the influence of external motivators (money, prestige, etc.) is exposed to the danger of shaping his behavior and opinions. But in certain phases of the creative process, extrinsic motivation is necessary. Therefore, different motivations are active in different phases of the creative process so the individual will be extrinsically motivated at one moment, and intrinsically at another. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

In addition to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, creativity requires motivation that includes courage to disagree, to take risks, to defy common opinion, and to be exposed to the possibility of being wrong. Some authors also distinguish three types of motives: instrumental motive, playful inner motive, and motive for expression (Conti & Amabile, 1999). Another aspect of motivation, motivation for achievement, is also a predisposition to creativity (Conti & Amabile, 1999). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) also points to the flow that drives the intrinsic motivation that stimulates creativity.

In some areas, the key to creativity is the possession of relevant specialized knowledge (e.g., in science), the ability to use special tools (e.g., in sculpture), skills in specific techniques (e.g., in writing), or mastery of certain instruments (e.g., in music). No matter of the specific area, at least one of the above listed prerequisites will be necessary for creativity. Thus, for example, mathematical creativity and creativity in writing will require mastery of a set of abstract symbols to represent an idea, although both

systems (mathematics and writing) are very different (Scott, 1999). However, as much as knowledge has proved necessary in the creative process, it also has negative aspects, becuse knowledge can limit openness to different opinions (Scott, 1999).

Creativity in art

Dunbar (1999) suggests that creativity is often shrouded in mystery. Sometimes it seems as if some creative works were created by chance, because only the moment of creation is remembered, not the whole process. But research suggests that when a creative idea occurs, sometimes there is even 10-15 years of intense pursuit of the idea (Scott, 1999). Researchers have been studying creativity in art from the very beginning. When explored its relation to intelligence, it was found that different types of artistic creativity require different types of intelligence. Thus, creative composers are characterized by a high level of musical intelligence, creative choreographers by kinaesthetic intelligence, writers by verbal intelligence, and alike (Lindauer, 2011). Research indicates that creative artists have highly developed in openness to experiences, dreaming and imagining, emotional sensitivity and anxiety, impulsiveness, ambition, and independence.

Goal and problems

Creativity is a broad construct that researchers tried to define in different ways. In creativity research, the crucial question is the perspective from which creativity is viewed. While some researchers believe that it is a characteristic of a person manifested in any field of activity, others believe that creativity is more related to a person's talent in a specific field. Given this, the question also arises on how to measure creativity. Creativity has long been identified with divergent thinking, which is today seen only as one component of creativity. Therefore, most measures of creativity which are still used today are based on measuring only this aspect of creativity, while omitting other components of creativity.

We wanted to check the described approaches to creativity through a subjective view of the creative process and motivation for creativity in the arts. To this end, we conducted qualitative research, in which we discussed the creative process with artists from different artistic fields. We tried to look more intimately at creativity and to expand the understanding of this construct. Their specific experience in creative work and a unique understanding of creativity is a very valuable and interesting source of information and knowledge about this area.

Through focus group discussions, we examined how artists see their creative process and how they describe their motivation for artistic creativity. In the focus group discussions, we concentrated on four key topics: What is creativity? What does your creative process look like? Can you describe how you come up with a creative solution? What is needed for creativity?

Given the above, the basic goal of this paper was to explore the creative process and motivation for creativity in different fields of art. The applied qualitative focus group technique gave the participants the opportunity to present their personal experiences and thoughts in free conversation and exchange of opinions, and to explain them with examples. Such an approach allowed us to gather extremely interesting and useful knowledge about creativity that may serve as foundations for further research in this area.

Method
Participants

The participants were artists from different artistic fields. To be eligible to participate in focus groups, artists had to have a degree in art (to finish an art academy) or to be actively involved in art for many years. A total of 23 artists participated in the study. According to the field of art, they were distributed into three groups. The first group was related to *architecture and design* and consisted of 8 artists from the following fields: design (4), graphic design (1), and architecture (3). The second group, called *performing arts*, included 9 artists from the field of music (6) and dance (3), while the third group of *fine artists* consisted of 6 artists from the field of photography (2), sculpture (1), painting (2), and street art (1).

Implementation of focus groups

At the beginning of each focus group, the moderator greeted the participants and explained that during the focus group the discussions will be audio-recorded for research purposes, so that accurate statements can be interpreted later, and that the recordings will not be used for other purposes. In addition, notes were also taken during the conversation. After an initial introduction, during which everyone introduced themselves, the moderator led the discussion according to a pre-determined scenario. Topics included a personal view of creativity, a description of the personal creative process, and inspiration and motivation for artistic work. At the end of the discussion, participants received a small gift in gratitude for their participation. After the focus groups were conducted, all interviews were transcribed, and the collected data was organized and adequately coded.

Results

The results are organized according to the research questions asked. The most prominent patterns of answers are given, and conclusions about the research questions drawn from them. Each quote states the artistic field of the participants (AD – architecture and design, FA – fine arts, PA – performing arts), but the results are interpreted at the overall level, regardless of the artistic field of the participants.

What is creativity and why is it important?

Artists see creativity primarily as a process of creating new and original solutions, which involves overcoming challenges and limitations and leads to development of

something new and valuable. Creativity is *the ability to shape a certain idea by giving it some value* (FA). Creativity *involves getting things connected in a comprehensive way and making a change happen* (AD). Creativity involves *looking at universally known things that are constantly being produced through a different prism* (AD). Creativity means a *different approach to known problems* (AD), and it is also *manifested in addressing the challenges and limitations that lie ahead*, while it is not always driven with a need to express yourself (AD).

Creativity is one of the basic human needs. It is typical for people; it enables progress and civilization development. Creativity inspires others to be creative and encourages them to work creatively.

> *Creativity defines humanity because all progress has come from creativity. All inventions and culture itself are products of creativity. If we were not creative, there would be no extension of the species. Creativity is like a breath* (AD).
> *An essential component of creativity is to be inspiring to others so that other people can use it or interpret it in their own way. Yes, it even surprises you when it comes.* (FA). *Good creativity encourages further creativity* (AD).
> *You are the most creative when you do the maximum for people you work for, that they can use it, rely on it, or get encouraged by it. If you succeed in that attempt, then you have done a great creative thing* (AD).

The creative process

Artists see creativity as a process, not just as a creative act. *The production of ideas is not a creative act; it is necessary to invest a lot of efforts after the first notion of an idea to bring the idea to an end* (FA). In the creative process, the emphasis is on creative approach, not just on the final solution. *Creativity is not in the moment of discovery, but in the way of discovery* (FA). *Creativity is both a need and an action; and stimulus and response* (PA).

The creative process involves the production of ideas, followed by the fermentation of ideas and the development of solutions. The initial idea is created from the context and needs, and this idea then needs to be elaborated and developed. *It is first necessary to recognize what the world needs, then to study it well, and only then to start with creative development of ideas* (AD). *First you need peace with the initial idea, and then through brainstorming the ideas are further developed* (AD). To reach a final solution, it is often necessary to leave the creative process for a while and move away from it. The artists state that *it takes fermentation time for an idea to happen* (PA), that is, *the idea needs to be simmered* (AD). They state that their ideas sometimes develop in the period of stillness, and that is why they consider that it is important to occasionally have some distance from the creative process. *When I go to take a shower, I get an idea* (AD, LU).

> *For a solution to emerge, it is essential to look at the problem in a new context* (FA).
> *I have a physical feeling that this task is at the back of my head, and I live with it, I carry it in every situation, and I know that a solution will come at some point* (AD).

> *You have a task, then you gather data about it, study it, and make a list of what you need to develop a solution. Then you go to the sketch, you embed the ideas, and you work on the product. Or vice versa. Sometimes you start with an idea, and then you do your research. It is important to have a frame of reference in which to operate* (FA).

To reach a creative solution, a lot of experience and knowledge is needed, because knowing methods and technologies as well as having wide experience enable creativity.

> *Creativity requires a lot of knowledge from various areas, which you then connect and that results in creativity* (PA).
> *It is important to know well the tools, materials, and methods you are working with* (AD). *It is necessary to allow people to touch paper or any material they work with; then the creative process may start* (AD).
> *You need a database in your head made up of quotes, travel experiences, education, as well as breadth. Because if we have a narrow database and no breadth, we can't be creative. New thoughts need new landscapes* (AD).

Artistic creation is an emotional process and a form of emotional expression of an individual. *I rarely work without emotion. There is no indifference* (AD).

> *Emotions are important in dance because you need to dance every emotion. And you need to transfer that energy to someone else. I am most creative when my feelings are most intense* (PA).

Motivation for creativity

Creativity requires great dedication and passion. *Creativity comes from great work* (PA). *Only great work can evoke creativity. After days and nights of work and a thousand sketches, one sketch can finally turn out well* (FA). *In dance, it is so that I will repeat a thousand times what the trainer danced, but a thousand and the first time I will dance in my own way and that will be creative* (PA).

> *It is important to find your creative source in yourself. Then you can approach creativity as any other job. Technical knowledge may be forgotten, tools may change, but your style and personal energy will carry you your way. Everything changes so fast, so the one who doesn't have that passion in himself/herself gets lost* (AD).

Creativity takes time, sometimes even years, and you need to be prepared for that. *I need time for creativity* (AD). *I need time to gather needed information, but I also need panic to drive me to finish the process* (PA).

> *I have been creating one project for ten years. I wanted to make Croatian jazz. I had an idea and it simmered for ten years. Like I had to mature emotionally. After ten years, the idea emerged* (PA).

The creative process does not always go smoothly, and to overcome creative blockages, persistent and dedicated work is necessary. Blockages are an integral part of the creative process and need to be overcome through engagement and absorption in work.

The blank paper is the worst. Take a pencil and draw, just draw whatever you wish. The idea will come somehow, it will float through your sketch (FA).

If I have a blockage, I don't write the first sentence, but start from the middle: I don't let myself be bothered, I just go on (PA).

Internal freedom and social support

To create, freedom of thought and action is needed; without it, it is impossible to be creative.

It is important to float easily in different areas of knowledge, and the speed of merging gained information is important, too (PA). *It is important to be ready to react so when an idea comes, you can easily handle it* (PA).

The older a person gets, the harder it is for him/her to think freely and without restrictions, and he/she loses the energy to create new things. It is very difficult to preserve this freedom of creation even after 30 years. Maybe that's where the genius manifests itself - to be able to keep that zeal in you (FA).

Social support is crucial and in Croatia it is perceived as insufficient. The artists listed numerous criticisms of the social climate and liberties and pointed out that education is not at a satisfactory level to enhance creativity in young people.

In Croatia, design is constricted because we also have constricted society. If society is such that we only want shopping malls, there is no room for creative design (AD). *We are not a happy nation nor a healthy generation. Everyone expects instant, fast things, and such products are not good enough* (AD).

Visual education is poor in Croatia. It needs to be developed (AD). *The whole schooling system also needs to be changed* (PA). *Children need to be taught creative thinking* (AD). *You need to learn how to consume creative things. Let young people listen to folk music, but they should also be motivated to listen to Bach* (FA).

The social standard in Croatia does not allow artists to work and grow as they should. To achieve that, we need higher social standard and a society that is well educated (AD). *To help artists in their work, greater freedom and tolerance in society should be present daily* (AD).

Discussion

During focus groups, artists concentrated on defining the concept of creativity and discussing what creativity is. The explanations they offered were based more on subjective and poetic considerations that reveal the emotional experience of explaining creativity than on theoretical aspects of creativity. However, as we will see, both subjective viewpoints and theoretical underpinnings often come to similar solutions.

When defining creativity, artists tend to capture many concepts related to creativity to define the construct. They frequently mention *creation*, *new*, *idea*, *product*, *process*, *moment*, and *fun* when they are describing creativity. Artists agree that creativity involves

solving problems and creating new ones. An interesting finding is that creativity does not relate only to something new but also to something valuable or functional, as most modern definitions of creativity indicate (Kozbelt et al., 2010; Kozbelt, 2011). They point out that it is not always crucial to innovate, but to identify needs and work on improving existing things. Artists thus state that a creative work must leave an impression on the audience in a way that enables or encourages further creativity.

For artists, creativity does not only involve an appearance of an idea that blinks in a moment, but they see creativity as a whole process. Similarly to Kaufman's (2009) work on different modalities of creativity, artists also notice that creativity comes from great absorption in work and that it cannot be defined only as a creative product. It is necessary to look at the person and the whole process behind it. Artists state that great knowledge and effort are required to develop something creative, which previous research also established (Scott, 1999; Feldhuson, 1995, acc. to Arar & Rački, 2003). Accordingly, they state that the key in the creative process is to use knowledge from one area and apply it in another area or other context. Creativity, in this sense, is manifested in merging two areas by combining elements or knowledge from both. This part of the creative process is often hidden and not known to the public, and therefore the observer's perception will often be blurred by the very effect of surprise that the creative work leaves. Artists state that the lack of understanding of the process behind the creative work is the reason why creativity is often mystified. In this sense, artists do not perceive themselves as creative as they are perceived by observers of their works. So, when they think about their creative process, they question the existence of creativity itself. Accordingly, this perceptual characteristic of creativity has been addressed by both Sternberg and Kaufman (2010) in their works.

Artists explain that it takes a lot of knowledge, skills, and experience to come up with an idea and that, after the appearance of an idea, it takes a lot of effort to realize it. They also state the important role of motivation that pushes artists to realize their ideas. In their own way, they see the role of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation that appears in different stages of the creative process, as Csikszentmihaliy (1988) and Amabile (1996) emphasize. They also stress the significance of communication with important others, especially in the phase of development of an idea.

It is interesting how artists present the same phases of their creative process, as Wallas suggested (1962, acc. to Kaufman, 2009). They state that the creative process starts from the task, and that it is followed by data collection, studying of the given area, and formation of the goals that are to be achieved. In art, this is the exploration of all the elements needed to create a concept of a piece of art. The artists then move on to the sketch and embed the ideas until they get the product they like. Artists usually have a frame of reference at the beginning in which they work. It is interesting that they state that getting out of these frames of reference and deviating from the path they set at the beginning is the most important and the most impressive part of creativity. An important part of the creative process that artists have repeatedly mentioned is

the time of fermentation of the idea, which Wallas (1962, acc. to Kaufman, 2009) calls incubation. They state that it is necessary not to think and not to elaborate on an idea when it appears, but to look at it from a different angle after a while. They have the feeling that the developed idea is always present in their mind and that they are carrying it in every situation, while it is developing by itself, independently of them. The idea will form on its own after a while. Artists mention that discussing with colleagues from the same field or with someone outside their profession helps them develop an idea at the end.

Interestingly, artists state that they need freedom and time for creativity, but equally, they need deadlines to complete the project. Artists express dissatisfaction with the social context in which they find themselves and which is not conducive to their creativity. They believe that the education system greatly hinders creativity and that it is necessary to reinvent it. One of the solutions that artists suggest is to improve the visual education in schools. In addition to improving the schooling system, the artists agree that it is necessary to educate the whole society. Artists state that it is difficult to be creative in a society that seeks only instant solutions. They also state the need for networking and interdisciplinarity, as well as greater government investment in art projects.

Conclusions

The artists who participated in the focus groups pointed out that creativity means creating new and original solutions, which lead to development of new values and changes. To be creative, it is necessary to overcome challenges and limitations, to meet the needs of humanity through creativity and to inspire and encourage others to be creative. Creativity is a process, not just a creative act. The process begins with the development of ideas, from which the most valuable ideas crystallize till the best solution appears. In this process, the *breadth* is the key – having vast experience and knowledge at all levels (from tools and materials, through methods and procedures, to earlier solutions, ideas, and general life experiences of the individual). For artists, the creative process requires work, effort, dedication, data collection, testing. Sometimes it takes a long time, even years. Blockages are an integral part of the creative process and need to be overcome through engagement and absorption in work. Freedom of thought and action is needed to be creative. Social climate in Croatia is observed as unsupportive. Artists point out that it is necessary to improve the social climate, freedom, lifelong education, and social standards that would encourage artistic creativity and collective interest in it.

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Istraživanje procesa umjetničkoga stvaralaštva: proces u kontekst

Sažetak

Cilj ovoga rada bio je istražiti proces umjetničkoga stvaralaštva. Proveli smo fokus-grupe s umjetnicima različitih područja umjetnosti. Ukupno je sudjelovalo 23 umjetnika koji su bili raspodijeljeni u tri fokus-grupe (arhitektura i dizajn, vizualne umjetnosti te izvedbene umjetnosti). Primjena kvalitativne istraživačke metode omogućila nam je uvid u teme koje umjetnici doživljavaju najvažnijima u svojem stvaralačkom procesu. U analizi svojega kreativnog procesa umjetnici su opisali svoje pristupe umjetničkom stvaralaštvu, od razvoja ideje do izvedbe umjetničkoga djela, pri čemu su istakli i najveće izazove s kojima se u svojem radu suočavaju. U ovom radu izlažemo najvažnije spoznaje o procesu umjetničkog stvaralaštva.

Ključne riječi: *inspiracija; kreativni proces; motivacija; umjetničko djelo.*