A COMPLETE HUMAN BEING. INTERVIEW WITH A PIONEER IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH: BENGT JOHANNISSON

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A Complete Human Being.
Interview with a pioneer in Entrepreneurship Research: Bengt Johannisson

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In 2008 Bengt Johannisson received the International Award for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research (from 2009 the Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research) “for furthering our understanding of the importance of social networks of the entrepreneur in a regional context, and for his key role in the development of the European entrepreneurship and small business research tradition”. The prize committee’s motivation was:

Bengt Johannisson is a pioneer in the field of entrepreneurship and small business research in Europe. For more than three decades, his research on the entrepreneur and the role of small businesses in regional development has inspired and provoked scholars as well as doctoral students.

Bengt Johannisson has been a very active participant and has played a key role in the development of the European entrepreneurship and small business research tradition. He has been influential, both through his extensive scientific production and his strong “presence” in the scientific discourse – by his dedicated participation in conferences, seminars for doctoral students, as invited lecturer and through his general interest in the debates in this field.

Professor Johannisson has devoted his entire research career to the furthering of our understanding of the importance of social networks of the entrepreneur in a regional context. He has also documented and explained how the social networks of the entrepreneur are related to the “life” of the entrepreneur, and he has identified the instrumental role of these social networks for regional economic development. Professor Johannisson has initiated and developed a Scandinavian, and partly European research tradition by introducing new approaches to gaining knowledge in the entrepreneurial and small business sectors, adopting a subjectivist and social-constructionist approach.

Furthermore, Professor Johannisson has been a vital contributor to the organization of the European entrepreneurship and small business research fields. He has been one of the prime organizers of the European Doctoral Program in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management. He has acted as editor for the journal Entrepreneurship & Regional Development which under his direction has evolved into one of the leading publications in entrepreneurship research. (http://www.e-award.org/web/2008_Bengt_Johannisson.aspx)

Two of Bengt’s close colleagues – Hans Landström and Chris Steyaert – got the task to summarize and evaluate Bengt’s academic research and present this in a special paper in the Small Business Economics Journal (Steyaert and Landström, 2011). They titled the paper “Enacting entrepreneurship research in a pioneering, provocative and participative way: on the
work of Bengt Johannisson” and said that in their view Bengt’s work can be summarized and discussed around the intertwined dimensions of pioneering, provocation and participation.


Since this excellent summary of Bengt’s work has already been written, I instead wanted to add a more personal reflection from Bengt. I have known, and worked with Bengt for many years (see Johannisson and Lindholm Dahlstrand, 2006, 2009, 2012), something that has triggered a number of questions I have about him as an entrepreneurship researcher as well as a “complete human being” (Johannisson, 1987a, p. 10). Thus I took this opportunity to interview Bengt about his view on “entrepreneurship research”, on “networks, participation and provocation”, and himself as “a complete human being”.

Entrepreneurship research

The first part of the interview with Bengt focused on his entrepreneurship research and why he became interested in the topic. It also included questions on how he defines entrepreneurship and on his view of the history and current state of entrepreneurship research.

First I asked Bengt about his personal view of the history and current state of entrepreneurship research.

Bengt says that with the practice turn in organizations studies entrepreneurship research has finally found a way to close the gap between Schumpeter’s hero entrepreneur and the everyday doings of venturing. Also presenting entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon has made visible that entrepreneurship is a genuinely human capability that appears in many different shapes but as a potential is epitomized in the playing child. For Bengt this is a very promising development in the field of entrepreneurship. It also means that he is not, as many colleagues, worried about the lack of one coherent theory of entrepreneurship. Half a century ago there were hundreds of definitions of “culture” around. Considering this, we have still plenty of time to reflect upon appropriate definitions of entrepreneurship, he says.

What is entrepreneurship to you? What does it mean? How do you define it?

Entrepreneurship is certainly more about action and interaction than just talking, Bengt says. It is coincidences that the entrepreneur and her/his associates experience rather than readymade opportunities that are important. Entrepreneurship is in itself a topic that has difficulties in obtaining legitimacy in the academic community. There are a lot of important phenomena that actually is about entrepreneurship but called something else, he mentions strategizing and strategy as practice as an example of this.
Bengt defines entrepreneurship as “creative organization of people and resources”. He also believes that entrepreneurship is something that can be practiced anytime, anywhere – it is just its manifestations which vary. He joins Baumol (see e.g. Baumol, 1990) who argues that it is the institutional conditions that determine when it will be functional or dysfunctional.

After these initial questions I wanted to know more about Bengt’s background and why he became interested in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship research. In his work he has emphasized that entrepreneurship is a social practice that needs to be contextualized, localized and situated by drawing upon and empirically grounding such concepts as networks (Johannisson, 1995b), industrial districts (Johannisson and Spilling, 1986), regions (Johannisson, 1983a) and local communities (Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989). But what led him to do research on this?

Bengt began his graduate studies at the then young Umeå University in Northern Sweden. His first supervisor was Erik Johnson, a professor in leadership at Copenhagen Business School. As a systems theorist he was not particularly interested in entrepreneurship and small business but triggered Bengt’s writing. Instead, Bengt was inspired by Dick Ramström who joined the research group in Umeå. They received funding for a project with an aim to investigate small businesses; before this there was no research on small firms in Sweden. Bengt thought then that this was something that could be “fun to try” and help him to “to make a difference”.

His licentiate thesis, based on the then popular systems theory, thus came to focus on small firms and their adaptation processes. He followed up this work with a few empirical studies of the very small businesses in the Småland region in Southern Sweden. His choice of Småland as the empirical basis was inspired by his recent acquisition of a summer home in the region; because of this he had gained knowledge of some local business owners. Even though the Småland region includes Gnosjö, with its famous industrial district, it was thus serendipity and coincidences that influenced Bengt’s choice of object to study. While Bengt wanted to analyze the importance of local production networks in the Gnosjös industrial district, it soon became clear that it was instead personal networking that made it commercially successful. In turn, it is precisely this that is the reason why Bengt in the Swedish National Encyclopedia presented the “Gnosjö spirit”, meaning that local firms both compete and collaborate and that running a business is a form of life.

Dick Ramström was an important mentor for Bengt. For Dick, it was important to give the graduate students freedom enough to pursue their own ideas in their thesis work. Dick also had contacts with Sparbanksstiftelsen, a Sweish bank foundation, that wanted to fund a research project on mergers and acquisitions. Bengt took on this challenge. Even if this was not a straightforward process, it was this project which finally ended up as Bengt’s dissertation. But then he already had gained the title of Docent (the equivalent title in English would be Associate Professor) – an academic title which is normally rewarded after a PhD and a few more years of successful research. Bengt got the Docent promotion in 1979 on a comprehensive report on Gnosjö and other local enterprising and communities.

When Bengt travelled around Sweden and presented his report on mergers and acquisitions at universities, seminar participants asked if the manuscript was intended to become a doctoral thesis. Bengt had not had that in mind but then he recalled that an influential professor at Gothenburg School of Economics, Sten Jönsson, criticised Bengt for still not having a doctor’s degree. This became the spark that got Bengt to decide that, after all, he should do a PhD, even if he was already an associate professor. The dissertation project thus came to be about mergers and acquisitions involving family businesses. The title of the thesis is Den organisatoriska smältdegeln (The Organizational Melting-Pot) and it was presented in 1980.
The Gnosjö study remained in the back of his head even when the thesis project on mergers and acquisitions became topical. Also this time the Småland region came to be the empirical object of his study, this time focusing on the crystal glass industry in the region. The project studied the so-called Målerås project, where the troubled Swedish glassworks tried to find ways to survive. Together with the designer Mats Jonasson in Målerås he initiated a genuine action research project. It peaked when 80-90 individuals after a few years acquired the local glass works. This social entrepreneurship led to Bengt already then coining the term “community entrepreneurship”, which is currently a hot topic both for Bengt and for entrepreneurship research in general. Both the research project and the newly formed company became successful; the company had 15 employees when Bengt left the action research project in 1985, for some periods after that it has employed 80 people. Still today, Bengt keeps some personal contacts there and sometimes meets with the Målerås designer Mats.

Over time, Bengt has extended his work over many different research themes and questions, including regional development, personal networks, social entrepreneurship, family businesses, entrepreneurial learning and teaching, and types of entrepreneurs including women, immigrants and community members (Steyeart and Landström, p. 125). But I want to know what he himself thinks are the most important insights he has reached in his career? I also ask him if there is anything he regrets that he did? Or something he regrets that he still hasn’t done?

Bengt says that he is pleased that he – together with others - has been able to demonstrate that entrepreneurship is a broad term and subject. He illustrates this with an example of his studies of extreme entrepreneurs (Johannisson and Wigren, 2006), intellectual entrepreneurship (Johannisson and Kwiatkowski, 1999) and social entrepreneurship (Berglund et al., 2012). He adds that it is important that entrepreneurship is seen as a collective phenomenon that is enforced when researching personal networks as well as social issues.

Bengt is also happy that he has been methodologically curious and daring to try different methods. His research has, thus, been a little different than the mainstream. As an example he mentions his interest in interactive methods, that is within a practice approach study how researchers and practitioners jointly create ‘actionable’ knowledge.

Research is in itself a learning process and Bengt does not feel that this learning has decreased over time. You do not have any less creativity just because you get older. He himself is downright bursting with it. He claims to be entrepreneurial – because others have told him so! – and that he learns from the entrepreneurship he is studying. Entrepreneurship is in itself a journey! He says that he, like Kirzner, wants to be a link between things which have previously not been linked and that ambition especially concerns bridging between research, education and practice.

Bengt regrets that he never did any academic journal paper based on his doctoral thesis. The thesis is only available as a monograph in Swedish, which makes it a bit difficult for the vast majority to access its findings.

Otherwise, there’s not much he regrets. But, he adds, perhaps sometimes he has made mistakes by taking part in other person’s research projects mainly with the ambition to help others instead of focusing on his own research interests.

You are a very successful entrepreneurship researcher. A result of this was that you received the International Award for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research in 2008. This prize has most often been awarded to American researchers with impressive number of publications and citations. Why are so few non-Americans able to show similar impact? Are there differences in e.g. the European and American research traditions? How? What does this mean? Should it be changed?
As in many other disciplines American research(ers) are dominating entrepreneurship research. This means that quality in academic inquiry into entrepreneurship early was associated with quantitative data and associated methodologies. With an increasing understanding of the role of context, an insight especially coming from European research, qualitative methods are becoming more recognized and will hopefully lead to that more non-Americans are awarded. But it is also important to keep in mind that many economists are prize winners and within that discipline quantitative approaches still rule.

Bengt thinks the fact that American researchers are so dominating the entrepreneurship field is depending on two things. First, as often emphasized, their big advantage lies with the language, and, second, the American culture which is much more entrepreneurial than the European. Entrepreneurship is something more natural there than for example in the UK.

For example, it took until 1978 before Bengt attended his first scientific conference outside Sweden. Before that, he mostly stayed in Sweden and wrote about his scientific results in Swedish. It was not until the age of 40, in 1983, that Bengt published internationally for the first time. That he published in Swedish for such a long period of time means that much of his scientific production is unknown to the international research community.

Bengt is not really fond of the “publish or perish” tradition which now seems to be more and more prominent. To some extent he thinks this has trivialized research. Instead of focusing on innovative and important discoveries it is now much about publishing as much as possible. The academic contributions will be smaller and many papers are mostly slight variations on what is already published.

Today Bengt again often writes in Swedish, not the least because he then can reach other constituencies but the academic one.

Bengt was an influential editor Entrepreneurship and Regional Development for many years (1998-2007). Probably no journal title can better summarize his work than one that combines the topics of entrepreneurship and regional development. But I want to know more about why he wanted to do this? And if this has impacted his research? Also, during this period the impact factor improved for this journal. How was this achieved? Finally, I also ask Bengt if and why it is important to have European based entrepreneurship journal(s)?

The fact that Bengt came to engage in the ERD was entirely because the interest shown by the founding editor Gerald Sweeney who wanted him as successor. This was due to the fact that Bengt already in the first issue of the journal in 1989 published a paper (Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989). Based on the Målerås case this article focussed on the spatial dimension of entrepreneurship, something which caught the attention of the editor, himself a reflecting practitioner, Bengt speculates.

The shared interest initiated a personal relationship beyond Bengt’s role as reviewer and Gerald Sweeney began to indicate that he wanted Bengt to take over the responsibility for the journal. When they met again at the RENT X Conference in Brussels 1996 (RENT – Research in Entrepreneurship and Small Business – conference) Gerald said that “in a year, you take over”. Bengt felt responsible and accepted the proposal. He does not regret it – it’s been an exciting journey! Even so, he felt pretty exhausted when he handed over the responsibility to Alistair Anderson (2008). Bengt devoted many weekends to the editorship of the ERD. He himself has not published so much in the journal but the work made him maintain his interest in the field. Being in charge of the journal Bengt never thought very much about citations or impact factors. Nevertheless, the journal climbed steadily in the ranking during Bengt’s nine years as the editor.
Bengt stresses that a reason for this is also Associate Editor Ed Malecki's commitment and the work of a relatively small editorial board. Ed Malecki as an American geographer did a tremendous job over the years as the associate editor. Reviewers' skills were mainly used as experts on different topics, while Bengt instead took on the methodological aspects. It turned out to be a very fruitful division of labour.

Since American research dominate the field of entrepreneurship and with them American scientific journals, it is important that there are European journals in the field. The European perspective is also a bit different compared to the dominant American tradition. The regional dimension used to be very blurred in American literature on entrepreneurship and small business. There is also more qualitative research in Europe, something Bengt consider as very important.

He also mentions that the non-English literature holds a lot of examples of earlier research on topics that not until very recently has caught the eye of other entrepreneurship researchers. There is much to gain for the interested. He also says that researchers who know only one language (i.e. English) should reflect on what it is like to not have that language as a mother tongue.

When Bengt did a final special issue in ERD this was an attempt to organize the field; a sort of testimony to assist future research directions. The result is a multidimensional Special Issue where each of the papers is included for a special reason. The first article on entrepreneurship as a processual phenomenon was written (on invitation) by Chris Steyaert, a leading representative of the emerging European tradition in entrepreneurship research. Both the second article, co-authored by Bengt's successor as editor Alistair A Anderson and Robert Smith, brings up the ethical dimension of entrepreneurship and the third article, written by Bengt's compatriots Karin Berglund and Anders W Johansson, with its critical perspective announce Bengt's present concern for social enterprises and societal entrepreneurship. The final article Bengt himself wrote jointly with a cohort of doctoral students from the European doctoral Programme in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management. That paper brings up methodological issues, especially how theories frame our image of reality. Partly the paper was written as a joke on the behalf of medical scholars – and their tradition to have a long line of authors for each paper – this resulted in an article with 14 authors.

In Berglund’s interview with Bill Gartner (Berglund, 2011), Gartner argues that entrepreneurship researchers should first lay bare the facts at hand (who did what and when) and only later, once this is done, move on to infer theories (why did they do as they did). I guess this might be a view that you share? Or would you even go a step further? You have yourself enacted entrepreneurship, that is, actively participated in entrepreneurial creation. What was the results of this adventure?

Here Bengt completely agrees with Gartner, but, as expected, he wants to go a step further: to understand a phenomenon you as a researcher should be engaged in its practice, he says. Entrepreneurship involves both action and interaction. Bengt was inspired by Vesper’s (1990) statement that entrepreneurs mainly succeed if they have practical experience from the field where they intend to start a venture. He also wanted to protest against philosophers who, drawing a parallel to zoological studies, cynically argued that you do not have to become a chimpanzee to study the behaviour of the species. Accordingly he, applying auto-ethnography, started his own venture in order to more fully understand what it was he himself was studying and talking about. His own venture in itself illustrates how personal networks in the relevant context, here a cultural setting, is used to furnish the emerging venture with resources (see further below).
When we wrote the chapters in our book (Johannisson and Lindholm Dahlstrand, 2012) you wanted to link innovation policy and entrepreneurship policy – why was that? Also, in the book you wanted to return to some concepts you introduced earlier in your career – which and why? From where does his interest in bridging and integrating different concepts and views come?

With the book, Bengt wanted to bridge entrepreneurship with the concept of innovation. Innovation is, as Bengt sees it, also something that easier catches the attention of policymakers. And in itself entrepreneurship is often about creative combinations and imitation, something which of course is very close to the concept of innovation.

Contributing to a much needed new vocabulary we proposed that a “rurban” life-style, a “glocal” outlook, and “pracademic” knowledge should furnish what we addressed as a “virtual” rationale. Each of these concepts is about building bridges between different fields of knowledge. Both rurban and glocal are concepts Bengt long borne with him. He says that the notion of “glocal” as a basic contributor to a vocabulary for development that recognizes social as well as ecological concerns communicates that any place can make its own contribution to the creation of new worlds. For example, when the Swedish government in 2007 appointed a Globalisation Board Bengt wrote a letter to them suggesting that it should instead be a Glocalization Board. There was, however, no response from the responsible ministers.

Based on your experience, what would you advice a young doctoral student to focus on?

Bengt’s research is often characterized by him wanting to build bridges between different fields of knowledge. Examples of this are his works to link local development of entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship with innovation (Johannisson and Lindholm Dahlstrand, 2012). Today Bengt thinks it is important that the bridges between entrepreneurship and family business research become reconstructed. Family Entrepreneurship is indeed often about entrepreneurship. There is much to do here.

Network, participation and provocation

At this stage in the interview I wanted Bengt to tell more about his own network, and if there are certain ideas or individuals (for example researchers, students, mentors or entrepreneurs) who have been especially important for him.

Society itself – not theories – is the basis and context for Bengt’s research. He cannot mention any specific theory that has influenced him in any significant way throughout his career. But of course, his early acquaintance with systems theory has accompanied him throughout his career and on one hand he is pleased to see the current practice approach in strategy research has re-discovered the systems view. Now he sees an opportunity to contribute to knowledge creation in the field of entrepreneurship by, through interactive methodology, linking the insights researchers and practitioners have. He considers the ability to communicate with entrepreneurs and speak their language to be one of his major achievements over his professional career.

Bengt thinks it is important to be able to inspire others – to help in cases where it is needed and stop oneself from doing this when it is not needed. You have to see the individual! This view goes as much for doctoral students as for social entrepreneurs like the one he at present is engaged in.

He has not tried to build a “School” where everyone quotes each other. However, cooperation with Hans Landström and the SIRE (Scandinavian Institute for Research in Entrepreneurship)
that they built together was important for Bengt. He is also proud that he has contributed to the building of new academic milieux that today all include entrepreneurship research: Umeå and Mid Sweden Universities (both in Northern Sweden) and Växjö, now Linneaus, University.

The interactive method has been an important component in his research. Similar with testing things and provoking others. Bengt mentions an example where he sometimes forced students to use different theories and then based on these go out and interview companies, indeed with completely different results. To test this himself, he wrote on one occasion two completely different articles about the industrial district Gnosjö in the local popular press. One painted a very positive picture, the other did the opposite. The aim was to make the entrepreneurs aware of the need to complete their vocational training with formal dedication. The positive one was met with silence; the negative caused quite a stir. The local entrepreneurs arranged a public meeting where they verbally scolded him. To Bengt this was a responsible initiative, an example of constructive critical research.

You have always chosen to participate in all kinds of debates. You are for example active in writing articles in the local newspaper as well as commenting on academic conferences. Why is that – is it to be heard, to discuss, change things, provoke etc? What kind of effects has this resulted in?

Bengt himself is impressed by people who are really actively engaged in something. It is they who drive change and enact entrepreneurship. Associating academic quality with the very interaction between research, education and community dialogue, he feels a responsibility to himself not only to do research that mirrors curiosity and rigour but also to teach by linking both to theory and empirical examples. And to involve in local debates in local newspapers is a way of communicating research findings to a society that feeds the universities in Sweden.

Bengt feels he has good contact and can talk to entrepreneurs. However, he thinks it is very difficult to get policymakers to listen. As an example, he cites his own research on local environments (Johannisson, 2012) which he recently returned to in the book on Enacting Regional Dynamics and Entrepreneurship (Johannisson and Lindholm Dahlstrand, 2012). Policymakers should better listen to what the research actually informs about, rather than to less well-conducted reports and surveys. As it is, it’s easier to get policy makers to listen if you provoke them! Then they listen, even if they get quite sour.

As mentioned above, “to make a difference” is something important to Bengt, and the provocation is a tool he uses for this purpose. He simply cannot be quiet. When Bengt reflects about why this is so, he enters into the relationship with his own father. His father was a successful academic professor, also with a chair in the Swedish Academy. His father did not participate in the public debate. Bengt’s outward orientation and provocative style may well be something of a rebellion against his father’s values; he and his father had completely different ways of relating to the practice of research. Bengt’s way of doing research is to encourage action and practical participation. His works are based on experience and empirical data rather than theories. Enacting entrepreneurship is to Bengt’s the ultimate way of learning what it is all about. Moreover, he believes that resistance and rebellion is something that can stimulate and trigger action.

He also thinks it is important that you allow yourself to experiment. After that you can read, he says. This is a bit contrary to the “publish or perish” tradition – that is to first read a lot and after that bring a tiny contribution yourself – which seems to become increasingly prominent today.
Instead he developed and practiced what he addresses as “enactive research”. Using his personal network in local cultural life to himself launch an entrepreneurial venture aiming at exploring the potential of creating regional development by bringing together the academic and arts communities. This ad-venture resulted in a book (Entreprenörskapets väsen (The Essence of Entrepreneurship) Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2005) which is based on auto-ethnography. He wanted both to trigger himself and to contribute to research. Personal friends and acquaintances contributed, but, as it turned out, few university researchers wanted to participate. Although Bengt sent a request to all employees at Växjö (now Linnaeus) University, it was only 3-4 people who showed any interest. The most important factors when you want to accomplish something, he says, is to have commitment and networks – are these two ingredients in place you can manage the impossible and the unknowable.

A complete human being

Bengt has used the network metaphor to open up the possibility of seeing an actor “as a complete human being” (Johannisson, 1987a, p. 10) where all human potentials, including the affective ones, need to be taken into account (Steyaert and Landström, 2011). This made me interested in knowing more about Bengt as a potential “complete human being”. One side of this is his interest in education, teaching, learning and supervision: I asked him to elaborate a bit on why this is important.

As indicated I think that research and education conditions each other, he says. Especially in a young field as entrepreneurship it is important to educate a new generation of researchers. To him it has been a kind of “glocal” responsibility. His doctoral student have either been recruited locally out of the first undergraduate and later master programme in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management at what is now Linnaeus university or globally from the European doctoral programme with the same name which was ran together with the Autonomous University of Barcelona. It is not only important to help young people in their career, it also feels good. In this mission he also practice the rule to invite the doctoral students to write their first confer-ence paper together with him. In this way he could hands-on coach them into the international research community.

In 2009 Bengt together with colleagues from the Jönköping Internation Business School and Växjö University wrote an application for a new Swedish Master programme in innovation and entrepreneurship, to be financed by the Swedish government. When it wasn’t financed he got quite upset. What angered him was that the government did not care what the research on entrepreneurship could contribute. Since the application joined the forces at the Jönköping Internation Business School and those at the Växjö University (now Linnaeus University) two major centers for entreprenurship and family-business research were brought together. In the 1990ies Växjö University ranked fourth in the world outside Northamerica as regards entrepre-neurship research and education and today Jönköping International Business School accommodates one of the world’s leading family-business research centers. Both institutions had a track record as regards building a bridge between academics and practitioners. Bengt strongly believes it should have been possible to do something important from an international perspec-tive with the proposed excellence master programme.

As a complete human being there are other things than research in Bengt’s life. He has chosen to be an extra grandpa in a public school. Thus I wanted to ask him why he has chosen to do this, and how it is important for him. Is entrepreneurship something important for the kids?
Children are entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship is something that is initially equally distributed among human beings – later “things happen”. The cultural and institutional factors are then important – they decide where entrepreneurship shows up. For example, the major differences between America and Sweden is that in America entrepreneurship mainly appears as a market phenomenon while in Sweden a lot of entrepreneurial initiatives are taken in the public sector.

Nowadays, one day a week Bengt participates as an extra grandpa in a local primary school. He says it’s fun to see how the kids behave in their everyday setting. This means that sometimes he is seen as the children’s friend, sometimes as their teacher. This also means that he on one hand is invited to the children’s play, on the other hand that the children do not listen to him as obediently as to the teacher. Again, this shows Bengt’s commitment to engage in the reality he describes in his research. You have to stand up for what you believe in, he says. This is for Bengt also a question of “payback to society”, a kind of philanthropy.

Still, what Bengt experiences as his biggest failure as an entrepreneurship scholar is that he has not yet managed to get entrepreneurship to be a mandatory subject in the Swedish teacher’s education. But he will never give up on this, he assures.

Once, Bengt and I and a couple of kids entered the Astrid Lindgren’s World (an amusement park in the Småland region) as one family, with a substantial discounted entrance fee. To me this suggest that Bengt is an entrepreneurial individual who grabs an “opportunity” and also that he does not always separate his professional identity from his private life. Has it always been like this? Is it something important for Bengt?

Yes, he says, I like trying out things, whether in private or in professional life. And if we can do both, as we did by acting as a family visiting the Astrid Lindgren’s World we practiced what Bill Gartner associates with entrepreneurship, that of acting as if what you say is what you can do.

Moreover, I also know that Bengt once applied for an Astrid Lindgren professor chair. But, why did he do that, and what kind of response did he get?

By doing this, Bengt says that he wanted to demonstrate the value of linking culture and entrepreneurship. A chair like this has not necessarily to be only about the literary. Astrid Lindgren herself wanted to point to children’s creativity. Courage and ability to collaborate and also how they are able to view the world differently: a bit upside-down, just like an entrepreneur. The application was a kind of a statement from Bengt’s side. But he only received silence in response.

In connection to all this, my final question has do with the importance of his own upbringing and social life, and how this has influenced his research?

For Bengt there are few boundaries between his professional and social lives. He rather sees their interweaving as the meaning of life. His commitment to his students, who have often been invited home to the big house with a sauna at the lakeside illustrates this. Fun for the students and for me, though perhaps not always as fun for my wife, Bengt says when we conclude the interview. Actually, he adds, this is exactly what my father used to do.
References


Åsa LINDHOLM DAHLSTRAND


