

## **Call for Papers:**

*Special Issue of Small Business Economics: An Entrepreneurship Journal*

### **Entrepreneurial Ecosystems**

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#### **Overview**

Many governments around the world seem to have openly accepted the functional economic theory of entrepreneurship as a pathway toward economic development (Hannon 2006; Minniti and Lévesque 2008, p. 605). This response by governments is consistent with the argument that a shift in the economic base toward knowledge requires a context and environment supportive of entrepreneurship (Audretsch & Thurik, 2004). However, creating a context and a supportive environment tends to limit the responsibility of government (Stam 2014) and instead opens up a shared responsibility of many who nurture, encourage, support, fund, advise, facilitate and work for, or, with entrepreneurs and their ventures. In other words, the economic outcomes of entrepreneurship sought by governments and the like, are a product of not only policy inputs but also socially embedded factors that underpin the creation, growth and flourishing of new firms and organizations that, if functioning well, can ultimately deliver desirable social and economic outcomes.

By way of support for this idea a number of authors have identified with entrepreneurship as being socially embedded. For instance Bygrave and Minniti (2000) discussed the social dynamics of entrepreneurship in terms of the entrepreneur as a catalyst for economic activity that affected the aggregate level of an entire economy. O'Connor (2013), in examining how entrepreneurship education may meet government economic purposes, defined entrepreneurship as the 'social process involving the efforts of individuals in activities that ultimately have economic implications at a regional and/or national level' (p. 559). Lee, Florida and Acs (2004) examined connections between regional social characteristics, human capital and new firm formation and concluded that policy-makers should pay closer attention to the social context that frames entrepreneurship.

The process of entrepreneurship from an entrepreneur's perspective is centrally concerned with opportunity recognition, discovery and/or creation and appropriation of value (Alvarez and Barney, 2004; Schendel & Hitt 2007). However, a new or small firm with growth ambitions does not benefit from the breadth and depth of resources and capabilities of its larger corporate relative (Rumelt 2005). This suggests that the mainstream business strategy literature is inadequate for the

entrepreneurial context and more particularly falls well short of dealing with strategy that relates to the entrepreneur and their interaction with an entrepreneurial ecosystem containing resources not under their control. Within the entrepreneurial sphere of resource management and asset orchestration (Sirmon et al. 2011), there are a number of elements within the activities of structuring, bundling and leveraging resources and assets which will be unique to individual ventures and the context within which they are situated. When these ideas are coupled with the view that entrepreneurship is socially embedded and context specific, the question and responsibility of strategy broadens further and more specifically it focuses on the issues of the strategic management of place as proposed by Audretsch (2015). In this work, strategy-making for entrepreneurship includes the considerations related to the contextual interaction of factors outside of the entrepreneurial firm such as the region's factors of production, spatial and organizational dimensions, human dimensions and policy dimensions.

These viewpoints draw attention to an emerging body of entrepreneurship literature that engages in the examination of the interaction between entrepreneurs, their entrepreneurial firms and the influences of the context within which the entrepreneurs and firms operate. This literature describes this dynamic set of interactions as an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Hwang & Horowitz, 2012). However, care should be taken with the analogy of an ecosystem as human systems differ to systems of nature due to three principle factors; foresight/intentionality, communication and technology (Holling 2001). While some suggest that an ecosystem embodies the interactions and interdependencies within industry value chains (Adner & Kapoor, 2010) others are defining the ecosystem beyond the value chain and instead place emphasis on the concepts of an interdependent set of actors, governance and the enabling of entrepreneurial action (Stam 2014). Acs, Szerb and Erko (2014) have developed an approach to entrepreneurial ecosystems where they incorporate both agency and institutions into a system using configuration theory.

Although it may be observed that there are common characteristics among entrepreneurial ecosystems (Isenberg 2010), every entrepreneurial ecosystem is different and idiosyncratic (Mason & Brown 2014). A mistake would be to believe or think that entrepreneurial ecosystems are the domain of only a few highly economically productive places. Rather, every place that is occupied by economic actors is more likely than not to have some form of an entrepreneurial ecosystem but the differentiating factor will be to what extent they are effective and efficient at achieving specific outputs and outcomes relevant to some specified set of regionally based objectives.

An important characteristic of entrepreneurial ecosystem research, that should not be overlooked, is that entrepreneurial success does not end at any point of the formation, survival, growth, and exit stages of an entrepreneurial firm's lifecycle. Instead a study of entrepreneurial ecosystems demands cross-level, or perhaps better stated as cross-systems, analysis. Entrepreneurial success in this context is determined by the ability of entrepreneurs to act as a transmission mechanism (Acs et al. 2014) to advance the socioeconomic fortunes of the place within which the entrepreneurial venturing happens. This view also suggests that an entrepreneurial ecosystem may be a composite model which may contain different systems contributing different elements to what eventually becomes the regionally considered entrepreneurial ecosystem.

## **Research Topics**

This call for papers seeks empirical, theoretical/conceptual research that explores the key areas that account for ecosystem dynamics that are critical to an entrepreneur contributing to the socioeconomic fortunes of place. In brief, we are interested in the strategic management of the entrepreneurial ecosystem with respect to optimizing its performance for explicitly or tacitly stated social and economic outcomes. In our view entrepreneurs engage with the discovery and/or creation and development of an opportunity, establish a new firm and subsequently attempt to grow that firm in a manner that may have an effect at the social and economic levels within a region or specific place. The objective of this call is to assemble a set of papers that deal with aspects of strategic practice and strategic behaviours of the many different types of actors, including individuals and institutions, that interact with resource constrained and/or independent entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial teams in the pursuit of socioeconomic gains at regional or similar levels of analysis.

In particular, we aim at collecting a set of articles that build upon the available evidence to strengthen and structure our understanding, provide robust analysis and demonstrate new insights into the complex relationships that are contained within an entrepreneurial ecosystem and how these may be strategically managed. Papers that embrace different approaches or levels of analysis and adopt an international perspective are especially welcomed. Papers could focus on (but are not limited to) the following topics:

- *Developing the theoretical framework for entrepreneurial ecosystems.* While definitions of entrepreneurial ecosystems are important, perhaps more important and relevant is the structure of entrepreneurial ecosystems that are suggested by various definitions. Papers that provide strong and deep theoretical foundations that may explain variance in definitions and examine multi-perspectival views are sought. Equally, using these theoretical frameworks to examine places and/or contrasting places to empirically ground theory would also make an excellent contribution.
- *Understanding and defining stakeholder roles within an entrepreneurial ecosystem.* Given that policy-makers are not on their own with respect to creating the context for entrepreneurship, a close examination of the various stakeholders that may influence the entrepreneurial ecosystem is warranted. Stakeholders may include individuals such as the entrepreneur, policy-makers, role-model entrepreneurs or angel investors or it may be defined at the organizational level of government departments, research institutes and universities, service providers, banks and venture capital firms etc. Research that examines the motivations, strategic behaviours, and/or intentions of the various individuals or organizations, or, research that relates these attributes to the changes in the entrepreneurial ecosystem configuration would be well received.
- *Interrogating the contributing factors and reciprocity among the contextual social dynamics and the entrepreneurial ecosystem.* Moving beyond the roles of actors draws attention to the artefacts of those roles that comprise programs, practices, new institutions, procedures, social or industry expectations and norms. Analysis of the contributions and influences of these elements on entrepreneurial behaviours and similarly how the entrepreneurial behaviours influence social dynamics would be valuable areas of contribution. Comparisons of different entrepreneurial ecosystems may also reveal insight into how the mediating variance affects the socioeconomic outputs and outcomes.

- *Examining governance, policy and strategy.* Who is responsible and how entrepreneurial ecosystems are managed in theory and practice for the strategic advantage of a region are key areas ripe for further development. Coordinating stakeholders, developing, shaping and modifying the institutions and specific influencing socially constructed artefacts that affect entrepreneurial ecosystems in a way that optimizes the performance are as yet largely under-researched. Furthermore, how is the concept of an entrepreneurial ecosystem differentiated, linked or opposed to alternate regionally based economic development strategies such as clusters, industrial districts, innovation systems and learning regions and other research that focuses on the firm's external conditions for innovation and business performance?
- *Delving into issues of performance objectives and measurement.* If an entrepreneurial ecosystem is to be strategically managed, performance measurement systems that account for variations in objectives also need to be provided with a theoretical underpinning. Some particular questions may include: What tools and techniques are available and how are they operationalised in the field? How do they account for multi-level inputs and outputs and how are issues of reliability and validity in the measures used dealt with? What time frames of measurement are relevant to which particular measures?
- *Probing the procedures and methods of systems and system interactions analysis.* To conduct research in many of the areas mentioned above will require creative and perhaps new research methods for the field of entrepreneurship. Articles that deal expressly with research methods, particularly those adopting systems views and/or novel approaches to research will be especially appealing.

### **Key dates**

The deadline for submission to this Special Issue is September 30, 2015. Publication is expected during the last quarter of 2016.

As a means to facilitate further development of the concepts, methods and research approaches and as a means to facilitate the community of researchers working in this domain, a symposium of invited scholars is planned for mid-June 2016 at the University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia hosted by the Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Innovation Centre. All authors of papers submitted to this call, regardless of acceptance for publication, will receive an invitation.

Submissions to the special issue should be sent electronically to Allan O'Connor (allan.oconnor@adelaide.edu.au) before September 30, 2015. All submissions will be subject to the standard review process followed by *Small Business Economics: An Entrepreneurship Journal*. All manuscripts must be original, unpublished works that are not concurrently under review for publication elsewhere. All submissions should conform to the SBEJ manuscript submission guidelines available at:

<http://www.springer.com/business+%26+management/business+for+professionals/journal/11187>.

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