
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Michael Dowling received his PhD in Business Administration from the University of Texas at Austin in 1988. Currently, he is a Professor at the University of Regensburg (Germany) and is the Chair of Innovation and Technology Management. Together with Jürgen Schmude, he founded the annual *Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research* (IECER) in 2003 and is the author of more than 20 peer-reviewed articles in the fields of technology management and entrepreneurship.

Jürgen Schmude is a Professor at the University of Munich, Germany. He holds a PhD in Geography (1987, the University of Heidelberg, Germany). In 1993, he received his certificate for the supervision of doctoral research (*Habilitation*) (Entrepreneurship, the University of Heidelberg) and became a tenured Professor in 1994. From 1998 to 2004, he was the Coordinator of “Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Research”, a research programme funded by the German Research Association (DFG). Together with Michael Dowling, he established the annual *Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research* (IECER) in 2003 and is the author of more than 20 peer-reviewed articles in the fields of entrepreneurship and economic geography. (<http://www.geographie.uni-muenchen.de/departement/fiona/personen/>).

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The *Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research* (IECER) has been founded in 2003 by Michael Dowling (Technology Management and Entrepreneurship) and Jürgen Schmude (Economic Geography) in Regensburg University, Germany. Since 2003, four editions of the IECER (Regensburg, 2003/2004; Amsterdam, 2005; Regensburg, 2006) have brought together each year participants from more than 15 countries. It has become one of the leading entrepreneurship research conferences on the field in Europe providing scholars from various disciplines the opportunity to present and discuss their latest research findings.

In February 2007, the IECER was organised by the GSCM-Montpellier Business School and University of Montpellier. This 5th edition of the IECER conference summoned 80 entrepreneurship scholars from many disciplines and 23 countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA. Comparative studies, emphasis on context and an increasing amount of research about emerging industries and markets were the most important trends revealed during the conference.

These topics reflect the current debates in entrepreneurship. Today, even SMEs that are individually weak may become internationally competitive and successful in a positive environment. Local clusters and knowledge networks are becoming increasingly important for new high-tech firms and new strategic competences needed by entrepreneurs are drawing on these spillovers and pooled capabilities of local clusters or networks (Ratten *et al.*, 2007). The 'region' is becoming increasingly important and future entrepreneurship research should value, in our opinion, the regional perspective in a more prominent way. A particular opportunity to do this was the 2007 edition of the IECER where scholars gathered around the overall theme of the conference 'Entrepreneurship and the Region'. The organisers took this opportunity to organise a special issue containing the best papers on this topic to the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* (IJESB) as an important outlet for research results focusing on international, cross-cultural and comparative academic research about entrepreneurs.

This special issue is introduced by a review of entrepreneurship research presented at the past five IECER Conferences (Schmude *et al.*). Attendant structures, outreach (regional patterns), participation of disciplines, thematical focus of research presented at the conference, and recent trends are discussed. Characteristics of the IECER are the high level of selectivity and quality, an evolving focus on original and new research, an increasing number of countries represented (Europe and outside Europe), a high disciplinary openness displayed by a comparatively lower number of participants from business compared to other conferences, and finally, a specific focus on the environment and regional issues.

The second article resumes the keynote speech for the conference theme 'Entrepreneurship and the region' (Malecki). The author examines the role of the geographical environment on entrepreneurship and addresses the issues of regional disparities in entrepreneurship, regional attractiveness for new venture creation, and ways in which local environments can be improved. The article concludes on the specific value of the entrepreneur as part of local society and networks when he is able to draw upon external (global) knowledge and information. Those extroverted community entrepreneurs are supposed to be critical for geographical environments leveraging entrepreneurship dynamics and growth.

The following papers were nominees for the best paper award, discussing this theme at different levels of analysis: European cross-country level (Bosma and Schutjens), subregional level (Lladós *et al.*) and individual level (Rønning).

The Bosma and Schutjens study describes the link between entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial activity at the regional level. It explores both entrepreneurial attitudes and activity using data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor over the period 2001–2006 and provides newly constructed, harmonised regional indices on entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial activity across 18 European countries (NUTS I and II level). By mapping these indices, patterns emerge on different spatial levels. On the European regional level, results indicate that entrepreneurial activity in a region does not necessarily relate to well-developed or well-developing regional economies. Entrepreneurship may be high in both highly competitive and lower competitive environments. The authors explain this finding with different entrepreneurial attitudes between the European regions of their sample. On the subcountry level, high density areas display high degrees of early stage entrepreneurship, but the spatial pattern

is less important when ownership rates are observed. The authors conclude that for setting up a business regional conditions matter and national institutions are less crucial. But when it comes to more advanced phases of entrepreneurship (survival, growth, *etc.*), national conditions gain in importance.

Lladós *et al.* use the concept of innovative milieu to assess entrepreneurship activity in the Barcelona region. They analyse whether a local entrepreneurship support agency, Barcelona Activa (BA), promotes the development of an innovative milieu, which favours entrepreneurial attitudes. The study outlines the contribution of BA to the emergence of an innovation cluster that fosters entrepreneurial attitudes. The results highlight the positive effects of the combination of incubation experience, development of ICT-based innovations and cooperation on the success probability of new ventures. Participation in institutional activities to develop commercial and social networks improves the chances of survival and growth. The entrepreneurship support agency observed seems to be specifically suitable for entrepreneurs with labour experience and plays a complementary role in the framework of the wide range of university spin-off centres in the metropolitan region.

Rønning examines the relationship between social and entrepreneurship activity in Norwegian farm households. The objective of the study is to refine the framework for studying social capital (including the distinction between business-related/civil society-related social capital and between positive/negative effects of social capitals) and to measure empirically how different forms of social capital impact on entrepreneurial activity. Based upon a survey, including 712 Norwegian farm households, in which 20% were engaged in entrepreneurial activity, evidence was found of enabling social capital in terms of diverse networks and in terms of strong ties that could facilitate cooperation (civic participation, membership in business organisations and perceived cooperation opportunities). The results indicate the positive effect of interaction with networks inside and outside the local community and across professional groups. Disabling social capital for entrepreneurial activity has been identified for overembeddedness in the farming community ('having grown up in a farm'). Control variables indicate also that entrepreneurial activity decreases with age while farming households with experience (past or current) in farming business have a higher start-up probability. Other results indicate that improved measures are needed to address civil society-related social capital.

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Reference

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