
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Michael Dowling received his PhD in Business Administration from the University of Texas at Austin, USA in 1988. Currently he is a Professor at the University of Regensburg (Germany) and holds the Chair of Innovation and Technology Management. Together with Jürgen Schmude, he founded the annual *Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research* (IECER) in 2003. His research interest focuses on technology management and entrepreneurship.

Jürgen Schmude is a Professor at the University of Munich, Germany. He obtained a PhD in Geography in 1987 (University of Heidelberg, Germany). In 1993 he received his certificate for the supervision of doctoral research (*Habilitation*) (Entrepreneurship, 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. His research interest focuses on entrepreneurship and economic geography (<http://www.geographie.uni-muenchen.de/departement/fiona/personen/>).

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In March 2008, the *Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research* (IECER) was organised by Michael Dowling and Jürgen Schmude at the University of Regensburg, Germany. The IECER brings together annually participants from different European centres for research (Regensburg 2003, 2004; Amsterdam 2005; Regensburg 2006, Montpellier 2007; Regensburg 2008). IECER has become one of the most important entrepreneurship research conferences in Europe, where researchers from many disciplines have the opportunity to discuss their latest research findings in an interdisciplinary forum. The sixth annual IECER attracted over 60 entrepreneurship scholars from many disciplines and 13 countries (Austria, China, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK). Over 40 paper presentations explored the overall theme 'Entrepreneurial Contexts, Decisions, and Strategies'. These topics addressed current debates in entrepreneurship, and for the second time, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* provided a special issue and guest editorship to the organisers of the conference to publish a selection of papers, which we briefly summarise in the following. Three articles in this special issue focus on entrepreneurial contexts (Heumann *et al.*; Van der Steen *et al.*; Fritsch *et al.*), two on learning strategies and decision making (Ettl and Welter; O'Shea and Buckley) and three on entrepreneurial strategies in specific types of firms or environments, such as emerging economies (Leitão and Franco; Gurau and Dana; Fertala).

The first article (Heumann *et al.*) analyses the institutional context with a focus on academic entrepreneurship and measures the entrepreneurial output of 'traditional' research universities and Universities of Applied Science (UASs) in Germany. The main results indicate important differences between both types of institutions. In particular, the UASs, focused on their principal teaching mission and less concerned with research, trigger entrepreneurial activity of former students on a higher level than expected. For research universities, a direct link is measured between R&D expenditure and the number of students (investment in research and entrepreneurial potential) in cultural sciences, economics, social sciences and human medicine research and knowledge-based entrepreneurship. In UASs, R&D investment and student-related entrepreneurial potential are linked to engineering sciences. Internal resources for entrepreneurship (chairs or technology transfer staff) prove to be stimulating for students in research universities, but not for those in UAS. An entrepreneurial 'climate' indicating opportunities for entrepreneurship in the local labour market has a positive effect for UASs, but not for research universities. These differences indicate that both types of universities

generate entrepreneurship in different areas by students having different disciplinary and knowledge backgrounds specific to their university. In sum, students of both types of institutions start up firms in different knowledge-based industries. These findings have important implications for the entrepreneurship policy of universities and regional governments.

The second article (Van der Steen *et al.*) is much in line with the previous one and focuses on determinants of knowledge-based spin-offs at the organisational level. Aside from institutional factors, the authors explore human capital and technology-based determinants for the success of science-based entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. Additionally, the longitudinal approach analyses the impact of these factors in phases of the spin-off process. The findings point out the importance of external CEOs in helping the new ventures to develop and deploy network contacts or cooperative agreements, considered crucial for entrepreneurial success. The authors also reveal interaction effects related to the role external CEOs play for scientific spin-offs. External CEOs appear to enhance the high scientific quality of successful spin-offs, but prove to be valuable also for ventures with a comparatively lower level of scientific quality by identifying the appropriate commercial purpose for the spin-off through business contacts and complementary business skills.

While the first two articles explore the determinants for knowledge-based entrepreneurship (and success), the third article (Fritsch *et al.*) concentrates on the regional level and measures the effects of new ventures on employment in West Germany's planning regions (*Raumordnungsregionen*). Separating the changes in employment caused by existing from those caused by new businesses, the relevance of indirect effects is revealed. The indirect effects of new ventures appear to be more important than direct employment effects.

The fourth article (Ettl and Welter) focuses on the learning and knowledge acquisition of female entrepreneurs. The authors investigate in detail women's entrepreneurship in the frame of entrepreneurial learning and opportunity recognition. The sample of German female entrepreneurs reveals a specific societal context that still restricts women's entrepreneurship in different ways. As a consequence, the entrepreneurs in their sample tend to restrict themselves owing to lack of self-confidence or unjustified fears of failure. Entrepreneurship support also appears to pay insufficient attention to the diversity of women's ventures. The findings support the importance of sector environments in the learning process. It appears that women have to break out of typical female behaviour in male-dominated sectors to successfully develop their venture. The results of this study make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the entrepreneurial learning of female entrepreneurs and provide useful insights and implications for entrepreneurship support infrastructure.

The fifth article (O'Shea and Buckley) concentrates on the entrepreneurial learning process of new ventures. The authors explore this issue from a psychological perspective and the findings reveal complex networks of strategies deployed by entrepreneurs for the purpose of learning and knowledge acquisition in the early stages of entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurs in their sample use specifically environments and networks to facilitate their learning process. The results provide valuable insights into effective ways of learning in the entrepreneurial process.

The sixth article (Leitão and Franco) explores the impact of human and organisational capital on the performance of Portuguese Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) using both economic and noneconomic indicators as performance measures. The study is an innovative approach as it uses data collected at the individual level (entrepreneur) and provides interesting findings concerning the relationship between entrepreneurial performance and types of capital: While 'enthusiasm at work' is the only significant human capital variable when using noneconomic performance indicators, organisational capital is supported by several proxies ('efficient organisational structure'; 'participative management'; 'incentives for interdisciplinary discussion and dialogue'; 'frequent meetings of working groups'). Economic performance indicators produce a more balanced picture (human capital: 'entrepreneur's intuition', 'propensity for innovating activities'; organisational capital: 'efficient organisational structure', 'use of external indicators for improving entrepreneurial performance').

The last two articles focus on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial strategies in emerging economies like Romania (Gurau and Dana) and Bulgaria (Fertala). Gurau and Dana describe the business environment in Romania in a longitudinal approach covering the period from 1989 to 2007. The evolution from a centralised and planned economy offered new opportunities for local entrepreneurs, but the business environment in this transition economy proved to be complex and unpredictable during the observation period. New opportunities for entrepreneurs were hampered by multiple barriers and challenges, preventing the success and continuity of entrepreneurial activity. The entrepreneurial strategies of entrepreneurs in this transition economy require a flexible learning process; entrepreneurs need to constantly improve their analytical and decision-making skills to adapt to rapidly changing market conditions. The most successful entrepreneurs appear to be those who engage more effectively in a flexible learning process, which draws upon all available resources to determine appropriate solutions to the challenges they face in a changing economy. Considering Bulgaria, Fertala focuses on the internationalisation of innovation-based firms in this transition economy. The findings reveal several factors that trigger formal national and international cooperation activities for product and process innovation. Operating in European and international markets and government measures (funding), for example, increases the propensity to engage in formal international cooperation. Human capital factors prove to play only a minor role in the cooperation behaviour of Bulgarian firms.

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