
Editorial

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This special issue is dedicated to entrepreneurship and small business research in France. Also included are francophone scholars from Belgium and Switzerland, and also from French-speaking Africa and Canada. Approximately 350 scholars of this community are members of two principal academic associations: *Association Internationale de Recherche en Entrepreneuriat et PME* (AIREPME), and *Académie de l'Entrepreneuriat et de l'Innovation* (AEI). Two research journals are affiliated to AIREPME and AIE: *La Revue de l'Entrepreneuriat*, and *La Revue Internationale PME*.

More than a dozen research centres in French business schools and in public universities are specialised in entrepreneurship and small business. A specific trait of French entrepreneurship research is the use of qualitative approaches (Lasch and Yami, 2008; Fayolle and Messeghem, 2011). Each year, an average of 30 PhDs defend their dissertations in this domain (Fayolle and Messeghem, 2011). Prominent themes are for example entrepreneurship support, types of entrepreneurs, international entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, firm growth, and family businesses experience. Recently, other themes have emerged, such as health and entrepreneurship (Torrès, 2012).

In June 2012, the workshop *Entrepreneurship Research in France: From Theory to Practice* was held for the second time. This was one of the first events organised by the newly launched LabEx 'Entrepreneurship' (University of Montpellier, France) – a laboratory of excellence funded by the French government in recognition of high-level research initiatives in the human and natural sciences; it is the only entrepreneurship laboratory in France labelled 'Labex'. More than 200 researchers and PhD students are part of this large entrepreneurship research community. Bridging theory and practice, the workshop received much attention and almost 100 researchers and practitioners took part in debate and discussions. Following the event, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* (IJESB) offered a special issue based on the papers presented, to witness the diversity of approaches in the French entrepreneurship community, such as preference for qualitative methods, conceptual contributions,

entrepreneurial process as privileged research theme and small and micro-firms as research object (Lasch and Yami, 2008; Welter and Lasch, 2008).

This diversity of approaches is reflected in this special issue: out of the six contributing papers, two are of conceptual/theoretical nature (Grazzini, Albanet and Boissin; Schmitt and Husson); one uses a qualitative research design (Messeghem, Sammut, Gangloff and Bakkali); another uses an action-research approach (Verstraete, Jouison-Laffitte, Kremer and Hlady-Rispal); and two adopt quantitative methods (Vial and Richomme-Huet; Robert, El Shoubaki, Lasch and Dana). Research themes address the entrepreneurial process and entrepreneurial (in particular small business) contexts. They explore incubator performance; cognitive dimensions of:

- 1 entrepreneurial situations (the interplay of entrepreneur, opportunity, and context)
- 2 firms transfer; relevance of strategic tools (business model) for small incumbent firms; female entrepreneurship and high tech entrepreneurship.

In France, we observe a strong entrepreneurship policy, and the entrepreneurship support infrastructure is well developed. The first article ('Performance measurement of French incubators' by Messeghem et al.) addresses the timely and relevant question of performance measurement of such structures. Using a balanced scorecard approach, the authors combine entrepreneurship and management control. The practical implications are two-fold: firstly, the balanced scorecard tool is well adapted for the evaluation of incubator performance; secondly, the balanced scorecard approach includes all stakeholders of the incubation process and responds to demands of new public management viz. to associate stakeholders in the evaluation process.

The second paper ('Entrepreneurial situations, definition and interests for entrepreneurial research' by Schmitt and Husson) proposes a new concept to capture the cognitive side of the relation between entrepreneur, opportunity and context ('entrepreneurial situations'). The paper contributes to the understanding of lived experiences of the entrepreneur in relation to his/her environment(s) for opportunity recognition and exploitation. From a practical viewpoint, this concept underlines that entrepreneurship support is not only about to help start a business, but also to help the entrepreneur to build meaning based on opportunity.

The third contribution ('SME owner-manager representations of firm transfer' by Grazzini, Albanet and Boissin) deals with firm transmission and explores cognitive dimensions of the firm transfer process. Focusing on the seller (and not on the buyer), different types of mental representations emerge (social manager; serial entrepreneur; unsuccessful entrepreneur; and leader expecting change) that could challenge generic entrepreneurship support in the context of firm transmission. This again highlights the value of considering cognitive dimensions when designing public policies.

The fourth ('Assessing business model relevance for business leaders in the construction industry' by Verstraete et al.) explores the relevance of business models in incumbent small firms in a traditional sector (construction). In such a particular small firm context, strategic tools are rarely used. The authors find that business models are relevant and useful outside their original context viz. new ventures, start-ups, etc.

The last two ('Women entrepreneurs in France', by Vial and Richomme-Huet; 'Linking types of ICT entrepreneurs to new firm survival', by Robert et al.) use rich public French datasets stemming from a longitudinal questionnaire framework administered by French authorities to obtain cohort data for newly founded firms. From

an entrepreneurship support perspective, entrepreneurship is considered as an underexploited employment entry-mode for women in France. The authors of this paper find contrasting evidence: female entrepreneurship appears to be concentrated in traditionally gendered industries and firms founded by women start smaller (despite unconstrained access to finance), but while female entrepreneurs outperform their male counterparts in terms of management, they struggle to get outside support.

Robert et al. expand a prior study (Robert et al., 2009) that revealed the existence of four different (and sometimes quite unexpected) entrepreneur profiles in the French ICT industry. Replicating this typology, Robert et al. study the crucial issue of new firm survival and:

- 1 find that survival rates differ significantly between the four types
- 2 identify the individual-level and organisational-level determinants that explain these different levels of survival.

More specifically, they observe unexpected human capital effects on new firm survival. Findings reveal negative effects of opportunity costs, negative or not significant results of industry and management experience, and no effects of entrepreneurship capital and preparation. As well, they find that a critical firm size is required in order to enable entrepreneurial learning in small organisations. Their findings challenge generic entrepreneurship support policy in ICT industries and offer new insights to the question how policy can better direct support to foster innovation and growth in new firms.

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