
Book Review

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Entrepreneurship in Western Europe: A Contextual Perspective
by: Leo-Paul Dana
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The concept of entrepreneurship has taken different meanings both in the scientific literature and in the professional language. The term entrepreneur was first used in 1755 by the French economist Richard Cantillon, to define the person who takes on himself high risks concerning the production activities. At the outset of the 19th century, Jean Baptiste Say focused his attention on the capacity of managing the resources effectively, to seize the better opportunities of the market; Say analysed the figure of the entrepreneur both in the perspective of managing the activities and of risk taking. In the second half of the century, Carl Menger placed his attention on the ability of the entrepreneurs to identify the goods that have a marketing value and of those that have no value, and therefore should not be exchangeable. In 1934, Schumpeter gave his fundamental contribution to the development of the concept of entrepreneurship and to that of innovation. In this sense, the entrepreneur is he who searches for new profitable opportunities by introducing innovative elements (new products; new production methods; new forms of organisation; new markets; new raw material sources). In Schumpeter's model, what drives economic development is the profit that the entrepreneur is entitled to for the innovations that he has produced. In the second half of the 20th century, a number of studies resumed Schumpeter's thought and scrutinised it, by analysing the entrepreneurial function with respect to the ability to innovate. Although there are different meanings to the term entrepreneurship, some noteworthy features can be identified, that either combined or separated, characterise its economic function: the ability to identify new market opportunities; the capacity to operate a synthesis between the demand expressed by the market and the productive factors needed to create a system of supply; the significant risk-taking related to the undertaking of a new initiative. Entrepreneurship should be considered a decisive factor, on which, very often, the socio-economic development of nations and territories is based on.

Over the years, a series of contributions have been issued on the subject of the entrepreneurship that can be related to the following topics: the concept of entrepreneurship and specific type of entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship and small

business; entrepreneurship and start up; comparative analysis of entrepreneurship in different countries; internal entrepreneurship in medium sized and large companies. Professor Dana's newest book, *Entrepreneurship in Western Europe: A Contextual Perspective*, cuts across most of the research topics on entrepreneurship; however, it can undoubtedly be stated that he focuses his attention on the comparative analysis of the different types of entrepreneurship in several countries. The fundamental assumption of his research is related to the fact that the characteristics of entrepreneurship are neither standard nor homogeneous under a time and spatial point of view, consequently, the attitudes and entrepreneurial abilities vary depending on firm's context. Accordingly, this implies the reference to a definition of enterprise as a complex entity in which economic, social, psychological, sociological elements interact; according to Professor Dana's work, the enterprises cannot be considered as simple economic entities or, worse, as trivial black boxes where the resources are transformed into products and services. The purpose of the book is to provide a careful description and an effective interpretation of the concept of entrepreneurship in Western European countries. The subject analysed is relevant for two reasons: the importance Europe has had in the socio-economic development of the entire planet; the constant changes that have often affected the context in which the entrepreneurial activity was being developed. One could consider, for instance, the political and economic unification process which has characterised the past 50 years of European history and which allowed the creation of a single currency, the euro. The author adopts a kind of contingency type method in the comparative analysis of different types of entrepreneurship in various countries in order to evaluate the influence of the context elements that have an impact on the enterprises and socio-economic development in different territorial areas. Professor Dana's research reveals how history has shaped the environment in which the enterprises have developed; indeed, the historical factors influence the social-cultural and religious context which, in turn, often affects the entrepreneur's attitude towards starting new activities and taking relevant risks. In Professor Dana's analysis, the impact of the geographic context on the entrepreneurial function should not be neglected: in some cases, the natural environment might favour the undertaking of entrepreneurial initiatives, and, in other circumstances, it might hinder the rise and the development of the enterprises. The most impressive element of this research is the wide and in depth analysis of the Western Europe entrepreneurial context. The bottom-up methodological approach is the most fascinating aspect of the book and it makes the reading really pleasant, also for the ones who do not have an economic and managerial background. Professor Dana takes the reader on an exciting journey to virtually every Western European country, in order to outline the situation of the context in which the entrepreneurship is created and develops. This narrative technique is crucial to facilitate the understanding of the different entrepreneurial characteristics of the territories of Western Europe. Professor Dana shows a truly extraordinary knowledge of the Western Europe context; his context analysis takes into account every perspective: geographical aspects, historical elements, socio-demographic, cultural, religious characteristics and legislative framework. The author provides a range of vivid pictures of the different entrepreneurial activities and about their associated contexts, through an almost poetic writing style, also with his use of suggestive images. The specific type of bottom-up approach allows the author to deeply analyse of the contextual elements and to effectively describe the different characteristics of Western European entrepreneurship: for example, in some northern European countries (e.g., Finland, Sweden), the enterprises associate their success to natural

resources; Rhineland's economic model is based on long-term relationships with stakeholders such as banks and employees; the UK is characterised by a model of governance where the power is centralised in the headquarters; in Denmark, the environmental-friendly entrepreneurial models have spread; horizontal network alliances have spread across Western Europe, while the vertical ones are common especially in southern Europe.

Professor Dana's brilliant writing achievement is linked, on the one hand, to his striking knowledge of the specialised scientific literature of each country analysed, on the other hand, to the structure of the book that presents some systematic elements which make much easier for the reader to identify the most relevant aspects. To each country (Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The UK), he devotes a chapter of the book. It is systematically organised in an introductory part, an historical overview, an analysis of the environment for entrepreneurship and the identification of the future perspectives. Apart from demonstrating an effective ability to represent reality, the author highlights an outstanding capacity of interpreting the entrepreneurial activities in the different contexts observed. Professor Dana's considerations always reveal particularly acute. From his research, some relevant elements for reflection and further analysis emerge:

- The historical, cultural, religious, social, political and geographical contexts influence the development of the abilities and of the entrepreneurial attitudes, impacting both on a micro and on a macro level. In this view, history demonstrates that Europe is not only the summing up of nations, many different cultures, varied social organisations, different ideologies and schools of thoughts have had an influence on Europe. With respect to the impact of different cultures, the entrepreneurial context of Western Europe can be understood 'in terms of overlapping layers' (compared to the US melting pot).
- The influence of context is not of a deterministic kind as it is not possible to associate, in all cases, in a unique way, to specific contexts, certain types of entrepreneurship. In this sense, it is necessary to consider the impact of individual variables, particularly the psychological ones, which can sometimes be independent from the context characteristics.
- Entrepreneurship in Western Europe varies greatly at the macro level both in relation to the historical factors and to the regulatory conditions that outline the different contexts.
- The globalisation of markets, the technological convergence and the partial homogenisation of the regulatory conditions of the European Union make the macro-economic scenario, less diversified than in the past.
- The weakening of the importance of the nation-states enhances the degree of internationalisation of the models of business, almost in every context and in a cross-cutting way.
- On a micro level the impact of cultural and social factors keeps being relevant in the elaboration of business models which are deeply different amongst themselves.

- The existence of specific sub-cultures inside the national states brings to the identification of specific entrepreneurial models that show totally peculiar characteristics. The presence of unique context conditions, cross-cutting the national states, makes the research in this field both complex and fascinating.
- The decreasing importance of the stand-alone firms, brings to the definition of entrepreneurial models based on cooperation (opposed to competition) and to the development of symbiotic ideas of business aiming at the creation of interdependence (opposed to the search for independence). The presence in Western Europe of network alliances and of clusters demonstrates the reality of this overarching trend.

Professor Dana's new book succeeds in synthesising in the best possible way the characteristics of Western Europe entrepreneurial activities by highlighting the most significant elements that can bring to the creation of convergent and divergent business models. We must be grateful to Professor Dana for taking up such a laborious topic (due to the complexity of the west European context) with an approach that combines methodological scientific expertise to efficacy of presentation. This book will surely offer an excellent foundation for all those who are interested in an in depth study of the topic of entrepreneurship in Western Europe (researchers, businessmen, managers and politicians) and also to analyse the peculiarities of the business models of the single nations, but also of the specific territorial areas. The writing style, poetical and engaging, will add to the pleasure of reading about themes that are generally presented inadequately to readers coming from different backgrounds.