
Concepts and facets of entrepreneurial diversity: moving the discussion forward

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1 Introduction

If you think about entrepreneurship and small businesses, what picture comes to mind? Whom would you call an entrepreneur? What characterises that person? What characterises his or her company? The variety of answers might be as multifaceted as the number of people considering these questions. More than 30 years ago, Gartner (1985:696) spotted that “*differences among entrepreneurs and among their ventures are as great as the variation between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs and between new firms and established firms*”. This statement is still true: It is impossible to universalise entrepreneurship – entrepreneurship is about variation and it varies in different dimensions (Welter et al., 2016). Surprisingly, entrepreneurship research has not yet covered entrepreneurial diversity in its conceptually broad sense. This is particularly strange because entrepreneurship research evolved during a time when contingency theory – of which diversity is a central aspect – flourished in the field of management. Dichotomising various categories of entrepreneurship instead of understanding the diversity inherent in it does not reflect reality. Dichotomies are helpful for exploring complex phenomena, but they tend to serve functionalist ends. To capture the uniqueness of each context, Welter et al. (2017) emphasised entrepreneurial diversity and argued that future research must attempt to address variation in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship more adequately. With this introduction as part of a special issue, we take up this call and reflect upon concepts and facets of entrepreneurial diversity, considering history, current topics, and next steps.

Discussions about diversity in both scientific and political debates often leave unexplained what *exactly* we mean by *diversity*. Scientific discussion of diversity is rooted in sociological research. Here, diversity serves not just as a synonym for heterogeneity, variety or multiplicity. Within the frame of *diversity*, researchers analyse and evaluate heterogeneity related to specific individual characteristics (Cox, 1991; Cox and Beale, 1997; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). These individual characteristics are called *diversity categories* or *diversity dimensions* and refer to aspects such as *gender*, *age*, *migration background*, and *physical ability*. From the perspective of selected diversity categories, researchers investigate teams, companies, institutions and all other kinds of groups. Relating to management and business research, *diversity management* in particular has been known for quite some time as a subfield of human resource management that investigates individual characteristics and their influence on firms and firm performance.

Diversity-related levels of analysis in entrepreneurship research have not (yet) been defined clearly. The present special issue offers selected papers that contribute to filling this gap. Further, this introduction provides a context for the papers by suggesting a frame for (researching) entrepreneurial diversity. We aim to contribute to future theorising on entrepreneurial diversity by connecting research about diversity in the entrepreneurship field to other scientific, political and societal discussions about diversity. In doing so, we prepare the ground for discussions of future research.

In the next section, we start with a more detailed look at how *diversity* is defined and conceptualised in sociological research. Afterwards, we take stock of our own research field and shed light on the previous notion of diversity in entrepreneurship research by looking at the discussion in leading scientific journals. We explore what researchers in the entrepreneurship field mean when they talk about diversity and to which characteristics and discussions they are referring. We move forward by developing a

framework to clarify and conceptualise entrepreneurial diversity. Additionally, we introduce the papers in this special issue and conclude with remarks for discussion, implications, and future research directions.

2 Taking stock: existing frames of diversity

To find suitable methods and concepts for future research, it is helpful to look to other disciplines and thereby advance research on entrepreneurship as an interdisciplinary phenomenon (Acs and Audretsch, 2010; Croci, 2016). To frame the term *diversity*, we start by looking at the historical development and state of the art in sociological diversity research and its concepts.

Diversity came to the fore of policy makers' and researchers' attention in particular because of demographic changes and discussions about imminent skill shortages. In the 1980s and 1990s, equal treatment and antidiscrimination for women was a main topic of research, followed by research on age, sexual orientation, physical abilities, religion and ethnicity, which broadened organisation and management studies (Bendl and Eberherr, 2015). From 1988 to 2003, the volume of research with a diversity focus nearly doubled every five years, although the overall research findings were weak and inconsistent (Harrison and Klein, 2007).

In general, sociological diversity research is guided by two different theoretical approaches. According to the first approach, diversity provokes conflicts, divisions, and dissolutions (Harrison and Klein, 2007). Managing diversity is therefore defined in terms of learning to cope with unassimilated differences (Gordon, 1992). The second approach appreciates diversity as such, as it sparks creativity and innovation (Hewlett et al., 2013). From a business perspective, researchers have especially considered the economic value of having diverse individuals in a team and using diversity management as a tool to increase companies' growth and development (Litvin, 1997). Research focuses on several single dimensions of diversity (e.g., *gender*), their parameter values (e.g., *female*, *male*) and relations between those parameters (Hanappi-Egger, 2012), using individuals and their attributes as reference points. Moreover, different diversity dimensions have not only been examined on their own but also interlinked with each other (Bendl and Eberherr, 2015). This research on *intersectionality* examines interrelations between categories and their consequences (McCall, 2005).

An often-quoted and adapted model to map diversity is the 'four layers of diversity' scheme presented by Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003). Building on and expanding work from Loden and Rosener (1991), they group different diversity dimensions into a model with the following four levels:

- 1 personality
- 2 internal dimensions (age, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, ethnicity and race)

- 3 external dimensions (geographic location, income, personal habits, recreational habits, religion, educational background, work experience, appearance, parental status and marital status)
- 4 organisational dimensions (functional level/classification, work content/field, division/department unit/group, seniority, work location, union or political affiliation and management status) (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 2003; Gardenswartz et al., 2008, 2010).

Personality refers to the non-interchangeable ways in which individuals think and behave based on their individuality and personal history. *Internal dimensions* comprise parameters that are normally not changeable by individuals themselves. *External dimensions* may alter during the life course and are changeable by individuals themselves. *Organisational dimensions* depend on individuals' professional affiliation. The four layers of diversity model has influenced sociological and societal debate on diversity. It succeeds in bringing together diversity categories that are in other respects often discussed separately. Although the four layers are widely used, they have been the subject of some controversy. The original intention of the authors was to provide support for practitioners and a consulting resource for companies regarding leadership. Therefore, the model captures only partial aspects of variety from a company's point of view and disregards, for instance, heterogeneity in the (organisational) context itself.

Taking stock of and a closer look at the framing of diversity in entrepreneurship research, we investigated the academic discussion on this topic in selected, well-reviewed journals over a predefined period of time. For that purpose, we analysed all papers with the keyword *diversity* published from 2010-2015 in 29 highly ranked business economics, entrepreneurship and small and medium sized enterprise (SME) journals. We focused on these journals only because discussions in these journals largely determine the scope, focus, breadth and relevance of a research field. The basis for our journal sample was the present German Academic Association for Business Research's (VHB's) journal ranking *JOURQUAL 3*. All included journals are classified as reputable and are ranked on the *Harzing* list. Through a keyword search for *diversity*, we found that less than 1% of the papers within the investigated journals and period dealt with the term *diversity*. We finally obtained a preliminary sample of 273 papers from 29 journals, which we downloaded, organised, categorised and analysed with computer-based assistance. Our course of action was as follows: We scanned every paper by reading the abstract, introduction and conclusion section to obtain a clearer idea of what the paper is about. Then, we searched every paper for the term *diversity*, scanned the passages around this keyword, first to see if – and if so, how – the term diversity is defined, and second to discover in which main regard/context the term is used. In this first step, we removed 95 papers that had no further relevance for our study, because the term *diversity* was used only once or twice in the abstract as a simple synonym for *variety* or *heterogeneity* or with a totally different denotation (e.g., biodiversity). Our final sample comprised 178 papers. We categorised and analysed these 178 papers in an exploratory manner using investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2004). Table 1 overviews the included journals and respective papers.

Table 1 Investigated journals and number of papers

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Classification of Journal*</i>	<i>Ranking JOURQUAL III (Impact factor)</i>	<i>Total papers within the investigated period</i>	<i>No. of papers (in %) mentioning 'diversity'</i>
Academy of Management Annals	BA	A (11,115)	466	3 (0,64)
Academy of Management Journal	BA	A+ (7,417)	466	18 (3,86)
Academy of Management Review	BA	A+ (9,408)	241	16 (6,64)
Administrative Science Quarterly	BA	A+ (4,929)	282	3 (1,06)
American Economic Review	BA	A+ (3,833)	1.633	11 (0,67)
Econometrica	BA	A+ (3,379)	572	20 (3,50)
Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice	E-Ship	A (4,916)	369	8 (2,17)
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	E-Ship	B (1,776)	231	11 (4,76)
Experimental Economics	BA	A (2,391)	200	7 (3,50)
Family Business Review	E-Ship; SMEs	B (4,229)	162	4 (2,47)
International Journal of Innovation Management	E-Ship	B (0,07)	344	4 (1,16)
International Small Business Journal	SMEs	C (3,677)	2.215	15 (0,68)
Journal of Business Venturing	E-Ship	A (5,774)	334	10 (2,99)
Journal of Economics & Management Strategy	BA	A (0,912)	230	3 (1,30)
Journal of Family Business Strategy	SMEs	C (2,975)	173	3 (1,73)
Journal of Industrial Economics	BA	A (0,963)	189	0 (0,00)
Journal of Management	BA	A (7,733)	535	20 (3,74)
Journal of Management Studies	BA	A (3,962)	377	9 (2,39)
Journal of Political Economy	BA	A+ (3,923)	200	13 (6,50)
Journal of Small Business Management	E-Ship; SMEs	B (2,876)	253	7 (2,77)
Journal of Small Business Strategy	SMEs	C (k.A.)	81	2 (2,47)
Management Science	BA	A+ (2,822)	962	10 (1,04)
Organisation Studies	BA	A (3,107)	231	11 (4,76)
RAND Journal of Economics	BA	A (1,465)	44	0 (0,00)
Research Policy	E-Ship	A+ (4,495)	1.727	31 (1,80)
Science	BA	B (37,205)	18.658	3 (0,02)
Small Business Economics	E-Ship; SMEs	A (2,421)	506	7 (1,38)
Strategic Management Journal	BA	A (1,465)	571	20 (3,50)
Zeitschrift für KMU und Entrepreneurship	SMEs	C (k.A.)	101	4 (3,96)
			∑ 32.353	∑ 273 (0,84)

*Classification according to the JOURQUAL III Ranking: BA = business administration, E-Ship = entrepreneurship, SMEs = small and medium-sized enterprises.

Source: Own elaboration.

In our investigation, we were interested in what researchers in the entrepreneurship field talk about when they map and talk about *entrepreneurial diversity*. We wanted to know to what attributes, characteristics, and discussions they refer to in this regard. Against this background, the relevant publications in our sample can be classified into five main groups. Most of the papers use *diversity* with reference to *company-related characteristics*, followed by different kinds of *individual-related characteristics*, *environment-related characteristics* and *characteristics of research approaches*. The fifth group includes papers that discuss *diversity and the diversity concept in general* (Table 2).

Table 2 Diversity-related categories used*

<i>Category (No. of hits)</i>	<i>Sub category (No. of hits)</i>
<i>1. Company-related characteristics (123)</i>	
1.1 Teams (58)	Team/group diversity (24) Diversity in workplaces/workgroups (20) Diversity in boards of directors/top management teams (14)
1.2 Innovation, technology, products (37)	Technological (knowledge) diversity (14) Diversity and innovation (14) (Product) portfolio diversity (8) Quality diversity (1)
1.3 Company in general (12)	Diversity of entrepreneur business models (9) Diversity of firms/SMEs (3)
1.4 Management (8)	Strategic diversity (3) Leadership (3) Goal diversity (2)
1.5 Other (8)	Social enterprises (3) Fault lines & diversity (2) Temporal diversity (1) Diversity climate (1) Diversity of prior art (1)
<i>2. Individual-related characteristics (84)</i>	
2.1 Ethnic aspects (31)	Race/ethnicity (19) (Im)migrants and diversity (6) Cultural diversity (5) Nationality diversity (1)
2.2 Gender (23)	
2.3 Experience, informational and educational diversity (9)	
2.4 Entrepreneurial diversity/diversity of entrepreneurs (7)	
2.5 Age (6)	
2.6 Sexual orientation (2)	
2.7 Other (6)	

Table 2 Diversity-related categories used* (continued)

<i>Category (No. of hits)</i>	<i>Sub category (No. of hits)</i>
<i>3. Environment-related characteristics (31)</i>	
3.1 Diversity of networks (20)	Diversity of networks/alliances (17) (Alliance) portfolio diversity (2) Diversity of stakeholder interests (1)
3.2 Diversity of regions (6)	
3.3 Other (5)	Diversity of contexts (3) Family household diversity (1) Diversity in corporate governance practices (1)
<i>4. Characteristics of research approaches (16)</i>	
4.1 Diversity of theories (6)	
4.2 Diversity of methods (4)	
4.3 Diversity in research in general (2)	
4.4 Diversity in social network research (1)	
4.5 Diversity of disciplines (1)	
4.6 Diversity of heuristics (1)	
4.7 Social support theory (1)	
<i>5. Diversity and the diversity concept in general (31)</i>	
5.1 Diversity concept in general (5)	
5.2 Diversity management (3)	
5.3 Super-diversity (3)	

*In all 273 papers; double entries are possible.

Taking a deeper look into the different groups, we found researchers talking about quite different things and labelling them as *diversity*. Papers in the first and largest group, *company-related characteristics*, take the company as a reference point and discuss aspects such as the *diversity of entrepreneurs' business models*, *strategic diversity*, *diversity in boards of directors* and *technological diversity*. In contrast to the first group, papers within the second largest group, *individual-related characteristics*, take individuals as the main reference point. As a main subtopic, all kinds of *ethnic aspects*, subdivided into *race/ethnicity*, *(im)migrants and diversity*, *cultural diversity* and *national diversity*, can be found here. The third largest group of papers comprises just a few papers dealing with *environment-related characteristics*. Here, aspects such as the *diversity of networks*, *regions* or *contexts* are to be found. *Characteristics of approaches*, our fourth group, refers quite differently to the diversity of research (process)-related aspects, for instance, diverse *methods*, *theories*, *heuristics* or *disciplines*. Only a few papers emphasise *diversity and the diversity concept in general*.

Overall, we find that there is a broad range of topics covered by the umbrella of diversity and no predetermined mapping of how to use the term *diversity*. *Diversity* is a word that is loaded with multiple connotations dependent not least of all on context,

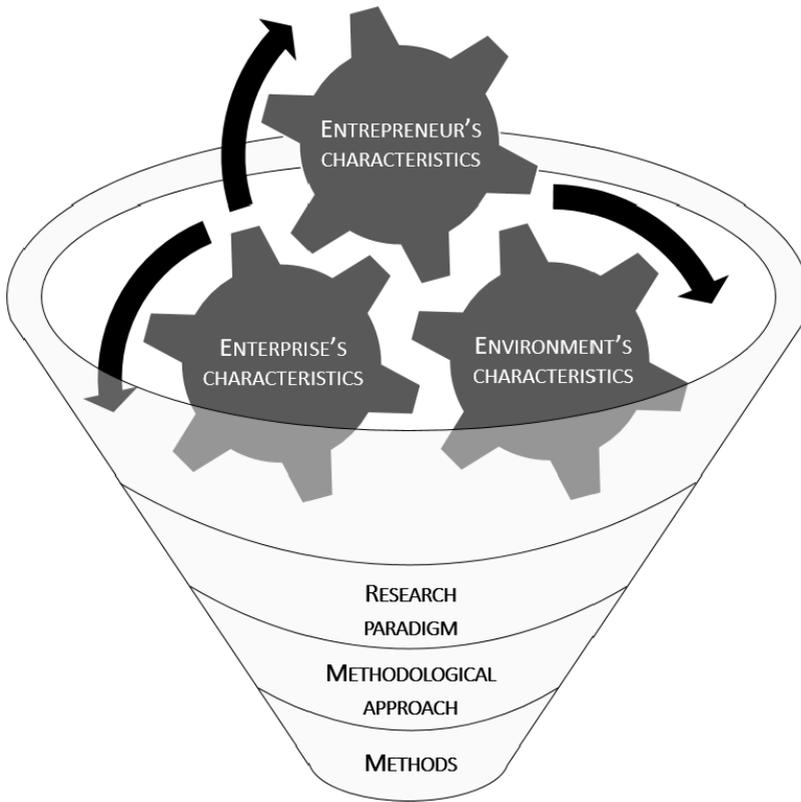
country and language (LiCalzi and Surucu, 2012). According to our sample, this is true for the use of *diversity* in the context of entrepreneurship research. Most papers here use the term without an explicit definition of what is meant and without reference to a theory. In line with other research results, in our papers grouped under individual-related characteristics, clarifications of the term *diversity* generally seem to be a discussion about differences in demographic variables (Bell et al., 2011:712). Mapping the status quo, we can sum up: when researchers talk about diversity, they are talking about quite different things, and it remains conceptually widely unclear what diversity in the entrepreneurship context means. This is problematic if we as entrepreneurship researchers aim to contribute to political and societal discussions about diversity and if we try to connect our research with work on diversity in other disciplines. Considering this gap, we start to move forward the discussion and conceptualisation of diversity in the entrepreneurship field in the following section.

3 Moving forward: a frame for (researching) entrepreneurial diversity

We have pointed out three main reference points for considerations of diversity in the entrepreneurship field: *the enterprise* for company-related characteristics, *the entrepreneur* for individual-related characteristics, and *the environment* for environment-related characteristics. The entrepreneur's characteristics are closest to what sociological diversity research discusses and what Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003), in their four layers of diversity model, map as *internal dimensions* and partially *external dimensions*. Although sociological diversity research has organisations/companies in mind when looking at diversity, these authors understand organisational issues as factors directly linked to an individual and his/her position within the organisation. What is disregarded in such models are the diverse characteristics of companies themselves as well as the influence of diverse environments on the interaction process between individuals, companies and the environment. In entrepreneurship research, it is widely known that these interactions are of importance, although their theoretical conceptualisation is in its early stages (e.g., within the debate about contextualising entrepreneurship research (Welter, 2019; Welter and Gartner, 2016)). Therefore, our frame comprises *entrepreneur's characteristics*, *enterprise's characteristics* and *environment's characteristics*. To complicate matters further, with the use of the term *diversity* in our sample in mind, we identify a difference in ways of doing research about diversity related to the underlying research paradigms and methodological approaches. Various methods and approaches are possible and common practice in current entrepreneurship research. A holistic view on entrepreneurial diversity research should – from our point of view – incorporate the diversity of underlying *research paradigms* and *methodological issues* as well as the diversity of used *methods* into the conceptualisation.

Bringing our thoughts together, we map the complexity of entrepreneurial diversity (research) and possible intersections of the diversity categories in Figure 1. This frame for (researching) entrepreneurial diversity can serve as a starting point for the overdue further discussion about entrepreneurial diversity.

Figure 1 Framing entrepreneurial diversity (research)



Investigating entrepreneurial diversity in a holistic way means considering the triplet of entrepreneur, enterprise and environment. The interlocking of these three aspects is symbolised in our model by gear wheels. Single cogs represent single characteristics (parameter values). It is less important how the single parameter values are named – the crucial aspect is to respect their interplay and intersection. Much more important than trying to capture all possible values is to stay open-minded towards the appearance of new aspects. The focus of analysis can change by rotating the gears. Accordingly, entrepreneurial diversity is an interplay of *entrepreneur's characteristics*, *enterprise's characteristics* and *environment's characteristics*; depending on the focus of interest, specific parameter values play a more prominent role than others do. What is crucial is for researchers to realise which perspective they are taking: researching entrepreneurial diversity holistically makes it necessary to clarify the research paradigms, methodological approaches and methods that guide and filter the investigation of entrepreneurial diversity – symbolised in our frame as a funnel.

4 This special issue: contributions and classifications

After identifying the gap in current knowledge about the conceptualisation of diversity in the entrepreneurship field, we started to stimulate further research in this field by publishing a call for papers to explore concepts and facets related to entrepreneurial

diversity. We issued an invitation for papers that enhance our understanding of the conceptual framings of entrepreneurial diversity, facets of entrepreneurial diversity, intersections of diversity dimensions, and/or tensions related to entrepreneurial diversity in different contexts. Both purely conceptual and theory-driven empirical papers were welcomed. Following the submission and double-blind review process, we selected three papers for inclusion in the special issue.

Beldina Owalla, Tim Vorley, Tom Coogan, Helen Lawton Smith and Katy Wing, in their paper titled ‘Absent or overlooked? Promoting diversity among entrepreneurs with public support needs’, focus on two individual dimensions of diversity, that is, *minority status* and *disability*, and consider intersections with other categories, such as gender, social status, and age, in their qualitative analysis. The authors are interested in understanding the support needs and challenges of under-represented groups in the context of business innovation in the UK. By means of focus groups, comprising participants from these target groups as well as semi-structured interviews with policy makers, their findings reveal that support initiatives are fragmented and sometimes of a short-term nature. However, these groups of entrepreneurs develop strategies to gain access to resources that otherwise would not be readily available. The findings show that intersectionality plays a major role in this context: it is not minority status alone but also relations with other socio-demographic categories that define engagement as well as the support needed. The authors propose a holistic conceptual model grounded in their data and aimed at promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. As a practical implication, they advocate a hybrid approach of designing programmes targeted at specific groups of entrepreneurs together with developing mainstream programmes in which equality, diversity and inclusion practices are embedded (Owalla et al., 2021).

Tobias Kollmann, Christoph Stöckmann, Jana W. Linstaedt and Julia M. Kensbock study personality as a diversity dimension in their paper ‘Personality composition and performance in entrepreneurial teams: understanding the impact of stability and plasticity traits in a relative contribution model’, assuming that entrepreneurs’ personalities and therefore their deep attributes are diverse. Interested in the ideal personality structure of an entrepreneurial team, the authors investigate how the personality composition of entrepreneurial teams influences team performance. To better understand the link between team composition and team performance, the authors take a meta-perspective on personality, which treats stability vs. plasticity as composite factors of the Big Five personality traits. By means of hierarchical regressions with 104 dyadic entrepreneurial teams of technology and knowledge-based ventures, Kollmann et al. (2021) examine the relative contribution of these two composite factors (minimum, maximum) in team composition to account for the possibility of a single team member affecting the group more strongly than the others (*relative contribution model* of team composition; see Kozlowski and Klein, 2000; Mathieu et al., 2014). The authors control for several team-related factors, such as entrepreneurial experience and team tenure. The results reveal that the high performance of an entrepreneurial team requires all members of the team to have minimum levels of stability-related traits, that is, agreeableness, emotional stability and conscientiousness. However, only one team member needs to have high plasticity-related traits, that is, openness and extraversion.

Verena Meyer, Stefanie Pakura and Valentina Seidel, in their paper ‘Engaging with entrepreneurial diversity: an intersectional framework’, question previous conceptualisations of entrepreneurial diversity. They argue that the term has been used as a placeholder for all kinds of differences, while a substantial conceptualisation has not yet

been delivered by entrepreneurship scholars. Acknowledging that the number and breadth of studies on entrepreneurial diversity is growing, the authors ask how diversity has been conceptualised in entrepreneurship research. Based on the intersectional approaches provided by McCall (2005), Meyer et al. (2021) develop a framework that they apply to take stock and analyse previous literature on entrepreneurial diversity. The framework includes three distinct methodological approaches to operationalising intersectionality: focusing on intercategory intersections, on anticategory intersections, and on intracategory intersections. Based on the existing body of literature, the authors develop five key challenges for research, among them the lack of a definition of diversity, the problem of measurements, and the dominance of attention to the diversity-performance relation. The authors offer recommendations to address each challenge in future research, such as definition approaches that address questions of categorisation and the interplay of social positions, further context-sensitive refinement of measurements, and power-critical approaches. Overall, Meyer et al. (2021) reveal a missing reflective conceptualisation and offer a starting point with practical guidance for future research on entrepreneurial diversity.

The three different contributions specialise in different aspects outlined in our framework for entrepreneurial diversity (research). Meyer et al. (2021) base their paper on existing research and studies. Owalla et al. (2021) and Kollmann et al. (2021) collect empirical data, Owalla et al. (2021) take a qualitative approach, and Kollmann et al. use a quantitative approach. While minority status and disability as individual characteristics are underlined in Owalla et al. (2021), Kollmann et al. (2021) target personality as an individual characteristic. Owalla et al. (2021) focus on business innovation and the UK context. Kollmann et al. (2021) focus on different personalities within entrepreneurial teams. Meyer et al. (2021) do not emphasise a single dimension of the model but take a meta-perspective with the overarching goal of making progress on the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial diversity itself. Collectively, the papers in this SI contribute to our conceptual understanding of entrepreneurial diversity in different ways: by considering intersections of different diversity dimensions, by contextualising personality as a deep dimension beyond the individual, and by offering a critical reflection on the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial diversity. While the guest editors highly recommend reading and reflecting upon these papers, the next section also offers some thoughts about future entrepreneurial diversity research that we developed through our own literature review and our experiences throughout the process of developing the current special issue.

5 Conclusion

We started this introductory paper by highlighting the complexity and multilayered nature of entrepreneurship, which can be subsumed under the label *entrepreneurial diversity* – although the use of the term *diversity* in the context of entrepreneurship research is not well grounded. Taking stock of the use of the term *diversity* within the entrepreneurship literature reveals that when researchers literally talk about diversity, they are talking about quite different things. Many papers use the term *diversity* without an explicit definition of what exactly is meant and without framing it. As a result, what diversity means in the entrepreneurship context remains conceptually unclear. This is problematic because a lack of a generally shared understanding of diversity hinders the

reconciliation of future research with previous studies and current societal and political debates. We have seen that the discussion about interconnections of attributes (intersectionality) in the sociological diversity literature is much more advanced than in the entrepreneurship field. Nevertheless, the sociological research stream has not (yet) adequately covered company-related characteristics or environment-related (contextual) aspects. We have tried to move the discussion about entrepreneurial diversity (research) forward, presenting a frame that considers the triplet of entrepreneur's characteristics, enterprise's characteristics and environment's characteristics and their intersections. Finally, we have highlighted the importance of research paradigms, methodological approaches and methods, which guide and filter investigations of entrepreneurial diversity.

What have we learned from our special issue to move the entrepreneurship field forward? We urgently need better theoretical approaches to connect to debates centred on intersectionality, inclusion, or something like the current policy programmes, claims and societal discussion about diversity. However, research that broaches the issue of diversity in entrepreneurship research has to be careful with aspects related to categorisation, inclusion and exclusion. For instance, the use of the single term *diversity* to refer to the presence of women/gender, minorities and disabled people suggests that a research approach is over-simplified. Further, such ambiguities in studies can lead to mistaken interpretations and conclusions. Connotations of variables such as *gender* differ from supposedly neutral ones such as *demographic attitudes*, contextually dependent ones such as *social category*, and even negative ones such as *stigma*. Researchers need to be aware of the underlying assumptions that they communicate in their way of categorising variables as well as the way that they cluster different attributes together (such as gender, age and ethnicity). Certainly, these attributes have some commonalities, but just as certainly they obviously differ.

Furthermore, the contextual embeddedness of entrepreneurship research, which is an international research field, has to be taken into account. Because of German history, the term *race* would be avoided in a German research approach to categorising people. In addition, the category of *veterans* is a special target group in the US that is not that prominent a focus of interest in European countries. Researchers are therefore advised to be aware of the contextual embeddedness of their assumptions. One more challenge for the international research field is the definition and consistency in the use of specific terms. We do not necessarily mean the same thing when we talk about something in the same words. To gain a common understanding of terminologies is therefore important not only for further diversity research but also for research in general.

Presently, diversity is a prevailing topic in research, societal discussion, public discourses and political initiatives. The concept is used correspondingly in the context of the sociological diversity debate, focusing on variations among individuals. Entrepreneurship research, as a discipline that comprises economic aspects and individual and contextual views, could benefit from closer links to existing diversity research. Likewise, the sociological discussion could benefit from an interdisciplinary approach and links to entrepreneurship research. From this point of view, it is beneficial that diversity is conceptualised so broadly in entrepreneurship research – this offers much space and possibility to focus the term on what we need in future research. Concerning the interrelations of individual, business-related and contextual aspects, entrepreneurship research can in turn contribute to sociological diversity research.

We close with a call for considering diversity in a more appropriate manner in our field of research. The frame that we present is a first step in this direction, enabling us to counteract the broached issue of tending towards inadequate dichotomies in entrepreneurship research.

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