
Editorial

Maria Elo*, Victor Martin-Sanchez and Martin Hannibal

Department of Business and Management,
University of Southern Denmark,
Odense, Denmark

Email: Melo@sam.sdu.dk

Email: vms@sam.sdu.dk

Email: mhk@sam.sdu.dk

*Corresponding author

Leo Paul Dana

Faculty of Management,
Dalhousie University,
Nova Scotia, Canada
Email: Lp762359@dal.ca

Biographical notes: Maria Elo, Full professor, University of Southern Denmark, professor, Belt and Road Institute of International Business at Shanghai University, senior research fellow, University of Turku and adjunct professor, Åbo Akademi University, works on international business, entrepreneurship and migration with topics such as internationalisation, resources of skilled migrants and returnees, migrant and diaspora entrepreneurship, transnational and family businesses, diaspora networks, diaspora investment and remittances. She has published books and articles, for example, in *Journal of World Business*, *Journal of International Business Policy*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Regional Studies*, *Journal of International Entrepreneurship* and *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*.

Victor Martin-Sanchez is an Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship in the Department of Business and Management at the University of Southern Denmark. He was previously an Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship at King's College London and holds a PhD in Business Economics from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His research focuses on entrepreneurship, internationalisation, and strategy, with particular attention to growth aspirations, strategic human capital, and the individual and institutional drivers of entrepreneurial action. His work has been published in journals such as *Organization Science*, *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *Journal of Banking and Finance*, and *Small Business Economics*.

Martin Hannibal is Head of research in International Business & Entrepreneurship at the Department of Business & Management, SDU. His research is focused on knowledge intensive start-ups and sustainability. He is actively involved in several international research networks focused on these topics. He is well published in various high ranking and topic specific outlets such as *Journal of international Marketing*, *Entrepreneurship & Regional*

Development, Journal of International Entrepreneurship, and International Journal of Innovation & Regional Development. He has been involved in several projects involving industrial partners.

Leo Paul Dana is Professorial Research Fellow at the Next Society Institute (NSI) of Kazimieras Simonavicius University (KSU), in Lithuania. He is also Professor at ICD Business School Paris. A graduate of McGill University, he has served as Marie Curie Fellow at Princeton University and Visiting Professor at INSEAD and at Kingston University. He has published extensively in a variety of journals including: *Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice, International Business Review, International Small Business Journal, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Small Business Management, Journal of World Business, Small Business Economics, and Technological Forecasting & Social Change.*

1 Introduction

The contribution of this special issue is that it broadens views of international entrepreneurship and of various types of international entrepreneurs and firms, particularly focusing on their strategies to overcome challenges and/or to develop capacity (Chrysostome, 2019; Epure et al., 2024; Evers et al., 2012; Zahra, 2021). As the micro-, small- and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) and family businesses represent the great majority of all business organisations in Europe and globally, their role as the resilient and innovative economic actor deserves continuous attention (Santoro et al., 2020). In the contemporary era, many business enterprises operate in home and host countries as well as transnationally, providing local, glocal and global markets with products and services (Bjerrisgaard and Kjeldgaard, 2013; Elo et al., 2020; Sadiku-Dushi, et al., 2019). International entrepreneurs and their businesses are elementary in developing capacity across contexts (Chrysostome, 2019). While the firm internationalisation is fostered and enabled through advanced technologies and digitalisation (Etemad et al., 2010; Hannibal, 2020; Vadana et al., 2020), they also face numerous structural challenges and impediments to growth and development, such as ageing societies, lack of skilled employees, or regulation (Capelleras et al., 2023). The societal challenges around international entrepreneurs are manifold, particularly considering resources available, gender, origin, language or market access (e.g., Aman et al., 2022; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021; Kothari et al., 2022). Furthermore, climate change, geopolitics, population economics, migration, social and political conflicts, pandemics, inequalities, and other transboundary issues create pressures for entrepreneurial firms to strategise differently from before and to generate novel ways of coping with challenges and opportunities (e.g., Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2021; Elo et al., 2024). Currently, there are multiple social, economic and political concerns that influence societies and international entrepreneurship, calling for better solutions, new strategies, theory angles and deeper understanding (e.g., Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019). Hence, we ask what kinds of strategies and strategising are employed by entrepreneurs and managers of small and medium-sized enterprises to overcome such challenges, impediments, and frameworks? What kind of capacity building happens in this context?

This special issue provides a range of managerial and entrepreneurial insights on business dynamics and practices that are valuable for scholars, practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders. We seek to contribute to multi-layered and multidisciplinary discussions on international entrepreneurship, its resources, antecedents and outcomes.

2 Capacity development through international entrepreneurial strategies

Economic development and capacity building activities go hand in hand and are built ‘as entrepreneurs build their activities’. Entrepreneurs’ role as the ‘visible hand’ of the market representing managers and entrepreneurs tackling challenges and developing opportunities is central, especially under uncertainty, instability, weak institutions and geopolitical tensions (Chrysostome, 2019). Interestingly, many international entrepreneurs launching and growing international business operations, fostering knowledge transfer and innovation diffusion are of migrant origin or internationally mobile people. These diasporic and migrant entrepreneurs span transnational and international spaces, serve markets, and trade across borders employing their particular resources and capacities (Elo et al., 2020, 2024). This mechanism of connecting and developing markets – the ‘invisible diaspora hand’ – shapes the internationalisation processes of products and value creation (Elo et al., 2020, p.694), but it also forms a system of strategies, behaviours and resilience to overcome challenges and entrepreneurs’ spatial and periodic liminalities (Elo et al., 2024).

Many researchers have shown that entrepreneurial challenges and related issues can be very different, depending on the local ecosystem of entrepreneurs. One collection brings together almost 100 authors writing internationalisation efforts by Europe-based entrepreneurs (Dana et al., 2008) – and we can see that even within Europe there are differences. On a global scale, even greater differences are evident as entrepreneurs are faced with unlike challenges ranging from infrastructure to regulation (see for example, Dana, 2004). As a result, geographic locus and in-betweenness represent strategic elements for IE (Sternberg et al., 2023).

Transnational entrepreneurship research suggests that migrant entrepreneurs play an increasingly significant role as sources of economic activities and especially export revenue (Baklanov et al., 2014). Of course, faced with unlike challenges, international entrepreneurs conceive and follow different strategies to reach objectives. For instance, where governments legislate much regulation but provide inadequate infrastructure – as is often the case in some African contexts – there are unique opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurs. An extreme example is that when it is impossible to conduct an activity legally, it is often carried out illegally. Thus, as coping strategies might depart from formal practices, developing capacities and infrastructures in alignment for legitimate and sustainable business development calls for more attention.

3 The objectives of the special issue

The main purpose of this special issue is to reflect on international entrepreneurship being a significant part of international business landscape and literature (Verbeke and Ciravegna, 2018; Cavusgil and Knight, 2015; Young et al., 2003). Accordingly, we aim

to broaden our understanding of how businesses pursue opportunities across countries while encountering diverse challenges (Reuber et al., 2018), in particular through employing multilevel perspectives including micro, meso, and macro lenses (Delio et al., 2023; Eden and Nielsen, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020). International entrepreneurship examines the speed, scope and the path of international expansion, addressing both the entrepreneur as well as the firm (Crick, 2009; Elo et al., 2018). Furthermore, we address and explore the boundaries set by the institutional context on these entrepreneurial efforts (Bowen and De Clercq, 2008; Epure et al., 2024).

This special issue presents divergent strategies and approaches on strategising. Each contribution presents practices and strategies employed by entrepreneurs and managers of small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, we extend the understanding to the employees who also experience them. Firms and business actors involve multiple actors or individuals. Thus, in order to overcome challenges, impediments and delimiting frameworks, many strategies and practices may comprise co-creation or even collective actions, through platforms, other collaborations, or digital elements. We attempt to present these interactions as forms of capacity building contextualised in each study. Through this it is the ambition of the special issue to advance the understanding on strategies for direct and indirect capacity building and overcoming challenges in international entrepreneurship.

4 Overview and contributions of this special issue

The collection of articles elaborates on the various levels of analysis: micro (individual and team), meso (organisational and sectoral), and macro (national and international), providing a multifaceted and extended view of international entrepreneurship and the respective arenas. Through these diverse perspectives, the contributions uncover new insights into how businesses and entrepreneurs identify, evaluate, and capitalise on opportunities in the global market and how they organise resources and skills to overcome challenges. Furthermore, several articles examine and present constraints imposed by institutional and organisational contexts, shedding light on the challenges that entrepreneurs face and the strategies they employ to navigate these barriers (Cunha et al., 2025; Cordova et al., 2025). Such barriers exist not only as external regulatory, social or market-related barriers, but also as internal resource barriers related to a particular entrepreneur or firm (Terstriep et al., 2025; Vuorio et al., 2025). There is a diverse set of strategies employed by entrepreneurs and managers to develop needed capacity for the business development (Wang and Rialp-Criado, 2025; Fernandes et al., 2025). In parallel, entrepreneurs and managers as well as employees struggle to develop capacities and responses to challenges that are sustainable, feasible and acceptable (Zoelner, 2025; Talukder, 2025), which represents a form of pressure to comply while navigating (Arte et al., 2023). This capacity building and its locus extends from the individual level skills to country level policy framework implementation (Zhang et al., 2025). Table 1 provides a summary of the papers included in this issue.

Table 1 Summary of papers

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Sample and method</i>	<i>Key findings</i>	<i>Main contribution to the issue</i>
Cordova et al. (2025)	269 individuals in seven Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) countries. 28 online focus group sessions.	The main results of the study reveal ten critical strategies for climate action-based regeneration, focusing on entrepreneurial resilience in LAC. Key findings highlight that cross-sector collaboration, sustainability education, and financial incentives are essential for achieving sustainable practices and a regenerative business landscape.	The research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable development by highlighting the interconnectedness of economic, environmental, and societal goals. It provides a roadmap for LAC countries to leverage collective action for a sustainable and regenerative future, contributing to the international entrepreneurship literature by emphasising climate change as a key driver of entrepreneurial and economic resilience.
Cunha et al. (2025)	47 Brazilian female transnational entrepreneurs. Semi-structured interviews.	The findings reveal that Brazilian migrant women entrepreneurs use transnational networking to overcome barriers and influence enterprise development in Germany while impacting their country of origin. The study highlights how transnational networks serve as a strategic tool for these entrepreneurs and reveals their potential to challenge existing power structures.	This study contributes to understanding the gendered dynamics of transnational entrepreneurship among Brazilian migrant women and its effects on institutional change and dual embeddedness. It also contributes to the broader field by discussing how networks help to overcome structural barriers and introducing a new institutional approach to understanding gendered business relations.
Fernandes et al. (2025)	61 articles, including a sample size of 14,535 observations. Hedges and Olkin meta-analytic procedure.	The study reveals that entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation significantly enhance the international performance of SMEs. Key findings show that company size strengthens the positive relationship between market orientation and international performance.	This study employs meta-analysis to contribute to the understanding of how market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation jointly influence the international performance of SMEs, offering new insights into the impact of dynamic capabilities on global success. It also explores the moderating effect of company size on these relationships, revealing how the scale of an SME shapes the strength and nature of its strategic orientations and international performance.

Table 1 Summary of papers (continued)

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Sample and method</i>	<i>Key findings</i>	<i>Main contribution to the issue</i>
Talukder (2025)	22 Finnish international small firms. Longitudinal qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews.	The study reveals that HR decision-makers follow a systematic process to identify, experiment with, evaluate, and select language performance standards. The study highlights that this process is influenced by the interplay between HR decision-makers' expectations and employees' reactions. Results show that the process leads to the formal integration of language standards into performance goals.	The paper contributes to understanding how SMEs develop language performance standards and manage external language diversity. It examines the role of SME HR in measuring and evaluating employee language performance. The study analyses how expectations are negotiated and mutually accepted in the exchange relationship between SME HR decision-makers and employees, contributing to social exchange theory.
Terstrieop et al. (2025)	34 German SMEs. Semi-structured interviews.	The study reveals that resilience factors such as optimism, flexibility, perseverance, and motivation are crucial for SMEs coping with crises. Internationalisation is identified as an additional resilience factor, helping SMEs enhance their adaptability and success. It also highlights that the interplay between motivation and internationalisation positively influences organisational decision-making and outcomes during crises.	The research addresses gaps in SME resilience research by providing insights into individual and firm-level factors contributing to resilience. It contributes by highlighting the importance of internationalisation as a strategy for improving resilience and decision-making in the context of disruptive crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
Vuorio et al. (2025)	162 Finnish internationally operating SMEs. Structural equation modelling.	The study reveals that institutions and sensemaking are key predictors of bricolage behaviour in international SMEs. It also shows that effective communication of sensemaking improves bricolage ability and confidence. Moreover, it highlights that the regulatory dimension of the institutional environment positively impacts bricolage ability, while the cognitive environment enhances sensemaking communication.	The study examines bricolage behaviour in SME internationalisation, addressing gaps in the literature and focusing on the organisational level. It links bricolage to sensemaking and the institutional environment, enhancing understanding of these factors in international entrepreneurship (IE). The research highlights how entrepreneurial cognition influences bricolage, emphasising the role of communication in sensemaking within IE.

Table 1 Summary of papers (continued)

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Sample and method</i>	<i>Key findings</i>	<i>Main contribution to the issue</i>
Wang and Rialp (2025)	492 observations from a listing of accommodations on Airbnb and VRBO in 246 cities across 37 countries. Linear regression model.	The study shows that regulation strictness and cultural distance are negatively associated with global platform economy supply. Findings suggest that strong network effects mitigate the negative relationship between regulation strictness and cultural distance and facilitate international expansion.	The study addresses a gap in the international business literature by focusing on the platform economy and its internationalisation challenges. Provides insights into how digital platforms can navigate institutional barriers and leverage network effects for successful international expansion.
Zhang et al. (2025)	8947 firm-level observations from the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (WBES) for 23 countries. Linear regression model.	Key findings reveal that party heterogeneity increases a firm's perceived obstacles to business. Results show that while state ownership and multinationality reduce the negative effects of party heterogeneity on business obstacles, a firm's political activities can increase obstacles in highly heterogeneous environments.	The study contributes by shedding light on how political competition impacts different types of firm obstacles, providing useful insights into how companies navigate resource challenges and adapt to institutions. This is key to improving risk management in today's unpredictable global political environment. It also contributes to the international entrepreneurship literature by identifying how international political conditions are perceived as obstacles and clarifying which firm-level variables can moderate this relationship.
Zelner (2025)	Three Moroccan engineers (pilot case study). Semi-structured interviews.	Key findings reveal that a discursive approach helps understand how transnational professionals, including entrepreneurs and employees, navigate and shape their identities within a given discursive landscape. The analysis shows how these professionals invest in, compose, and resist identities based on the available discourses.	This paper contributes to advancing knowledge on transnational professionals' subjective experiences and identities by applying a discursive approach within a social constructionist framework. The paper contributes to the international human resources management (IHRM) and transnational entrepreneurship literature by illustrating how a discursive approach contextualises research on mobile professionals and by highlighting how a social constructionist epistemology introduces new, complementary questions to existing IHRM studies.

Overall, this special issue contributes to the ongoing discourse in international entrepreneurship by highlighting the dynamic interplay between entrepreneurial actions, markets, and institutional environments. The theoretical advancements, empirical findings, and practical implications presented here enrich our knowledge in this field, offering valuable perspectives for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

5 Toward a framework

Building on the nine papers in this special issue, we highlight the value of the multilevel lenses to understanding strategies for building capacity and addressing challenges in the context of international entrepreneurship (Cavusgil and Knight 2015; Verbeke and Ciravegna, 2018). The diverse multidimensional insights and methodologies presented have deepened our comprehension of these complex dynamics. However, this issue opens up new questions and areas for inquiry, suggesting that future research should continue to push boundaries and explore emerging themes in this evolving field.

Figure 1 Multilevel, interdisciplinary, and thematic lenses to understand international entrepreneurship



In Figure 1, we provide a thematic overview emerging from the contributions of the articles featured in this special issue. Drawing from these papers and ongoing discussions on international entrepreneurship and capacity building, we showcase the disciplinary plurality integrated into understanding international entrepreneurship from a multilevel perspective. We take inspiration from Etemad’s (2018a, 2018b) conceptual multi-layered framework of international entrepreneurship. Etemad’s outline positions the international entrepreneurship domain at the intersection of five key disciplines: entrepreneurship, international business, networks, strategy, and operations management (Etemad, 2018a; Elo et al., 2018), while this special issue offers further views related to e.g. language, sociology and institutions. Our focus on international entrepreneurship, particularly on strategies for overcoming challenges and developing capacity (Chrysostome, 2019; Zahra, 2021), operates within and across these layers and introduces them as additional

dimensions offering explanations for these entrepreneurial dynamics, strategies, and responses. This multilevel approach enriches the field of international entrepreneurship by providing a deeper and richer understanding of the strategies employed by entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial firms to navigate complex environments and challenges while developing opportunities.

Prior literature has addressed these structures employing the concept of embeddedness. Such layered embeddedness is essential in analysis, particularly in the case of migrant and diaspora entrepreneurship where mixed and multiple embeddedness is prevalent and often transnational (Bagwell, 2018; Etemad 2018a, 2018b; Elo et al., 2018). However, multiple layers of embeddedness are also inherent in the structures of emerging and developing country business and family business (Basco, 2017; Elo and Dana, 2019). These elements underline the need to consider carefully the context in which the phenomenon is examined, following the calls for contextualisation (Welter, 2011; Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2024). As these special issue contributions illustrate, contextualisation can also be relevant within the firm or an organisation and the object being contextualised can represent a practice or a strategy, not necessarily a product, service or organisational unit.

As we look to future research in the context of international entrepreneurship, several promising avenues emerge from the gaps identified in this special issue. While we have explored various macro-to-micro layers, there is still much to be examined in how specific pain points are addressed and resolved, especially concerning the development and ownership of capacity across different stakeholders. Future studies should delve deeper into the practical aspects of capacity-building, beyond mere language considerations, to understand how entrepreneurs navigate and overcome these challenges at the micro level. Additionally, with the shifting geopolitical landscape and its impact on knowledge transfer and business dynamics, research should focus on how these new boundaries influence the strategies and resilience of entrepreneurs in this complex era. Investigating how these geopolitical changes shape capacity-building and stakeholder engagement will provide critical meso and macro level insights into adapting to an increasingly interconnected and turbulent global environment.

Finally, we seek with this special issue to reshape our perspective on how international entrepreneurs and SMEs tackle capacity-building and overcome challenges through a multilevel framework. By leveraging the findings elaborated here, we aim to stimulate a surge of innovative research and inquiry. This is essential for micro, meso, and macro level understanding of how firms can strategically navigate and thrive amidst global complexities, thereby securing a sustainable competitive edge and long-term success.

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