Exploring Entrepreneurial Diversity: A Fascination or Frustration?

1. Abstract

This chapter critically discusses the importance of acknowledging diversity within entrepreneurship and some strategies to facilitate the richness of the phenomenon. It helps researchers and practitioners to understand the importance and benefits of having different but equally valid world views about the phenomenon, which is vital for entrepreneurship research to progress further. We acknowledge that there are already some established arguments to support inclusiveness within the current context of entrepreneurship research. Aim here is to strengthen these arguments with a brief literature rationale, which is informed by our research experience. One of the key advantages of acknowledging heterogeneity is that it can help scholars to convert any frustrations that is caused by not having common understanding to a fascination to embrace the wholeness of the phenomenon. Our understanding of how to appreciate diversity and inclusion is limited, as a solution, we encourage critical debates among multiple actors of entrepreneurship and urge to widen research adopting more innovative and creative approaches.

Key Words: Entrepreneurship Research, Diversity, Inclusivity

2. Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the importance of diversity in entrepreneurship to help the field to move forward progressively. In our view, appreciation of diversity is vital to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Developing such understanding, for example, can facilitate

governments, policy makers and funding bodies to tailor support that they extend for both established and nascent entrepreneurs.

For this chapter, we position entrepreneurship as a multifaceted, complex social construct. Therefore, it is contextually embedded and subjective (see Rajasinghe et al., 2021). This leads us to argue that it is vital to appreciate the diversity which should be encouraged by challenging current predispositions and dominant views. Unless, our understanding of the phenomenon can be limited by dominant paradigms (Berglund and Johansson, 2007; Rajasinghe et al., 2021) and may mute the complexities within the field. Thus, we emphasize the importance of appreciating diversity and discuss how this can facilitate creativity and innovation.

According to Davidsson (2004; 2016, p. 01) "one of the fascinations [of researching entrepreneurship] is the richness of the phenomenon which leads to one of the greatest frustrations, namely the lack of common understanding of what precisely entrepreneurship is". It seems to us that society at large is still driven in search of near impossible, 'a common understanding'. In our view, frustration emphasized by Davidsson is a result of deeply rooted predispositions of the phenomenon and different world views of diverse stakeholders of entrepreneurship. Once these mental models and world views are challenged and questioned, the diversity within the field can be fascinating for entrepreneurship scholars, practitioners and other stakeholders. This is vital for the phenomenon to move forward without restricting it into a mechanistic discipline (Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019; Rajasinghe et al., 2021). We acknowledge that numerous researchers and practitioners have been establishing theories and practices that embrace diversity. However, many (see Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Marlow, 2020) continue to affirm that the field is still positivist dominant which can restrict our understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity.

3. Nature of entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is subjected to multiple interpretations (Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017; Blundel et al., 2018). For example, some authors attempt to define entrepreneurship by incorporating traits (Chell, 2013) and psychological aspects (Gartner, 2012; Tang, 2020) of entrepreneurs into their definitions. Furthermore, governments and policy makers explore to understand entrepreneurship through metrics such as economic growth, technology clusters, and job creation (Block et al., 2017). There is a public discourse which encourages the view that entrepreneurship resides within individuals, for example, Sir Richard Branson, Sir Alan Sugar and Sir James Dyson (Block et al., 2017; Bridge, 2017). Moreover, entrepreneurship is described differently through various social, cultural and geographical lenses (Baker and Welter, 2020). For instance, in China, the success of entrepreneurship is closely linked with 'Guanxi', the social networks that underpin the practice of entrepreneurship (Burt and Burzynska, 2017). In conjunction with risk-taking and experimentation, "a culture of failure (…) appears to be prevalent in Silicon Valley" (Gold, 2017, p. 119), USA. Therefore, failure appears as a key element of entrepreneurship in this context, whereas entrepreneurial endeavour is predominantly perceived as a value creation and individual activity in places such as Denmark (Reffstrup and Christiansen, 2017).

We also noticed some common themes within entrepreneurship literature. For instance, newness (e.g., product, process, organisation) (Gartner, 1988; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996); profit-making (Kirzner, 1973); recognising, creating and exploiting opportunities (Rae, 2015). In addition, themes such as creating new combinations (Schumpeter, 1934; 2017) and managing turnaround in an existing organisation (Panicker and Manimala, 2015) are also relatively popular. More recent themes in the field include creating value for others (see Lackéus, 2020) and social value co-creation (see Ratten, 2020). Entrepreneurship is also researched from different perspectives, such as economics and management (Block et al., 2017); arts (Paulsen et al., 2020); and in various

disciplines from health care (Haase and Franco, 2020) to engineering, and design (Mäkimurto-Koivumaa and Belt, 2016). Research is also being carried out in different contexts varying from academia (Schaeffer and Matt, 2016), family business (Jones and Li, 2017), diverse ethnic groups (Henry et al., 2018), refugees (Refai et al., 2018), natives and immigrants (Brzozowski et al., 2018). Therefore, there is evidence of diversity in definitions, themes and scholarly efforts to acknowledge the subjective nature of the phenomenon. However, majority appears to be influenced by "public prominence of innovative, high-growth, technology-based, and venture capital-backed ventures" (Welter et al., 2017, p. 313) which seems to have influenced practitioner and research agendas within the field.

4. Why is acknowledging diversity important?

The diversity present with entrepreneurship is an opportunity for us to know about the phenomenon deeply and to develop more relevant and applicable knowledge (Welter et al., 2019). Our position of entrepreneurship that it is a social activity informed by humanism (Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019), helps us to argue that entrepreneurship is predominantly grounded within culturally and contextually informed experiences of various actors (e.g., entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs, venture capitalists and scholars) who reside in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Stam, 2016). However, "much of our research continues the highly skewed quest to develop our understanding of entrepreneurship by studying a tiny group of outliers, while frequently ignoring the vast bulk and diversity" (Welter et al., 2017, p. 312- 313) of what is actually happening in everyday entrepreneurial activities. This appears to have restricted our understanding of the phenomenon.

Less attention placed upon understanding contextual influences on entrepreneurial process can also be observed. For example, sufficient emphasis has not been placed on cross-cultural and

transnationally networked nature of entrepreneurship and innovation (Sun, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). "Focusing on such linkages not only would uncover the complex ways that actors mobilize a range of resources and traverse social and geographic spaces (as they travel physically and virtually) but would further foreground the changing nature of space itself" (Fraiberg, 2021, p.177). Similarly, identities, behaviours and actions of entrepreneurs, individual consciousness, perceptions, attitudes and environmental and socio-cultural factors should be captured to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (see Raco and Tanod, 2014; Berglund, 2015; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2017). Given the "demand for creativity and judgement in the face of unclear goals and uncertainty" (Rajasinghe et al., 2021, p.867), it is also vital to understand the complex interplay between individuals, social and environmental factors (Joo et al., 2013) within entrepreneurial eco-systems which may revitalise the wholeness of the field.

This idea can be appealing to researchers who acknowledge the subjective nature of entrepreneurship (Brannback and Carsrud, 2016; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). To our understanding, acknowledging diversity from scholarly perspective is an indirect endorsement of different realities that exist including positivist paradigm. Thus, our urge for active acceptance of diversity within entrepreneurship should not be seen as an effort to discard any world views but as an endeavour to appreciate them all equally to develop a deeper understanding. This lays a foundation for entrepreneurship stakeholders to see the phenomenon beyond their own frame of reference.

Therefore, we invite stakeholders of entrepreneurship to be more open for diversity and to promote different avenues of knowing so the field progresses further to achieve its true potential. This may reduce the risk of restricting our understanding of the phenomenon by the limited world views that we currently possess as researchers and practitioners.

5. Strategies to appreciate diversity

We are yet to develop a comprehensive understanding of how the field should approach appreciating diversity. We re-emphasise that the critical entrepreneurship scholarly communities and practitioners should continue to explore the possibilities and the challenges of ensuring diversity. Based on our experience of research and practitioner engagement, we discuss three such strategies that may help generating further debates.

5.1 Wider research to develop subjective knowledge

It is vital to challenge the socially accepted predispositions of entrepreneurship that limit our understanding (Berglund and Johansson, 2007; Fraiberg, 2021) as they appear to mask complications and ambiguities rooted within the phenomenon (McKelvey, 2004; Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Fraiberg, 2021). Therefore, wider research to develop subjective knowledge embedded in various contexts (Welter et al., 2016; Fuller-Love and Akiode, 2020) by appreciating "inclusivity, diversity, and pluralism in research perspectives and approaches (Leitch et al., 2010, p.79) should continue rather than restricting our understanding to few different variables (Rajasinghe et al., 2021). We endorse the idea of Welter et al. (2017, p.318) that "there is no one type of entrepreneurship. No one best way. No ideal context. No ideal type of entrepreneur. Differences matter, and, if we actually believe this, then, we need to be looking for where, when, and why those differences matter most. And we need to pay attention to our language: does it extend to such variety, differences and heterogeneity?" Therefore, encouraging critical debates, questioning our ontological and epistemological assumptions, social, religious and cultural belief systems assist us to develop different but equally valid understanding of the phenomenon.

5.2. Innovative research approaches to deepen understanding of uniqueness

We emphasise the importance of exploring individual and collective experience and understanding of wider stakeholders of entrepreneurship considering that entrepreneurship is grounded in the

experience of multiple stakeholders (Stam, 2016; Packard, 2017; Rajasinghe et al., 2021). This allows scholars to fully appreciate the richness of the contextually embedded unique experiences which may not be sufficiently acknowledged through dominant positivist approaches or by relying on few popular qualitative frameworks (Raco and Tanod, 2014; Van Berg et al., 2020) "overlooking the breadth of approaches qualitative research has to offer" (Van Burg et al., 2020, p. 02). To address these challenges, scholars should "enable different forms of analysis and offer the potential for novel theorising of entrepreneurship process" (Van Burg et al., 2020, p.02) through innovative research approaches and perspectives. However, it appears that our attention to such innovative approaches is relatively insufficient to meet the current knowledge demands within the field (Van Burg et al., 2020; Rajasinghe et al., 2021).

5.3. Facilitating knowledge co-creation

There is encouraging evidences of growth of studies that focus on developing required understanding for policy, practice and research but the society continues to search for universal truths by muting the complexities present within entrepreneurship (McDonald et al., 2015; Marlow, 2020). This is not solely an issue with research but also our perspectival directedness towards more generalisable knowledge (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2017) and practice. Thus, the field needs adopting contemporary approaches to knowledge production, for example by facilitating co-creation of knowledge (Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017), i.e. joint production of knowledge between practitioners, researchers, policy makers and other actors (OECD, 2021). This is crucial particularly in the contexts such as entrepreneurship "where collaboration between multiple stakeholders matters and can also help prepare for societal transitions to more sustainable, inclusive and resilient futures" (OECD, 2021, p.06). It is also vital to understand the role of context in knowledge production (Baker and Welter, 2020) and question 'whom should our research serve?' or the purpose of our entrepreneurial practice. This is timely given that "we have become

rather self-centred in the development of our research" (Welter et al., 2017, p. 317) and practice, narrowing down our themes to fit into criteria to gain tenure or to celebrate the wealthy and successful (Welter et al., 2017) by depriving opportunities of many unknown individuals, groups and organisations who could facilitate us to understanding the phenomenon deeply.

6. Benefits of exploring and appreciating Diversity

We reiterate that the gaps highlighted above should be addressed by creating space for diverse stories of entrepreneurs to emerge thereby facilitating deeper understanding of the practice of entrepreneurship, for example, how it is practiced, interpreted and perceived in various contexts (Welter et al., 2017). These different lenses may include commercial, social and natural lenses (Bacq and Janssen, 2017) or entrepreneurship during times of crisis such as Covid-19 (Ratten, 2020). Openness to these differences within entrepreneurship leads us to understand the iterative and inherently open process of entrepreneurship which ranges from, ideation, exploration of opportunities, creativity and innovation, growth, result-orientation, success and failures.

For example, if we look at entrepreneurship from creativity perspective, we can argue that the creativity is a vital element of the phenomenon. This is evident when we look at Amabile's (1988) notion of creativity as the generation of useful and novel ideas or some others' interpretations that it involves generation of workable original solutions to complex ill-defined problems (Lubart, 2001). Woodman et al's (1993, p.293) position creativity as a "creation of new product, service, idea procedure or process" by actors within a complex social system. Novelty, complexity and providing valuable solutions continue to appear as key themes within the creativity literature (see Joo et al., 2013; Zhang and Zhou, 2014). These to our understanding echo well with the notion of more holistic entrepreneurship. Therefore, we urge readers to consider entrepreneurship and creativity are set of complicated interdependencies rather than isolated discoveries (see Joo et al.,

2013) and respect these complexities of the phenomenon. This is for us is appreciation of diversity which seems to create a platform to be more creative and innovative.

Promoting studies that appreciate diversity also underpins conceptualising messy paths of entrepreneurship and how initial ideas evolve over a period of time through multiple interactions of social actors (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Nayak and Chia, 2011). The more diverse the new knowledge generated in a region, the higher the probability for a greater volume of entrepreneurship. Similarly, an inclusive approach to entrepreneurship forms the basis for economic agents to perceive and value potential market opportunities differently (Qian et al., 2012) and to enhance economic performance (Verheul and Van Stel, 2010). This can help challenge the notion that entrepreneurship is an intentionally planned linear trajectory (Steyaert, 2007).

Above all, the appreciation of diversity lays a foundation for entrepreneurship stakeholders to explore wider ontological and epistemological positions thereby not solely relying on measurable outcomes and statistically generalisable knowledge. Such attempts to rely on positivist expectations often appear to lead to one of the greatest frustrations but we see the possibility of converting such frustration into "one of the fascinations of researching (…) and understanding entrepreneurship" (Davidsson, 2016, p.01) by acknowledging the richness and the contextual nature of the construct. We also believe that fascination generated by appreciating richness leads entrepreneurs to be free thinkers rather than relying on one world view thereby creating opportunities to be more creative and effective in their entrepreneurial engagements. It can facilitate practitioners to empathise and comprehend the stories of other social actors, and also policy makers to understand the need for tailoring support structures within the contexts that they operate.

7. **Conclusion**

This chapter emphasises the need for accepting diversity in entrepreneurship research and practice. Diversity can be frustrating for many who cannot enjoy the complexity within the field. This frustration may be a result of our predispositions or due to the structures and the cultures that we belong to or associate with. We invite readers to question their world views (ontological and epistemological positions of entrepreneurship) and strive to be more inclusive in research approaches, practice and policy initiatives by placing more emphasis on areas such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender, cultural, information and personality diversity. Facilitating a fuller appreciation of entrepreneurial diversity can advance our understanding of the disparate ways that entrepreneurship can help in times of crisis situations such as Covid-19.

We are obsessed by the diversity and firmly believe that it is a vital ingredient of growth and sustainability. Thus, our aim was to discuss and re-emphasise the importance of diversity in entrepreneurship to help the field to move forward progressively. This may help us to be more fascinated by the heterogeneity and richness of the phenomenon.

8. References

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