

Bridging theory and practice in entrepreneurship education

Foreword to the 2022/4 issue of the journal Information Society

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Entrepreneurship has become central to business education. At the same time, companies have transformed their HR policies to hire the most creative and innovative graduates and improve their understanding of start-up ecosystems (Bureau 2018). The growing number of entrepreneurship courses in higher education is a clear sign of the need for additional and solid intellectual foundations, at both methodological and theoretical levels (Valerio et al. 2014; Fayolle 2019). Innovative teaching methods are quasi-by-products of the quantitative growth of entrepreneurship in higher education institutions, in a positive sense.

In our interpretation, the main goal of entrepreneurship education is to help increase the business knowledge of those participating in the training, which, when put into practice, can increase the success and competitiveness of newly founded or already existing organisations and can help them respond to global social needs (Volkman and Audretsch 2017). The significant growth of entrepreneurship education throughout Europe in recent decades has played an important role in the development of academic infrastructure within the discipline. The support of government institutions is crucial, and not only in terms of funding. One example is the ‘HEInnovative’ platform, co-financed by the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), where institutions can monitor their level in offering entrepreneurial programmes (www.heinnovative.eu). In 2021, the European Commission published a guide to fostering entrepreneurship education (Lilischkis et al. 2021).

The effects of entrepreneurship education are also hotly debated in the entrepreneurship literature. The basis of several years of debate about the relevance of theory and practice in management education is Mintzberg’s argument, according to which ‘management is a practice that has to blend a good deal of craft (experience) with a certain amount of art (insights) and some science (analysis)’ (Mintzberg 2004, 1).

One of the key points of a research agenda for entrepreneurship education is that many important questions of entrepreneurship education are still open and require further research. Those involved in entrepreneurship education must teach with proven knowledge, validated methods and tools, in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Europe-based scholars have made a significant contribution to research on entrepreneurship education (Landström 2010). Among the developments, the following are particularly worth highlighting: a series of handbooks on entrepreneurship education edited by Alain Fayolle, the European Entrepreneurship Education (E3) conference organised by the European Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ECSB) and the Triple E Awards, a global recognition of efforts towards the quest for entrepreneurship and engagement in higher education.

Yet, from both a theoretical and a practical point of view, the lack of literature and research on the transregional phenomenon of starting a business can be demonstrated. Specifically, we identify two key issues in entrepreneurship education: 1) What are the current evidence-based practices in entrepreneurship education? 2) What are the results of recent research activities with a focus on regional entrepreneurial activities?

With the Danube Cup project, we attempt to combine these two perspectives. We aim to connect disciplines and (local/national) communities and to shift to a regional thinking perspective. The Danube area stretches from the Black Forest in Germany to the Black Sea at the Romanian-Ukrainian-Moldovan border and is home to 115 million people. The region is relatively fragmented and shows great disparities in wealth, job opportunities and innovation capacity. New entrepreneurs who want to survive crises and optimise the growth of their start-up need to think and act regionally, from day one. This approach means that they must plan and implement regional solutions that are fully relevant not only in the local, national market but also in the surrounding countries. This is the only way they can overcome the difficulties caused by fragmented and small domestic markets.

Purpose of the thematic block

The inspiration for this thematic block came from the first Danube Cup Conference, organised in 2022 by the Corvinus University of Budapest and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. The conference was set to highlight the trends in entrepreneurship/start-up education, to share experiences and knowledge and point out applied measures that can be implemented at other HE institutions (Jáki and Huszák 2022). The international conference aimed to support the dissemination of best practice entrepreneurship education methods and relevant high-quality research. Consequently, contributions from both the academic and the practitioner communities - using a range of scientific approaches, presenting the latest innovations and achievements in entrepreneurship/start-up education - have been accepted in many entrepreneurship education-related topics, and published in present thematic block and in two more academic journals (Huszák and Jáki 2022; Jáki and Huszák 2023). Contributions presenting methodological developments and real case studies were particularly welcome. All contributions were peer-reviewed and accepted based on the originality of the work, relevance to the conference theme and overall quality.

A total of 31 abstracts were sent for the Danube Cup 2022 international conference with participants from Austria, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Moldova, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Of these, 27 abstracts were accepted by the Danube Cup Scientific Committee. During the conference, the participants were inspired to try new approaches, as well as to participate more innovatively in the teaching and research of entrepreneurship-related skills and topics, thereby maximising the impact of their work and taking it to a higher level.

Entrepreneurship education is often focused on the local context, mainly due to the lack of international perspectives, connections and knowledge of the stakeholders. Contextualising the local and international conditions is crucial in entrepreneurship education, especially if international growth and the development of students' international entrepreneurship competencies are the goal. The available research data (Pimpa 2020) indicate that the integration of experiences, practices

and processes gained in a cross-border environment into the educational processes at home helps to achieve transnational professional results.

With the Danube Cup project, a regional community of university lecturers and researchers who consider the topic to be close to their heart was created. The common goal of cooperating educators, researchers and staff of technology transfer or entrepreneurship offices is to help improve the international success rate of new ventures founded by university students by bringing together the most motivated student start-uppers from universities located along the course of the river Danube (Jáki and Huszák 2022). We hope that the community will remain active in the long term and will be able to make a lasting contribution so that the education and research of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in the region along the Danube can continue to develop across borders.

Contribution of the thematic block

The thematic block illustrates in a broader sense that entrepreneurship education is not only about drafting business plans and launching new ventures. 'It is also about creativity, innovation, and growth, a way of thinking and acting relevant to all parts of the economy and society as well as the whole surrounding ecosystem' (Wilson et al. 2009, 42). Consequently, entrepreneurship education at HEIs is not an isolated phenomenon but a continuously developing field. While a combination of lectures/practical seminars and case studies remains the dominant teaching format, experimental and hands-on learning has attracted interest among faculty (Bureau 2018). This special issue presents several such alternative, innovative teaching methods and learning approaches.

Kállay (2022) describes in his article in present thematic block an innovative teaching method for combining theoretical and practical approaches in entrepreneurship education. After reviewing the entrepreneurship education practices of several European and other higher education institutions operating in other parts of the world through the available literature, Kállay states in his study that 'in entrepreneurial education students are almost always connected to practice in some way'. Based on Kállay's research (2022) published in present special issue, the practices of university entrepreneurship education can be divided into two broad categories: 1) students must develop their own business idea, or 2) they must review and analyse the practical operation of companies by connecting with real businesses and acting in a quasi-consultant role. In relation to these, Kállay states that there is no unified, unique answer to the problem of the optimal proportion of theory and practice in entrepreneurship education. Kállay (2022) then presents the Student Generated Case Study Method, an approach developed at the Corvinus University of Budapest. The two-round educational method based on iterative problem identification and solution proposal seeks to connect and balance theory and practice in entrepreneurship education, even with a diverse group of students.

One of the main reasons why students engage at different levels in experiential entrepreneurship classes is that different students may have different expecta-

tions, so they put different levels of effort into the foundation work and, as a result, progress at different speeds. Lagging teams and individual students may become discouraged if the lesson moves to topics that are not yet relevant to them. Other teams and motivated learners who are quick to prove a hypothesis may get bored if the lesson content stops their progress. One of the most successful solutions to this problem is to provide students with differentiated learning experiences. Iványi and Danyi (2022) analyse in their article published in present thematic block the impact of an entrepreneurship training course that has been running for several years on the entrepreneurial skills and motivation of university students, using a cross-sectional approach within the framework of difference-in-differences. The researchers classified the participating students into three categories based on their entrepreneurial motivations and expectations. There is a significant difference according to teamwork, the level of active participation in the course and the ease of obtaining a good grade. Students can choose from three curricula based on their motivation. The researchers' conclusion is that the extra work should be reflected in the grades of students who choose a more challenging and work-intensive curriculum (differentiation in grading). It should be mentioned, however, that only a very small percentage of students choose the option that involves extra work and more complex tasks.

The impact of higher education courses and programmes on students' entrepreneurial ambitions is also a topic that has been extensively analysed in literature (Fayolle 2019). In their study published in present thematic block, Huszák and Oborni (2022) correspondingly point out that the increased number of business and management programmes in higher education institutions (Valerio et al. 2014; Fayolle 2019) reflects the growing entrepreneurial ambitions of students, and that there are more and more start-ups founded by university students – not only at Stanford University but also at European HEIs (Volkmann and Audretsch 2017). However, as Huszák and Oborni (2022) elaborate in their study, differences can be demonstrated in the proportion of male and female students founding start-ups. The action-based research of Huszák and Oborni (2022), based on the peer-mentoring method, examines whether formal mentoring can be integrated into university education and whether it encourages the entrepreneurial ambitions of female students. The research highlights the need for mentoring in influencing learning outcomes and entrepreneurship ambitions, as well as the critical conditions for integrating the mentorship approach into higher education. The results show that priority support, which creates trust through openness, motivation and commitment, plays an important role at the early stage of entrepreneurial ideas. The results provide sufficient evidence that mentoring programmes are viable pedagogical methods for teaching entrepreneurship skills.

Szőcs and Bethlendi's study (2022) published in present thematic block examines the geographical distribution of the most valuable start-ups ('unicorns') in recent years. They illustrate that the emergence and distribution of unicorn companies can be explained by the institutional context, with particular regard to the provision of human capital. Based on the statistical data of Crunchbase and CB Insights port databases, the authors came to the conclusion that one of the

factors behind growth is the significant amount of venture capital available in the global financial markets. The analysis shows that the USA and China account for nearly 70% of the world's unicorns. At the same time, it is also important to highlight that the UK has the most valuable start-ups, mainly in the fintech sector. Most unicorns are found in the fintech and Internet software and services sectors, but e-commerce, healthcare and AI-related developments are also dynamically developing.

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Loretta Huszák, Erika Jáki

(Guest Editors in Chief and Reviewers)

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