The impact of regional entrepreneurial contexts upon enterprise education

By Dr. Briga Hynes & Dr. Sarah Drakopoulou Dodd

Synopsis

This research investigates the role of regionality as a contextual influence upon enterprise education as educational institutions and their stakeholders are embedded in wider contexts, including social, legal and economic factors. We demonstrate the significance of regional contexts, its milieu of agents, routines, traditions and institutions in shaping entrepreneurship capital and its conduciveness to entrepreneurial behaviour and risk taking. The findings show that although national context is clearly relevant, the impact of regional context upon enterprise education should also be considered most carefully as differences occur by regional type, across enterprise education objectives, outcomes, resources and social constructions of the entrepreneur.

Introduction and Background

An accumulation of scholarship is steadily amassing that takes cognizance of the inherently contextualized, relational and embedded nature of entrepreneurship which necessitates greater awareness of and analysis of contextual differentiation. That said, there are relatively few insights into the nature and degree of external contextual influences upon enterprise education to date. Entrepreneurship education varies mainly due to contextual issues which combine characteristics of the regional infrastructure and the social and economic environment of the individual. Context-setting within schools takes the form of storying entrepreneurship, of presenting credible local identities and expressing the meaning of entrepreneurship for these communities. These factors can be anticipated to influence various aspects of enterprise education, such as course content, learner entrepreneurial intentionality and are a powerful means of developing local narratives of entrepreneurial identities and careers. Therefore, we need a greater appreciation of context in explorations of entrepreneurial learning, with an appreciation of its relational aspects, and its social-embeddedness in local learning networks for the design of targeted and appropriate entrepreneurship education programmes. It thus seems likely that for school-based learners and educators, level of regional development is an important issue, shaping normative, cognitive and regulatory institutions alike. Our research proposes that...
entrepreneurship is differently constructed within the educational environments of young learners from divergent regional contexts, and hence offers different future ‘stories’ and entrepreneurial intentions.

Issues and Questions Considered

Regional knowledge contexts are co-created and performed through the modus operandi of a particular habitus, which implies that virtuous spirals of entrepreneurship in well-endowed areas will contrast ever more sharply with culturally and materially constrained areas of (relative) entrepreneurial deprivation. Embeddedness in specific socio-cultural milieux is likely to shape the objectives, content, meanings and institutions of entrepreneurial learning in general, and enterprise education in particular. Secondary schools participate in these milieux, thereby matching the patterns of regionality found for other entrepreneurial processes, structures and identities. Indeed, it seems reasonable to argue that schools stakeholders are playing a critical role, co-creating regional narratives of enterprise with the next generation of potential entrepreneurs, and thereby constructing new entrepreneurial ‘products’. In a very real sense, teachers, administrators, supporting entrepreneurs and the pupils themselves are storying particular potential entrepreneurial futures and the result of this joint interaction of actors has a variety of economic, educational and social impacts. The weft and weave of local entrepreneurship capital generates the inter-linked structures, cultures, resource matrix and learning systems which in turn mould regional entrepreneurship patterns. Entrepreneurial learning as widely construed, as well as formal education processes, are an integral element in these regional systems. Indeed, context specific formal enterprise education has already been recommended as a vehicle for overcoming structural deficits in rural regions. There is therefore likely to be substantial merit in considering the impact of regional context upon enterprise education. We argue that schools are an important locus, and enterprise education a vital process, in the enactment of regional discourses of entrepreneurship as this ‘joint sense-making and identity-making work’ exposes the next generation to local success narratives of the entrepreneur. As a consequence we call for more awareness and analysis of contextual differentiation and to acknowledge how this influences what is meant by ‘entrepreneurship’, or indeed, ‘enterprise education’, within the context studied.

Methodology

This objective of the research was pursued through a comparative multi-method, cross-national investigation in six European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom). The methodology combined a range of quantitative surveys, as well as semi-structured interviews and metaphor analysis. The empirical study included the views of multiple stakeholders, school pupils (between 14 and 19 years old), teachers, parents, education administrators and supporting entrepreneurs. In terms of sample selection, it was intended to try and capture regional effects, if such existed so partners selected two contrasting regions within their country, one well-developed economically and technologically relative to the country’s norms with high levels of entrepreneurship, and the other under-developed economically and technologically and with low levels of entrepreneurship.

Outcomes and Findings

Entrepreneurship is differently constructed, and offers different futures to young learners from divergent regional contexts. Enterprise education makes explicit and personal the rather tacit public discourse about entrepreneurship to which local pupils have been exposed to all their lives, and it provides a framework for them to perform these identities. The findings depict idiosyncratic habitus-specific entrepreneurial identities, localized entrepreneurial competences and makes manifest latent local resources, and gives meaning to all of these by articulating them within a legitimated narrative frame. The study has established that regionality shapes the context for enterprise education and influences the educational objectives, outcomes, resources and cultures for schools’ entrepreneurship programmes. Schools are important enablers in enterprise education and should engage the student with local entrepreneurs, creating empathy with local success narratives of the entrepreneur and instilling appropriate entrepreneurial skills and competencies. It is also important to note that regional development is relative, not absolute. The findings applied across almost all countries studied, so that the relative regional munificence at national level is shown to matter, rather than absolute regional munificence across the countries studied. This article contributes to advancing entrepreneurship education theory and the regionality of entrepreneurship education theory (which is under researched) by providing comprehension of the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship education to inform appropriate and regionally relevant entrepreneurship education programmes, and suggests that taking account of local enterprise habitus is critical for effective and impactful enterprise education programmes.

For further information and comments, please contact:
Dr Helena Lenihan
Assistant Dean, Research
Kemmy Business School
University of Limerick
Ireland
Tel: +353 61 202079 (direct dial)
Email: helena.lenihan@ul.ie
Web: www.economics.ul.ie

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