

Call for papers – Rencontres de St-Gall 2018 03 to 05 September 2018 in St.Gallen

Beyond Silicon Valley: Moving towards a contextualized view of entrepreneurship

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Ever since Birch's original work on gazelles – high-growth companies that are increasing their revenues by at least 20% annually for four years, starting from a revenue base of at least \$1 million – much of the attention of scholars and policy makers has focused on high-growth, technology-enabled, venture capital-backed businesses that form new industries, create thousands of jobs, do big initial public offerings, and make their founders billionaires. Silicon Valley-based icons such as Apple, Google, Amazon and Facebook are regularly featured in the popular press and widely used as case study material in business schools. It has become a conventional wisdom that these gazelles, or more recently, “unicorns” – privately held companies valued at a billion dollars or more – represent both the pinnacle and the primary goal of entrepreneurship.

The economic and societal reality is a far cry from this wild hype. There is plenty of evidence that entrepreneurship attracts persons whose characteristics show a strong fit with the uncertain entrepreneurship environment so that they might become stars. However, we also know that many (start-up) entrepreneurs fail or persist on the edge of failure, or if one prefers a more positively toned framing, sustain themselves on the brink of success. Most new ventures will not become gazelles but rather remain small or medium-sized enterprises. Indeed, the majority of businesses within most economies are small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Even if one were to restrict attention to growth and wealth creation, technology-oriented and venture capital-backed businesses would often not predominate. Established SMEs and family businesses still create the majority of jobs in sectors not associated with venture capital, but in, for example, construction, logistics, consumer products, food and beverage, and education.

Recently, a growing number of scholars have become critical of the over-emphasis on the “Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship”, which appears to constitute a tiny group of outliers. For example, Welter et al. (2017; 2011) suggest that a wider and non-discriminatory, contextualized perspective on what constitutes entrepreneurship would lead to better theorizing, i.e. theory which more realistically renders the phenomenon. These authors call to approach entrepreneurship more broadly, as a “heterogeneous, blooming, and messy” process that can produce heroes of many kinds who generate economic and societal impact in various contexts rather than heroic Silicon Valley entrepreneurs only. Aldrich and Ruef (2017) identify a focus on high-growth firms, innovative activity, and opportunity recognition as three interrelated threads of the Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship. They point to what they believe to be scholars' misplaced attention to the extreme and their corresponding neglect of the “mundane”.

High-growth firms have become some kind of fixation within enterprise policy, too. Brown et al. (2017) argue that a number of distinctive myths have become deeply embedded within policy frameworks. Such myths have been built on misconceived preconceptions of

high-growth firms, which have resulted in policy-makers paying lesser attention to SMEs as backbone of economic wealth. For education focusing on entrepreneurship and SME management it may be dangerous as well to centre theorizing and teaching on these “black swans”. Entrepreneurship theorizing, education and policy making may thus suffer from severe selection biases.

At the Rencontres de St-Gall 2018, we want to embrace entrepreneurial diversity by exploring heterogeneous types of entrepreneurship. We encourage contributions that explore both the valorised and disparaged side of entrepreneurship, such as opportunity vs. necessity motivations, Darwinian vs. communitarian or missionary motivations, venture capital-backed vs. bootstrapped financing, formal vs. informal entrepreneurship, men-owned/led vs. women-owned/led, innovator vs. replicator, growth-oriented vs. lifestyle, in a variety of settings, including start-ups and traditional SMEs and family businesses. We welcome conceptual and empirical papers that shed light on the kaleidoscopic nature of the entrepreneurship phenomenon, putting particular emphasis on the context within which entrepreneurship unfolds (e.g., family embeddedness, task environment such as industry or immediate work environment, non-task environment such as cognitive, regulative, and normative institutions, everyday entrepreneurship outside a business context). We encourage contributions which adopt lenses from adjacent disciplines, such psychology, economics, and sociology to generate a more holistic and thereby relevant understanding of the phenomenon including its antecedents, consequences and processes.

An indicative, but not exhaustive, list of questions that this call for papers addresses is:

- How does context impact entrepreneurship including opportunity recognition, opportunity exploitation and outcomes at the level of the individual entrepreneur (e.g., income, satisfaction, wellbeing), firm (financial and innovation performance) and institutions?
- What would a contextualized theory of entrepreneurship look like? Which contextual levels do we need to distinguish and account for in entrepreneurship research?
- In what way has our fixation on high growth firms biased our theorizing about entrepreneurship?
- If our focus on high-growth entrepreneurship has slanted us toward a too narrow definition of entrepreneurship, what would a new definition have to look like?
- What features of high growth entrepreneurship and firm growth more generally do we need to consider in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the entrepreneurship phenomenon?
- What would a typology of various forms of entrepreneurship have to incorporate?
- How is sustainable entrepreneurship different from high risk – high return entrepreneurship?
- What can Silicon Valley entrepreneurship learn from other types of entrepreneurship, such as long-lived family businesses for instance?
- What can we learn from studying outliers in theory building more generally?
- What theories and (new) methods can we draw upon to study contextualized entrepreneurship?
- Are dichotomies (e.g., opportunity versus necessity-based, formal versus informal, innovator versus replicator, growth-oriented versus lifestyle, and so on) useful to explore a “messy” phenomenon such as entrepreneurship?
- How can we develop deeper entrepreneurship knowledge by drawing on failure experience, near misses, and setbacks which characterise the entrepreneurship journey?

- How can entrepreneurship educators engage students to relate the daily tasks and various roles of entrepreneurs in different contexts to the grand questions facing our society?
- What are effective support mechanisms to help germinate sustainable as opposed high risk – high return entrepreneurial ventures considering the context in which the entrepreneurs and their ventures are embedded?
- In what way is everyday entrepreneurship, i.e. entrepreneurial activities happening as part of everyday life and outside the business sector, different from traditional entrepreneurship?
- Where, when, and why differences matter most to render a comprehensive picture of everyday entrepreneurship?
- Should policy makers support everyday entrepreneurship? And if yes, how?
- Should we teach everyday entrepreneurship? And if yes, how?

The deadline for submission is 2 July 2018.



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References

- Aldrich, H. and Ruef, M. (2017). Unicorns, gazelles, and other distractions on the way to understanding real entrepreneurship in America. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, published online before print November 10, 2017, doi: 10.5465/amp.2017.0123
- Birch, D. (1979). *The Job Generation Process*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Program on Neighbourhood and Regional Change.
- Brown, R., Mawson, S. and Mason, C. (2017.) Myth-busting and entrepreneurship policy: The case of high growth firms. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 29(5-6): 414-443.
- Welter, F., Baker, T., Audretsch, D. B. and Gartner, W. B. (2017), Everyday Entrepreneurship – A Call for Entrepreneurship Research to Embrace Entrepreneurial Diversity. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 41(3): 311–321
- Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing entrepreneurship – conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 35(1), 165-184.

Practical information about the Rencontres de St-Gall 2018

Duration	Monday 03 September 2018, 9 am until Wednesday 05 September 2018, 4 pm (Welcome Cocktail on Sunday evening, 6.30 pm)
Participants	By invitation; university professors, senior members of research institutes, and experts in the field
Number of participants	Approximately 50, by invitation
Conference language	English
Conference format	Every participant will receive the papers before the conference. There is no individual presentation of the papers by their authors. Instead, the papers are summarised by the chairperson and discussed within a general discussion forum. All participants are actively encouraged to submit their views, make suggestions, and therefore contribute to the development of the field.
Format of papers	Papers must be submitted via email to walter.weber@unisg.ch until 2 July 2018. Papers should be in English in a MS Word format and be 6,000 to 8,000 words. <u>Each paper must include an abstract and three debating points / questions relating the main issues discussed in the paper.</u> Joint papers are welcome. As the papers are distributed electronically there is no style guide to observe. Please include your full name, title, function, and organisation.
Conference proceedings	Papers will be distributed electronically before the conference. In addition, we will request every participant to make a “friendly review” of a paper submitted by another participant. The reviewers are encouraged to submit their review directly to the author(s) before the conference.
Conference fee	CHF 680.- (including all meals, coffee breaks and outing)
Venue	Kantonsratssaal des Kantons St.Gallen, Klosterhof 3, St.Gallen (Cantonal Council Hall, next to the Abbey Library of St.Gall)
Accommodation	A list of hotels will be sent in spring 2018 with the final registration form
Deadline	2 July 2018 , for the submission of full paper, conference and hotel registration