Entrepreneurship Education in the Danube Region

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Resources for entrepreneurship education are not evenly distributed around the world, and territorial cooperation is often necessary. This is particularly true for the Eastern European region and especially for the Danube region. Entrepreneurship research (including entrepreneurship education) has a long tradition in Western countries but catching up and integration into international networks poses a challenge, especially for Eastern countries. The aim of this special issue is to contribute to the development of this international cooperation by presenting research and best practices in entrepreneurship education in Central and Eastern Europe. The special issue is part of the Danube Cup initiative, which combines entrepreneurship teaching and research to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship educators to benchmark best educational practices and develop inspiring research results in the field of entrepreneurship education.

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JEL Codes: M10, M13, A20

1. Introduction: Designing Entrepreneurship Education Regionally

The development of entrepreneurship programs is ongoing. A comprehensive review of the literature on entrepreneurship education is challenging at best, as educational design is constantly evolving and encompasses an increasing number of disciplines. Research suggests that modern entrepreneurship education needs to provide learning experiences to students rather than only knowledge (e. g., Bell/Bell 2020). One goal of a relevant learning experience is to teach students how to apply the lessons learned in industry (Duh et al. 2020). For example, recent discussions in the literature on the topic of entrepreneurial university refer to education organizations which implement industry-relevant strategies (Majoor-Kozlinska et al. 2024). Such strategies could include actions in which university students and researchers work on projects whose contents (e. g., technological solutions or management knowledge) could be applied in real organizations during and after the courses (see Fuster et al. 2019).

When decision-makers in educational institutions consider adopting an entrepreneurial approach, educators must be strongly committed to using updated working methods (Hadziahmetovic/Dinc 2020). For example, entrepreneurial project work differs from traditional lecturing, where successful participation

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is measured by remembering materials for exams after the course (Laukkanen 2000). In such project work, entrepreneurship educators might consider using regionally known entrepreneurs as motivating mentors and coaches for students who could become entrepreneurs (Rasmussen/Sorheim 2006). In fact, an informed educator could use such role models to encourage students to learn entrepreneurial skills (e. g., conscious risk-taking and creativity) which can contribute to considering entrepreneurship as a career option (Djordjevic et al. 2021).

However, although role models and other resources (e. g., access to capital, information about regulations etc.) are components of entrepreneurship education, they are often not equally distributed across the world (e. g., Thomassen et al. 2020). It is therefore challenging to outline a general model for how entrepreneurship educators could develop new or tailor existing instructional methods, courses, or programs to meet the specific needs of the societies of which their institutions are a part of (see Fayolle, 2013). The regional aspect is crucial because, in addition to resources, national cultures and ecosystems can also affect the development of entrepreneurial skills. For example, national culture can affect entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of teams (Engelen et al. 2014). Research also indicates that country-specific entrepreneurial habits can also affect entrepreneurial intentions (EI) of individual students (Rajkovic et al. 2020). Consequently, entrepreneurship education should carefully consider the regional aspect on multiple levels. This special issue aims to contribute to this regional aspect.

2. Danube Cup Initiative as an Initiator of this Special Issue

The aim of this special issue is to address the challenge faced by entrepreneurship educators in developing and offering relevant entrepreneurship education solutions for the Danube region. It is part of the Danube Cup initiative, which combines entrepreneurship teaching and research in the Danube region. More specifically, the vision of Danube Cup organization is to build a network of higher education institutions which are both committed to scientific rigor and practical relevance. To achieve this vision, the research pillar of the Danube Cup provides an international stage for entrepreneurially-minded students, researchers, and educators (Danube Cup 2024). The hope is that researchers will develop entrepreneurship education solutions which can be tested and used as best practices in various education institutions, particularly in countries along the Danube River. The Danube Cup conferences on entrepreneurship research aim to highlight trends in entrepreneurship/startup education, share experiences and knowledge, and highlight measures which can be implemented at other higher education institutions and accelerators (Huszák/Jáki 2022). The special issue is in keeping with the vision of the Danube Cup research pillar. In fact, the

goal of this special issue is to reveal new entrepreneurship education solutions which could help entrepreneurship educators generate regional impacts.

The 2nd Danube Cup research conference was hosted by the University of Belgrade on 24th and 25th November 2023. The conference organizers collaborated with journals such as *Journal of East European Management Studies* (JEEMS), which aims to promote dialogue and cooperation among scholars seeking to examine, explore and explain the behavior and practices of management within the transforming societies of CEE. In line with the conference session themes, we, as the guest editor team of JEEMS, called for papers for a special issue on entrepreneurship education in the Central and East European region because we believe that entrepreneurship education is a tool which could significantly affect economical and societal transformation processes in the Danube region (Hashi/Krasniqi 2011). In fact, we believe that the cooperative and entrepreneurial efforts of young people (e. g., students) could lead not only to new startups but also result in projects that could bring innovations to existing companies (see Van Vuuren/Alemayehu 2018).

3. Interdisciplinary European Conferences on Entrepreneurship Research – the Missing Link between East and West

In comparison to the United States, the issue of entrepreneurship has reached Europe with a considerable delay. When the first Chair of Entrepreneurship was established in Germany in 1998 at the Oestrich-Winkel Business School (today: EBS University), there were already around 50 such departments in the U.S. (Schmude/Welter/Heumann 2008). The expansion of entrepreneurship research in the western half of Europe also marks the establishment of the Interdisciplinary Conference on Entrepreneurship, Innovation and SMEs ('G-Forum') as an annual national conference in 1997. A further research forum dedicated to entrepreneurship, the Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research (IECER), was created in 2005 when academic entrepreneurship research in Western Europe reached a critical mass. IECER was initiated by Michael Dowling (Business Administration, University of Regensburg) and Jürgen Schmude (Economic Geography, University of Regensburg) (Schmude et al. 2008).

Since this critical time in 2005, both conferences have been held on an annual basis, with a different Western European location chosen each year. In our research, we were particularly interested in the proportion of Eastern European researchers as participants at the latest conferences of the two international research networks. The 22. IECER conference was held from September 18–20, 2024, in Innsbruck, Austria at the Management Center Innsbruck | The Entrepreneurial School. The 27th 'G-Forum' was held from September 25–27,

2024, in Ingolstadt, Germany at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt and the Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt.

As Table 1 reveals (participant numbers were obtained from attendance lists shared with all event participants), there is a noticeable regional concentration of participants from Western Europe. This observation applies to both conferences, with an even higher concentration at the 'G-Forum'. In the case of the 'G-Forum', the high proportion of German participants is due to the 'home-market effect'. In short, we feel that the international character of both conferences can only be demonstrated along Western European dimensions. The proportion of Eastern European participants was notably low (25,83 % at IECER and 11,99 % at 'G-Forum', respectively), which in our view indicates the perceived East-West divide in the field of entrepreneurship research (including entrepreneurship education). In other words, such a strong participation of Western European researchers in major research forums could have such an impact on entrepreneurship education research findings which emphasise a Western approach. In the worst scenario, an overemphasis might result in taken-for-granted insights which might not be applicable worldwide (c. f., Fayolle 2013). As discussed above, cultural and regional differences affect the ways in which students develop their entrepreneurial qualities (Rajkovic/Nikolic/Cockalo/Stojanovic/Kovacic 2020). Therefore, the field of entrepreneurship education would benefit from research and best practices which specifically consider the East European context and its impact on the methods and techniques used by entrepreneurship educators.

Table 1: Regional patterns at IECER and G-forum, 2024

	IECER conference 2024[1]		G-Forum conference 2024[2]	
Total number of participants	120	100.00 %	292	100.00 %
Other than CEE participants	89	74.17 %	257	88.01 %
of which German participants	27	22.50 %	200	68.49 %
CEE participants	31	25.83 %	35	11.99 %

Notes: CEE stands for Central and Eastern Europe and includes countries comprising Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Although the methods of entrepreneurship education are frequently applied and further developed in the CEE region, cooperation between higher education institutions and researchers in Eastern and Western Europe could be stronger. Cooperation is crucial in entrepreneurship education because cooperative activities are often part of key strategies, which can provide critical resources (e. g., university researchers´ innovations) for startups (Fuster et al. 2019). Utilizing

1 https://www.iecer-conference.org/.

2 https://www.fgf-ev.de/en/g-forum-2024-ingolstadt-germany/.

such innovations is important for many startups, but especially for those operating in transition economies, such as countries in the CEE region (Peng 2001). We hope that this special issue will help to fill these gaps by sharing new best practices which entrepreneurship educators could apply when developing and offering regionally relevant entrepreneurship education.

4. Contributions of This Special Issue

The first article in this special issue explores a novel context for entrepreneurship education: primary school. *Janez Gorenc, Blaž Zupan,* and *Alenka Slavec Gomezel* use survey data from Slovenia to explain how primary school education interventions (e. g., weekend events) can support early adolescents´ entrepreneurial intentions and attitudes. In the second article of this special issue, *Janez Gorenc, Alenka Slavec Gomezel,* and *Blaž Zupan* use semi-structured interview data from pupils, their teachers, and principals, again from Slovenia. The authors explicate how a constructivist pedagogy, together with its collaborative and resource mobilizing functions, can improve the entrepreneurial qualities of 11–14-year-old pupils in Slovenia. Thus, the first two papers of this special issue shed light on complex personal and external factors which play a role in entrepreneurship education interventions in the rarely studied context of primary schools (see Salavou/Mamakou/Douglas 2023).

The third article in this special issue also deals with interesting context-based details—not at a specific education level (as in the first two articles) but by analyzing contexts over time. In fact, *Judit Csákné Filep* and *Áron Szennay* analyze entrepreneurship education from the perspective of generational differences. They use Hungary-specific data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) dataset. The authors suggest that tailored entrepreneurship training programs would be important, as their results revealed a positive correlation between participation in entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activity. This finding is interesting because, as discussed in the study, formal entrepreneurship education was less accessible to generations raised during socialism than for generations raised after socialism, which affects entrepreneurial pursuits in such contexts (c. f., Smallbone/Welter 2009; Smallbone et al. 2014).

The fourth article in this special issue compares hackathons and project-based learning (PBL) instruction methods. Using their survey data from Serbia, *Ana Miličević, Milica Simić, Zorica Bogdanović, Marijana Despotović-Zrakić,* and *Marko Suvajdžić´* suggest that both hackathons and PBL can influence entrepreneurial behavior and mindset. However, the authors also add that these methods might support different entrepreneurial skills. Among their implications, the authors reveal that hackathons (i. e., informal education) are particularly effective at fostering creativity while PBL (i. e., formal education) might be more efficient in developing students´ soft skills. Additionally, the authors

found that their sample of students preferred hackathons over PBL. The topic of student experiences could be an interesting avenue for future research, for example, to test whether students´ positive course experiences affect their competitiveness and effectiveness outside the education environment after the educational interventions (Huq/Gilbert 2017).

In the fifth article of this special issue, *Ivan Todorović, Milan Okanović, Slavica Cicvarić Kostić, Igor Pihir,* and *Miha Marič* contribute to the discussion on informal versus formal types of entrepreneurship education. One of their implications suggests that extracurricular activities can affect different entrepreneurial mindset types (e. g., elaborating mindset, implementation mindset, and compulsiveness) more strongly than formal entrepreneurship education does. The authors collected their data in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, and they discuss their results in light of demographics (e. g., gender, startup experience, family background). Such a multinational data analysis provides interesting insights into how cultural differences impact on the development of entrepreneurial qualities in the CEE region (c. f., Mali/Kuzmanovic/Nicolic/Mitic/Stojanovic 2020).

In the sixth article of this special issue, *Katarina Milosavljević, Zoran M. Rakićević,* and *Jovana Rakićević* review existing research on effective learning models used in entrepreneurship education at universities. The authors take a global approach and conclude that effective learning models can be classified as generalized, augmented, motivational, or training types. They outline an agenda for how these learning model types could be used effectively to achieve entrepreneurship education goals. Although some literature reviews have been published, such as Thomassen et al.´s (2020) literature review on entrepreneurship education contexts, Milosavljević and colleagues´ specific focus on effective learning models provides details for entrepreneurship educators´ course design purposes in the higher education context.

In the seventh article of this special issue, *Milica Jovanović, Jelena Anđelković Labrović, Ivana Kužet,* and *Jasna Petković* also present a model which could help design higher education courses. The authors develop a "multidisciplinary roadmap" which represents a pedagogical strategy for developing entrepreneurial competencies. Their "roadmap" includes soft and technical skills and incorporates technology entrepreneurship and human resource management tools. The authors designed and tested their pedagogical strategy contribution through action research conducted over two cycles and with two generations of students in Serbia. The "roadmap" aims to foster students´ creativity, idea validation, and teamwork. The authors contribute to the understanding of learning-by-doing as an effective instruction method for entrepreneurship education in higher education (c. f., Rasmussen/Sorensen 2006).

The final article in this special issue tests and reports on how entrepreneurship educators could integrate a design thinking-based instruction method into uni-

versity teaching. More specifically, *Blaž Zupan* and *Anja Svetina Nabergoj* conducted in-depth interviews with educators and students at universities in Slovenia, United Kingdom, and the United States. They found that both environmental factors (e. g., mentoring, tools, and spaces as well as external recognition) and process factors (e. g., interdisciplinarity, fieldwork, experimentation, and user-centered research) are key components of university courses applying design thinking. The authors state that these components might support students´ entrepreneurial work as their university courses conclude. The implications are intended to help future entrepreneurship educators apply Brown´s (2008) design thinking concepts to ensure the continuity of entrepreneurship education participants´ projects and improve their learning experiences (c. f., Sarooghi et al. 2019).

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