Foreword

Entrepreneurship is about emergence and creative organising of resources according to opportunity and so is the making of a new discipline such as entrepreneurial studies. Over the last 15 years entrepreneurship has become recognised as an academic domain of its own. Increased institutionalisation through, for example, (endowed) chairs, research conferences and scientific journals have contributed to an enhanced legitimacy of entrepreneurship within the academic community. As entrepreneurship researchers we have an obligation to use this public recognition of our collective insights, and the self-confidence that accompanies it, whenever and wherever societal challenges call for them. Now, in 2004, when the European context is radically changing, is the right time to offer such contributions. Therefore the publication of this book, its variety of entrepreneurial phenomena and how they may be researched, is very timely. Its different contributions do not just provide a state of the art, a historical image of European entrepreneurship research. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this volume offers a point of departure for further inquiries into entrepreneurship that recognise its embeddedness in unique social and cultural settings.

European entrepreneurship research originally very much replicated North American theories, methods and empirical representations of the phenomenon. Over the years, European researchers, however, have not only refined originally American frameworks and methodologies. We have also made significant independent contributions to the field, such as constructionist thinking and narrative methodology. Our greater concern for the interface between business and society, historically well founded in the European context, has generated new interesting research approaches that demonstrate how entrepreneurial phenomena bridge between different societal sectors. The European setting obviously invites comparative research, empirically illustrating the importance of the socio-cultural context. In this volume the significance of such cultural contingencies and associated institutional settings is well demonstrated by its many contributions. Thereby their authors collectively contribute to the creation of a genuine dialogue between European and North American researchers, offering mutual learning on equal terms. The recognised need for joint academic venturing into entrepreneurship is also reflected in an increasing number of journals including both authors and editorial board members from both sides of the Atlantic. Research conferences on entrepreneurship, independent of where they are held, today attract researchers from countries all over the world. The entrepreneurship research community has become truly global.

Offering a broad variety of approaches this book contributes significantly to the making of entrepreneurship into an academic discipline of its own. Still in its infancy, entrepreneurship research must adopt an eclectic view and establish a broad interface with other disciplines. As much as management (once) co-opted economics, systems and operations analysis as well as sociology with their well-established models and concern for regularities, entrepreneurship benefits more from anthropology, ethnography and social psychology with their interest in everyday life and sensemaking. The entrepreneurial phenomenon lends itself to multidisciplinary approaches considering its concern for process as well as for structure, for economic rules of the game as well as for social embedding. In contrast to management studies, entrepreneurship research and education thus cannot be reduced to an activity that to a considerable extent is possible to discipline as a professional field where formal training and codified knowledge go hand in hand with universal models and normative statements. Entrepreneurship is as much associated with identity making as with profit making, as much with creativity and spontaneity as with the enactment of visions. These generic features must be reflected in the ways we research and teach entrepreneurship.

In my mind the variety in terms of what issues are addressed and how, as well as the diversity with respect to national origin, that this volume offers thus is much needed. Its contributors jointly signal that many challenges remain for scholars in entrepreneurship all over the world. We in Europe are privileged, though, since the changing European scene makes several of these potential research issues visible. The new member states, still with an underdeveloped infrastructure, make obvious the need for appropriate institutions so taken for granted in mature welfare states. Entrepreneurship for job and wealth creation remains an important issue, whether as a generic strategy for the reconstruction of old-new economies in former Eastern Europe, for marginal regions in any mature economies or for developing countries. The emergence of the strong Asian economies carried by their own constructions of entrepreneurship tells us to be more humble as regards our European understanding of the phenomenon and its reach. It is obviously important that multifaceted approaches to entrepreneurship are carefully tried out before conclusive recommendations as regards knowledge for use at universities and by practitioners are made. As researchers we are driven by the ambition to produce universal knowledge, whether as theoretical models, appropriate vocabularies or generic approaches. Aiming for those ideals we, though, have to realise that it is still far too early to make ourselves comfortable as explorers in entrepreneurship. The research must go on!

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