Entrepreneurship is about ‘heterogeneity’ – entrepreneurs start their ventures from all kinds of backgrounds, with a variety of business ideas, and their way of starting a venture varies considerably. This fact was emphasized by William Gartner in his thesis ‘An empirical model of the business start-up, and eight entrepreneurial archetypes’ (1982) and not least in his well cited article in the Academy of Management Review in 1985, in which he provided a framework for understanding the variation in entrepreneurship – in entrepreneurs, their activities, the kind of organizations they start, and the contexts in which the activities take place – a framework that can be seen as a kaleidoscope for viewing the varying patterns of entrepreneurship.

Following this line of argumentation we can say that context matters! The institutional conditions for entrepreneurship differ significantly between countries (Lundström and Stevenson, 2005). The attitudes towards entrepreneurship, risks and failures and the economic environment differ (for example, the growth of the economy, legislation, taxes, administrative burdens for entrepreneurs) and there are variations between countries with regard to support for entrepreneurs and new ventures – all of which are factors that affect the possibility to start new ventures in a society, and make the behaviour needed to start a business quite different in one country compared to another. As a consequence, the rate of entrepreneurial activities and the characteristics of the businesses started vary significantly in different contexts (Bosma et al., 2008).

There is also great heterogeneity in terms of the companies started by entrepreneurs. The majority of ventures can be considered imitative – we tend to start businesses that are essentially similar to other businesses, for example, we start restaurants that are similar to other restaurants or boutiques that are similar to other such outlets, and so on. Of course there are reasons for this kind of imitative behaviour in entrepreneurship – not least the fact that it is a way to reduce the uncertainty inherent in new ventures. Despite this tendency to start imitative ventures, there are always entrepreneurs who break the pattern and create more innovative ventures – ventures that might result in new industries. Starting innovative ventures is something quite different to starting imitative ventures (Aldrich, 1999), for example, the entrepreneur must acquire new skills and routines that do not already exist and convince others to believe in the new idea and venture.

In addition, we can start ventures, irrespective of whether they are imitative or innovative, in many different ways (Reynolds and Miller, 1992). It may even be that the first sale to a customer occurs before the entrepreneur begins thinking about starting a business. Furthermore, the duration of the start-up process varies greatly from a couple of weeks to several years. There is no one best way of starting a new venture – it is a complex process that involves creativity and experimentation as well as planning and systematic work.

Finally, individuals differ! Each year millions of people around the world start their own venture, and it would be somewhat surprising if we could find similar characteristics and motivation among them. In general, there has long been a notion that either ‘you are an entrepreneur or not’, and it has been popular to assign particular traits and motives to
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the entrepreneur (Brockhaus, 1982), but today we know that such variables only explain a few per cent of the variance (Davidsson, 2008). In addition, we have to bear in mind that entrepreneurship is not mainly an individual achievement but a social phenomenon – more and more ventures are started by a team of entrepreneurs – a fact that makes the prerequisites for and the process of starting a new venture quite different from starting an individual venture, for example, regarding the resources available, but also the possibility of conflicts within the team and negative dynamics in the venture.

The conclusion that we can draw is that there is more variation than similarities in entrepreneurship – entrepreneurship is a highly heterogeneous phenomenon – and this heterogeneity needs to be taken into account in our entrepreneurial education. In this third volume of the Handbook of Research in Entrepreneurship Education, Alain Fayolle treats the issue of heterogeneity in entrepreneurship in a very meritorious manner by taking an international approach to entrepreneurship education, and in this way we can learn from the diversity of teaching experiences around the world.

As Fayolle argues in his introduction (p. 2) ‘There is no magic method, only methods which are more or less well adopted to a set of factors such as the pedagogical objectives, the characteristics of the audience, the institutional, cultural and organizational constraints’, thus there is no best pedagogical approach or method in entrepreneurship education. In the first part of the book we learn about different pedagogical approaches in entrepreneurship teaching, such as simulation methods, case studies and the use of practical expertise possessed by entrepreneurs. The second part of the book includes a couple of chapters that focus on differences in terms of making use of the richness of student diversity in the teaching situations, but also with regard to differences in entrepreneurship teaching between countries and cultures. The third part elaborates on entrepreneurship education for particular audiences such as women entrepreneurs, ethnic minority entrepreneurs, artists and scientists, and undergraduate students. Finally, in the fourth part of the book, the heterogeneity in entrepreneurship is taken into consideration by a discussion of entrepreneurship education in different institutional cultures, for example, in the university context and private corporations.

The richness of the book provides great opportunities for the reader’s own learning. By taking the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship seriously, the reader can learn from the different pedagogical approaches and entrepreneurship educations presented and reflected upon in the book. I wish the reader an enjoyable and profitable reading experience.

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References


