While start-up firms are usually born small, many of them have the potential to revitalize the whole economy, or parts of it, and change the way we think about business, innovation, and life in general. People tend to believe that successful start-up entrepreneurs are lonely champions and start-up firms are standalone stars, but even the biggest talents are lost without a supporting environment. Applying an ecosystems perspective to study the development of innovative small firms is hence becoming increasingly popular among entrepreneurship scholars. Still, we have limited knowledge of how the interactions between the context and the firm affect the development of both.

In this handbook, we offer various empirical, literature-based, and conceptual studies that focus on how the different actors and factors in the ecosystem incubate start-ups. Similar to living organisms, the care and resources firms receive at the start of their life are crucial for their growth potential and future success. We propose a Start-up Incubation Ecosystem (SUPIE) perspective, which, in contrast to other ecosystem approaches, focuses on a more specific and perhaps more critical context that surrounds firms at the time of “hatching”, when they start learning how to become independent, i.e. survive and grow by using the available resources in their proximate environment.

SUPIEs are both exciting and challenging to study. Similar to natural ecosystems, they vary significantly in size, from a group of individuals to a whole geographical region, or even more; in type, as some incubate software firms while others nurture biopharma companies; in resources, as shown by the comparison of urban and rural SUPIEs. Besides, they are also connected to and embedded in one another.

The above considerations brought alive a new aspiration at Nord University Business School, where an internationally recognized research team, led by local professors and assisted by renowned visiting scholars, have been studying the crossroads of innovation and entrepreneurship for more than three decades. The new aspiration was to gather researchers from around the world interested in understanding and further exploring SUPIEs, and to create a research handbook that sums up previous works on, offers original contributions to, and sets future directions for the study of start-ups and their environments.

In Spring 2018, we issued an open call for researchers to submit their ideas.
and ongoing projects with us for possible publication in a SUPIE research handbook. During the following 12 months, the proposals were evaluated, and the submitted chapters went through two rounds of blind peer review. The editors helped author-teams to align their ideas and research projects with the theme of the book. Between the two revision rounds, in November 2018, we invited contributors to Nord University in Bodo, to present their works and receive additional feedback, and at the same time network with fellow researchers. While some chapters have been withdrawn during the process, we are happy that 23 manuscripts ended up being accepted for publication. These chapters are written by 54 scholars affiliated to institutions in 15 countries including Australia, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

The SUPIE handbook would not have been published without essential financial and human resources. First of all, we would like to thank the contributors for their interest in publishing their research with us and for actively collaborating with the editors during the review process. We express our gratitude to the Regional Research Funds for Northern Norway and Nord University for providing the funding that made this project possible. We also thank the publisher, Edward Elgar, for expressing their interest in the topic and for the kind assistance they have provided throughout the publication process.

We hope that the story of a book does not end when published, and the SUPIE research handbook becomes an important piece in the field of ecosystems approaches to entrepreneurship and innovation. The book is primarily recommended for those who would like to get acquainted with the topic and different ways of studying it. For example, PhD students may find it a good starting point before submitting their research proposal, but we believe that many other academics, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can also benefit from the variety of chapters included.

Finally, before they start reading the book, we advise the readers to look at Figure I.1 in the introduction, which organizes the chapters according to their relationship with the primary layers of SUPIEs: individual and organizational, in addition to framework conditions. The other dimension of the figure relates to the unit of analysis, also used to structure the chapters. Accordingly, following the introduction, the studies are divided into three main groups: Part I deals with the start-up incubation ecosystem as a whole, its build-up and functioning; Part II discusses the role of start-up support organizations within SUPIEs; and Part III focuses on how university-based SUPIEs spin out and support start-ups.

The Editors