



Call for Papers

Rethinking Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: An International Comparative Perspective

The Conference Series on Frontiers in International Business Research

Sponsored by:

USC-CIBER, Sonoco International Business Department, McNair Institute on Entrepreneurialism &
The Institute for Development Strategies (IU)

Over the last twenty years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly focused on the ways in which entrepreneurial ecosystems can spur growth and innovation. With the disruption of conventional international trade regimes, leaders look often to ecosystems as a vital asset to accelerate the localization of firms, investors and new technologies. This approach has led to two important shifts in perspectives. First, the literature has moved beyond the conventional Kirznerian focus of entrepreneurship as an arbitrage opportunity to a Schumpeterian driver of value creation. Second, the exploration of ecosystems implies that the value accrued to the firm extends in part beyond its internal resources and borders but rather to the spatial and institutional configurations in which it is embedded.

At the same time, the difficulties in nurturing entrepreneurial ecosystems (OECD 2020) reveal a problematic assumption of uniformity (or universality) in the composition and dynamics of ecosystems. The one size fits all, or *tabula rasa*, assumption (Adner 2017, Jacobides, Cennamo & Gawer 2018) is largely rooted in the typical narrow determinisms of legal, technological and resource conditions that can facilitate the creation and growth of new firms and sectors as well as the creation and recombination of knowledge resources vital for value creation. Moreover, the determinisms are often closely tied to strong assumptions about the inevitability of globalization, free trade and ever encompassing global value chains.

In contrast, this conference embraces an international comparative perspective that can help make sense of the variety of ecosystems and the attendant entrepreneurial strategies shaping success and failure. The conference offers a unique forum for researchers and practitioners to re-evaluate the critical incentives, capabilities and linkages that enable firms to compete and collaborate in fostering greater value added for both themselves and their societies. Examining the variety of entrepreneurial ecosystem configurations allows one to endow the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystem with greater precision in three important ways (Wurth, Stam & Spigel, 2022).

First, a comparative perspective necessarily forces us to release assumptions of the uniform impact in terms of economic development, technologies, and regulatory structures. Rather, we can see more sharply how similar conditions may lead to divergent outcomes in entrepreneurship and conversely, how different conditions with similar outcomes reveal often overlooked possibilities for prosperity.

Second, the comparative perspective is often historical. This allows us to trace the evolution of and learn from the intellectual antecedents of ecosystems from around the world, such as industrial districts (Piore & Sabel 1984), technological clusters (Porter 1998), regional networks (Di Giovanna, 1996), “*les innovatives milieux*,” (Maillat, 1995), the learning region (Morgan, 1997) or “*Die Standortpolitik*”.

Third, comparative perspectives shed new light on multi-level analysis. We are forced to re-visit the interactions between different types of firms (new vs old, local vs foreign, small vs large), sectoral organizations, regional institutions, and even transnational regimes, ideally identifying the constraints and linkages that may block or enable knowledge creation and recombination.

We welcome submissions from a variety of methods, levels of theorizing and contexts. We encourage exploratory and speculative submissions. We want to bring together works that can speak to both the central tenets of the aforementioned debate and the diversity of disciplinary perspectives. In turn, we also encourage works that can be retrospective and prospective, perhaps integrating past research that together can shed light on future trends. Moreover, we hope to create a unique learning experience by bringing together researchers, entrepreneurs and financiers, as well as policy makers a variety of countries and industries.

Suggested, though not comprehensive, lines of inquiry include:

- What are the similarities and differences between entrepreneurial ecosystems within the same industries in terms of their organizational composition, network linkages and regulatory frameworks?
- How does the ecosystem concept emerge from yet also differs from its historical antecedents? Where is the intellectual leverage and policy advantages?
- How do the underlying technological or industry characteristics of the ecosystem impact its compositions and structure?
- Do nation states have distinctly different approaches to or patterns of entrepreneurial ecosystems or is this a purely sub-national game?
- How do entrepreneurial ecosystems vary in terms of start-up rates, growth, and innovation outcomes? How do the different configurations co-vary with different types of firm learning, innovation patterns and scaling strategies?
- How do the periodic disruptions to global value chains impact the resilience in entrepreneurial ecosystems? Conversely, what makes some ecosystems more resilient and others more brittle or rigid?
- To what extent do the explorations of entrepreneurial ecosystems reframe the longstanding Jane Jacobs debates on organizations and regions facilitating discovery via discrete mechanisms or chance encounters?
- Where do multinational firms fit into the work of ecosystems and how do multinational firms vary in their strategies to shape and connect with different ecosystems?
- How do the debates on the evolution of entrepreneurial ecosystems conform with the conventional notions of the difficulties of multinational firms becoming embedded in different countries?

This conference will feature opening and lunchtime plenary panels with leaders from the investment and regional economic policy communities.

WHEN: **October 3-4, 2025 (Opening reception, evening of October 2)**

WHERE: Darla Moore School of Business, Rafael Viñoly Building, accommodations at the Columbia Hilton (<http://www.hiltoncolumbia.com/>).

Please submit a paper proposal of 800-1000 words or a panel proposal of 1000-1300 words (including participant information) to DMSBFrontiers2025@moore.sc.edu **no later than 5pm (EDT) July 21, 2025**. Accepted proposals notified by Aug. 2, 2025. Full papers due by September 15, 2025. Two nights' accommodation provided for paper presenters.

Conference Organizers:

- David Audretsch – Ameritech Chair of Economic Development, Indiana Univ. & Sonoco Fellow, Folks Center for International Business
- Sjoerd Beugelsdijk – J. Willis Cantey Professor in International Business, Univ. of South Carolina
- Dirk Brown, Director, McNair Institute for Entrepreneurism and Free Enterprise, Univ. of South Carolina
- Gerald A. McDermott – Chair, Sonoco International Business Department, Univ. of South Carolina

References

- Adner, R. (2017) Ecosystem as Structure: An Actionable Construct for Strategy,” *Journal of Management*, 43 (1): 39-58.
- Di Giovanna, S. (1996). Industrial districts and regional economic development: a regulation approach, *Regional Studies*. 30:373-386.
- Jacobides, M.G., C. Cennamo and A. Gawer. (2018) “Toward a theory of Business Ecosystems”, *Strategic Management Journal*, 39 (8): 2255-2276.
- Maillat, D. (1995). Territorial dynamics, innovative milieus and regional policy, *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*. 7:157-165.
- Morgan, K. (1997). The learning region: institutions, innovation and regional renewal, *Regional Studies*. 31:491-503.
- OECD (2020), *International Compendium of Entrepreneurship Policies*, OECD Studies on SMEs and Entrepreneurship, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/338f1873-en>.
- Piore, M.J. and C.F. Sabel (1984). *The Second Industrial Divide. Possibilities for Prosperity*. New York: Basic Books
- Porter, M.E. (1998). *On Competition*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Wurth, B., Stam, E., and Spigel, B. 2022. Toward an entrepreneurial ecosystem research program. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* 46(3): 729-778.