Digital Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: A Systematic Literature Review

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Background

With the aim of understanding entrepreneurship holistically, studying entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) has emerged as a promising area of research. In addition to placing the entrepreneur rather than the incumbent firm at the center of the investigation, the EE approach considers the broader entrepreneurial context within which entrepreneurship takes place, and examines wide-ranging socioeconomic, technological, and cultural dimensions. While the literature on EEs has focused on the spatial dimensions, emphasizing the relevance of regional proximity, it is imperative to consider also the technological context, prompted by digitalization. By transforming the nature of processes and outcomes in entrepreneurship, digital technologies endorse a reconsideration of entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, digitalization has changed the locus of entrepreneurial opportunities and practices, and hence the dynamics in EEs, suggesting the need to explore digital entrepreneurial ecosystems (DEEs).

Methodology

Objectives

There exists ambiguity in this relevant field of DEE, creating a gap in our systemic understanding of entrepreneurship in the digital age. In order to advance our knowledge on DEEs, it is necessary to look at adjacent literature streams which have considered on the one hand the effect of digitalization on entrepreneurship, and on the other hand the nature of ecosystems in a digital context. This study aims to consolidate and enrich the literature on DEEs by providing a solid scientific foundation of what characterizes DEEs, how DEEs differ from EEs, and which added value the concept of DEE offers.

Future Research Avenues

There are several avenues for future research, including a deeper exploration of the DEE concept and its application in different contexts. It is also important to investigate the impact of digital technologies on the formation and evolution of DEEs.

DEE Conceptual Framework

Acknowledging the uniqueness and distinctive peculiarities of ecosystems, we suggest that there is neither a one-size-fits-all approach to DEEs, nor a single set of characteristics. Hence, we propose a conceptual framework presenting a set of characterizations corresponding to principal ecosystem attributes which are useful to understand DEEs. We argue that by offering a range of characteristics, our framework provides an inclusive picture of the different possible types of DEEs. Furthermore, by juxtaposing two dimensions, a two-by-two typology showing four forms of DEE arises. The typology does not suggest that there are only four kinds of DEEs, however the dimensions deem as endpoints, providing a range within which DEEs could be clustered.

Selected References


