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Entrepreneurship Research in Germany

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This article explores entrepreneurship research in Germany, paying particular attention to its origins and current “re-emergence.” Since the late 1990s, the field has gained ground, as is reflected in an increasing number of entrepreneurship chairs at universities, and the establishment of an annual national entrepreneurship conference. A particular strength of the German approach to researching entrepreneurship, which can be traced back directly to the historical roots, is found to be its consideration of context specificity and embeddedness, going hand-in-hand with a strong multidisciplinary tendency. These are two features where entrepreneurship research in Germany could add a distinctive flavor to the current mainstream debate. In practice, the diffusion of this perspective is inhibited by an insufficient exchange with the international scientific community.

Introduction

More and more researchers in Germany today study entrepreneurship phenomena. Since the late 1990s, one can observe an increase in publications and in the institutionalization of entrepreneurship research at universities, while an annual conference, the *G-Forum*, was created in combination with a yearbook of entrepreneurship research, both assisting in fostering the development of a scientific community. During most of the early and mid-twentieth century, entrepreneurship research in Germany was practically non-existent, while research on small and medium-sized enterprises flourished. Despite its outstanding historical tradition, such as the works of Max Weber and others, current entrepreneurship research is probably best described as a field in its adolescence.

This paper sets out to investigate the development of German entrepreneurship research over time, in order to take stock in the light of the overall development of the field. Several articles have reviewed the development of entrepreneurship research during the last decades, stating a lack of conceptual and paradigmatic development (Ireland, Reutzel, & Webb, 2005; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) and legitimacy (Busenitz et al., 2003), while reviews of the state of the art across Europe drew attention to the strengths of the European approaches, such as taking into account contextual differences (Huse & Landström, 1997). In this context, the paper reviews the field in Germany and progress made with creating legitimacy. It discusses the historical origins of the field, the path of rebirth and consolidation before turning to review themes. The paper then turns to assess

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whether and to what extent the German approach is distinctive and different, and finally asking about the future of the German approach.

The Origins of German Entrepreneurship Research

Historically, the origins of entrepreneurship research can be traced back to German and German-speaking scholars prominent in nineteenth and early twentieth century, who have had a great influence on economics and sociological disciplines in general. This refers to German scholars such as Karl Marx (1818–1883), Gustav Schmoller (1838–1917), Werner Sombart (1863–1941), and Max Weber (1864–1920), as well as to Austrian economists such as Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883–1950) and Friedrich von Hayek (1899–1992). Most likely, none of these scholars would have understood himself as an entrepreneurship researcher, but a closer look at their works reveals ideas and themes which are an implicit and explicit part of today's entrepreneurship research in Germany and elsewhere. While much of this “early entrepreneurship” research was concentrated on the entrepreneurial person (Berghoff, 2004; Pribram, 1998; Winkel, 1977), its most important contribution may be in the accentuation of context. As German entrepreneurship research still reflects this idea today, we will briefly introduce the reader to some examples.

Max Weber is not only known as the founding father of modern sociology. Moreover, he analyzed the role religion played for the development of modern economies. In his most famous book on Protestant ethics and the “spirit of capitalism” (1905), he identified three major traits of Protestant ethics that influenced entrepreneurship development, namely the zeal for work, a propensity for saving, and sincerity (Weber, 1920/1984). While it is difficult to explicitly trace Weber's ideas in German sociological entrepreneurship research, his impact on entrepreneurship research in general is more obvious. Weber's ideas fuelled a never-ending debate in the entrepreneurship discipline on whether entrepreneurs are born or made: Do entrepreneurs show some innate traits as discussed by “traits” proponents, with McClelland's works on the need-for-achievement as a prominent example (McClelland, 1961)? Or are entrepreneurs made in the sense of the cultural context influencing the emergence of entrepreneurship?

Context also played a large role in the works of *Gustav Schmoller*, who, albeit never gaining international recognition, laid the foundations for the concept of a social market economy, picked up in the twentieth century by Walter Eucken and Ludwig Erhard. The current discussion on the (institutional) embeddedness of entrepreneurship (e.g., Davidsson, 2003; Steyaert & Katz, 2004) can be traced back to Schmoller, who understood human actions as being embedded in and influenced by economic, political, and social institutions, thus anticipating the main ideas of institutional theory, in particular the concept of formal and informal institutions of Douglass North (Plumpe, 1999, p. 263; Pribram, 1998, p. 414), and drawing attention to the context specificity of entrepreneurship.

With the exception of Schmoller, whose main works were never translated into English,¹ many ideas from German (or German-speaking/Austrian) scholars were adapted by foreign entrepreneurship scholars. Translation of well-known works, as well as the

1. In the early twentieth century, German was still the dominant language for scientists all over Central and Eastern Europe. As such, it was understood and spoken by many Anglo-Saxon academicians as well, cf. Zimmermann (1996).

mass emigration² of German scientists and academicians from 1933 onwards paved the way for an international reception of German economic research; moreover, many emigrants soon published major works only in English. This brain drain fundamentally changed the German scientific landscape and cultural life: German science lost its intellectual and cultural roots, which had fostered the specific holistic perspective in the German economics and sociological disciplines (Priddat, 1998, p. 415), and the German language lost its recognition as not only being the language of the “poets and thinkers,” but also that of an internationally recognized scientific community.

Rebirth and Consolidation of the Field

Despite this outstanding historical tradition, current entrepreneurship research is probably best described as a field in adolescence—a field on a path towards a renewed consolidation. To illustrate this point, this section discusses the rebirth of the field from the 1950s onwards, and the progress made with its institutionalization by looking at actors and disciplines involved.

Re-birth of the Field

During most of the early and mid-twentieth century, entrepreneurship research in Germany was nonexistent, while research on small and medium-sized enterprises flourished. This is reflected in a number of institutes and researchers analyzing SME (small and medium-sized enterprises) phenomena, as well as in specific conferences and publication outlets. As far back as 1948, albeit not a German conference, but one with a large participation from Germany and held in German language, the *Rencontres de St-Gall* were initiated to discuss SMEs and factors inhibiting and promoting their development, implicitly picking up a discussion arising in the nineteenth century about whether SMEs would persist in an age of industrialization. The first meeting included well-known management and economics professors from Swiss, Austrian, and German universities, like *Alfred Gutersohn* from the University St. Gallen in Switzerland, *Willy Bouffier* and *Walter Heinrich* from Vienna, and *Karl Rössle* from Munich (Schmidt, 2004). One of the specifics of this conference, which also still is reflected in the policy-orientation of SME research in Germany (and other German-speaking countries) is its mixture of participants, who were drawn from both academia and politics, including SME associations, local administrations, and others. Another distinctive characteristic concerns the interdisciplinary nature of the conference, where researchers interested in SME topics met and still meet biannually, regardless of whether they are from management science, economics, or other disciplines. Today, this conference is the oldest SME conference, although no longer focused exclusively on small business topics.

From the 1950s to the late 1970s, entrepreneurship research in Germany was closely tied to a small and diversified set of individual scholars, without a genuine entrepreneurship research discipline developing. In the tradition of the “Historical School” of Schmolter and others, economic and social historians such as *Wolfram Fischer*, *Fritz Redlich*,

2. A list of emigrants from Germany in the 1930s reads like a “who’s who” of science and liberal arts. Emigration covered all professions and areas of life, including, e.g., architects and artists from the Bauhaus (Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe), physicists (Albert Einstein), writers and dramatists (Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann, his family and brother, and Kurt Tucholsky), musicians (Kurt Weill), actors (Marlene Dietrich), and politicians (Willy Brandt).

Wilhelm Treue, and *Jürgen Kocka* researched biographies of eminent entrepreneurs in Germany and its states (*Länder*) over the centuries. In economics and management, we can trace back the renaissance of entrepreneurship research to the 1960s, when *Ernst Heuß*, an influential German economist, picked up some of Schumpeter's ideas in his well-known book on market theory (Heuß, 1965). Building on Schumpeter's distinction between pioneering entrepreneurs and business-owners, he presented a typology of entrepreneurs distinguishing between "initiating" entrepreneurs (Schumpeter's pioneer), (spontaneously) imitating entrepreneurs, and conservative types of entrepreneurs who only react to pressure or are totally immobile. Moreover, he linked those types of entrepreneurs to stages of market development with the first two types of entrepreneurs dominating in early, experimental and expansive stages, and the latter two types being prevalent in mature and decreasing markets (Heuß, 1965, p. 10). In 1979, *Horst Albach*, an eminent management scholar, wrote an influential article on the "Re-Discovery of the Entrepreneur in the Economic Policy Discussion," concluding that the descriptive and explanatory power of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur was limited, as the environment for entrepreneurship had changed considerably since Schumpeter's days (Albach, 1979). Both works already indicate a specific of German research, namely the attention paid to context, thus also harking back to Schmoller's ideas on the embeddedness of individuals and economic actions.

The most recent stage in the renaissance of entrepreneurship research took off the ground when Norbert Szyperski, another well-known German management researcher who focuses on the venture creation process, established a research group (*Projektgruppe Gründungsforschung*) at the University of Cologne in 1977. In the 1980s, from a sociological perspective, *Dieter Bögenhold* initiated an interdisciplinary discussion on different forms of entrepreneurship and their consequences for economic and social development with his monographs on "*Die Selbständigen*" (The Self-Employed, Bögenhold, 1985) and "*Der Gründerboom*" (The Entrepreneurial Boom, Bögenhold, 1987). While these individuals have been highly influential in the recent rebirth of the field, most of the discourse still took place in workshops and seminars, which makes it next to impossible to trace their impact directly. What can be analyzed, however, is the final outcome of this process: the institutionalization of entrepreneurship research in Germany over the recent decade.

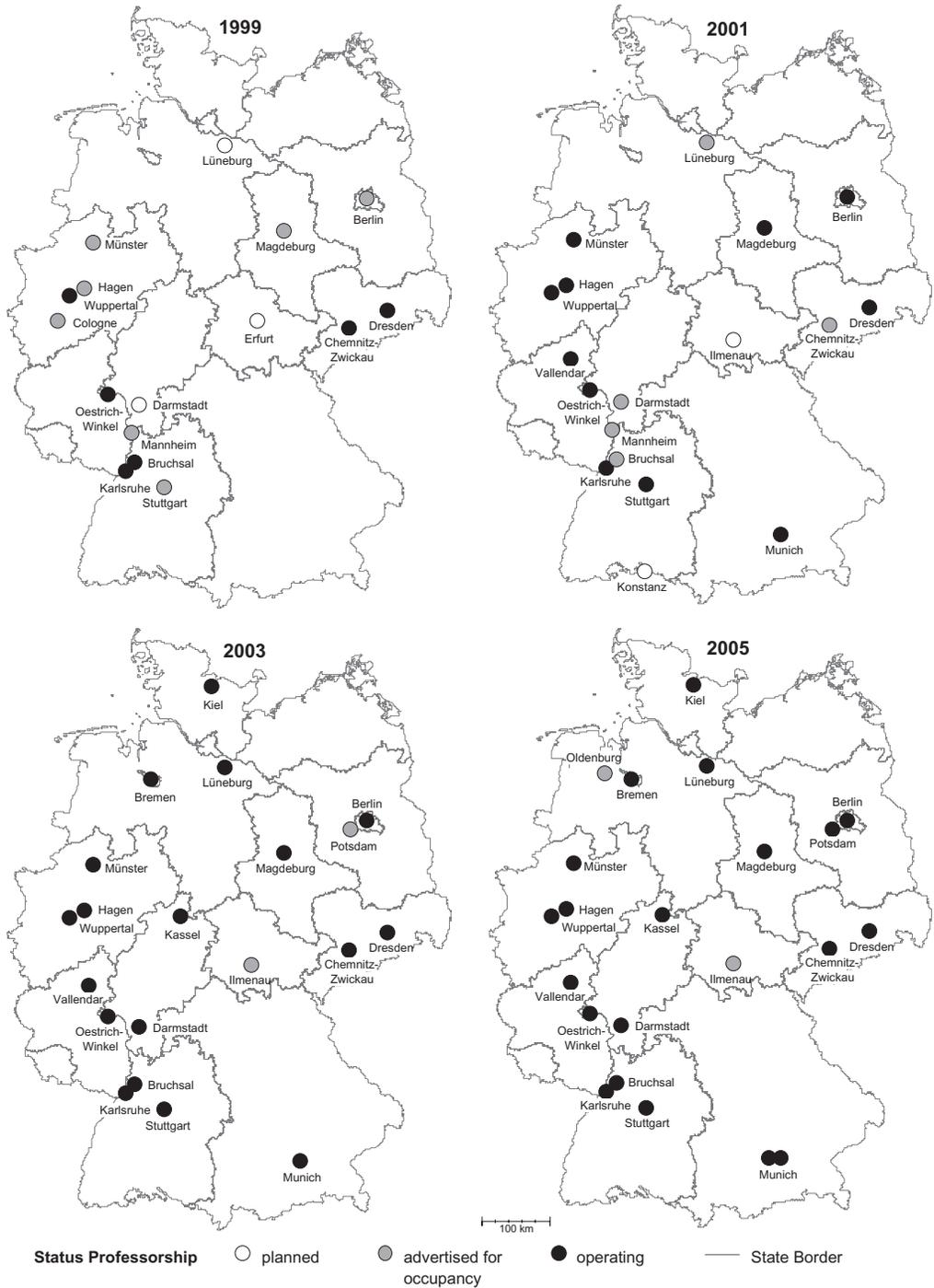
The Institutionalization of Entrepreneurship Research at German Universities

In Figure 1, the recent consolidation of German entrepreneurship research is visualized in terms of academic chairs offering respective programs to students.³ Following this indicator, the degree of formal institutionalization in the area grew rapidly throughout the past decade. In 1999, which acts as the benchmark of our analysis, six professorships clustered in only four states were actively working on the issue of new venture creation.

3. The data underlying Figure 1 cover solely university chairs, as in Germany, there is a systematic division of labor that links entrepreneurship *research* (i.e., research aiming at the creation of a theory of entrepreneurship) to universities and *education* (i.e., teaching aiming at the mediation of entrepreneurial human capital to potential entrepreneurs) to universities of applied sciences (Schmude & Uebelacker, 2002, p. 32). Thus, chairs at universities of applied science appear to be a somewhat misleading predictor for the presence of entrepreneurship research. We also did not take into account other professorships focusing on entrepreneurship research, and institutes researching the topic outside universities, as for example the research group created by David Audretsch at the Max Planck Institute in Jena.

Figure 1

Development of Entrepreneurship Professorships at German Universities 1999–2005



Source: Authors' investigations

By 2005, that number had climbed to 20 institutes spread throughout virtually the entire of Germany.

As is revealed by a glance at the upper left partition of Figure 1, the rather short period of observation applied here obscures some earlier developments, as a large fraction of the 14 professorships taking up their activity between 1999 and 2005 were already planned or even advertised for occupancy in the year 1999. That is, new firm formation had gradually become a relevant topic in the 1990s, with formal institutionalization markedly intensifying by the end of the century. In the meantime, with most of the planned and advertised professorships having entered “business,” the interim boom has turned into a phase of stagnation. Between 1999 and 2005, the number of newly planned chairs relative to all has diminished significantly, suggesting that the structure of professorships plotted in the lower right part of Figure 1 provides a good representation of what the (formal) German research landscape will most probably look like in the short and medium run.

In practice, the process of formal institutionalization was to some degree complicated by the consequences arising from the neglect of the topic in the first half of the twentieth century. Other than, for example, in the United States, German entrepreneurship research had literally no academic basis to build on, illustrated by the fact that the impetus for establishing an entrepreneurship chair was often realized with private resources rather than with public investments (endowed professorships—*Stiftungsprofessuren*, which is still a rare mode of organization in German higher education). An absence of trained research and teaching personnel, as well as uncertainty about the goals and curricular orientations of the professorships to be created, often turned the formation process into a perpetual effort, along which some of the plans for setting up an entrepreneurship chair were temporarily postponed or—in the worst case—finally abandoned (Schmude, 1999a, p. 18). As far as chairs were indeed established, the management sciences appeared to be the major addressee for running the respective institutions—an implicit convention that has paved the way for the concentration of professorships in the area of Business Administration characterizing the academic landscape today (Schmude & Uebelacker, 2002, p. 7).

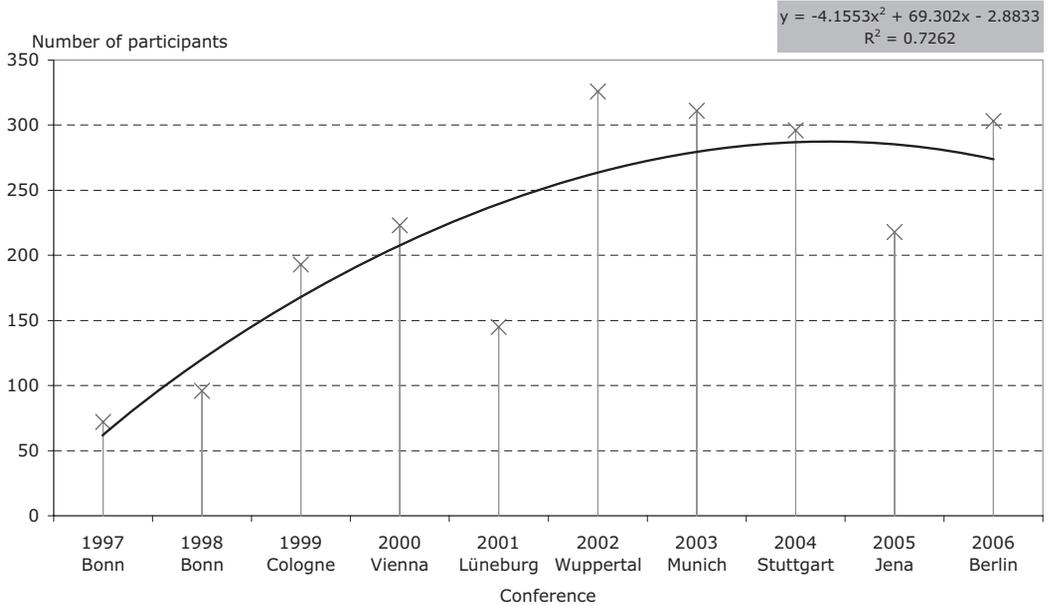
After all, German academic entrepreneurship research has experienced an impressive process of spatiotemporal diffusion and formal institutional consolidation, which was, on the other hand, not accompanied by an equally strong diversification of its disciplinary focus. This may be judged problematic insofar as the (informal) German research scene is embedded in a multidisciplinary setting, engaged in a huge variety of research questions, theoretical concepts, and analytical methods.

Creating a Scientific Community: The *G-Forum* Conference

Reviewing the development of entrepreneurship professorships alone may draw an incomplete picture of the (re-)emergence of German entrepreneurship research. Additionally, the *G-Forum* as the annual national conference can be assumed to appropriately reflect another population of actors involved with the topic of new venture creation. The conference, which is widely recognized as a prominent mode of exchange between academic disciplines as well as between academia and practice, has been established as recently as 1997, in rough temporary coincidence with some important stimulating work in German entrepreneurship research (e.g., Brixey, 1996; Brüderl, Preisendörfer, & Ziegler, 1996; Fritsch, 1996; Schmude, 1994a). A glance at the number of participants in the conference over time visually confirms the process of consolidation (Figure 2). From 1997, when a rather small group of about 70 researchers and practitioners met at the first conference in the City of Bonn, to 2002, when the conference resided in the City of Wuppertal, the size of the attendee community had more than quadrupled to 320. From

Figure 2

Number of Participants in *G-Forum* Conferences 1997–2006



Source: Organizer of the *G-Forum* conference.

then on, the conference managed to maintain a generally high level of participation—with outliers characterizing individual conferences such as the one held in the City of Jena in 2005.

However, a more detailed analysis shows that this trend only partly reflects the actual interest attributed to entrepreneurship research. Disaggregating participants by their state of origin reveals a pronounced regional orientation towards attendance at the conference. Not surprisingly, for each state of origin, the number of participants exhibits an impressive peak in the year in which the conference resides in close geographical proximity.⁴ This impact of location and mobility costs on participating behavior suggests a situation in which a rather small number of “core researchers” participates in the *G-Forum* on a regular basis, where they are joined by a group of “interested locals,” the size of which may vary substantially with conference location. This large and varying number of “interested locals” may be interpreted as reflecting an even larger *latent* interest in entrepreneurship research, not only among academics, but also among private corporations, credit and finance organizations, regional politics, or research institutes (Schmude, 1999b, p. 16), which can be temporarily mobilized by the opportunity to attend the conference at a low cost.

4. For example, the regional structure of attendees has been heavily dominated by attendees from North Rhine-Westphalia in the years 1997, 1999, and 2002, when the same state actually hosted the conference. The same trend is obvious for the conferences in Vienna (2000), Munich (2001), Stuttgart (2004), Jena (2005) and Berlin (2006).

Entrepreneurship Research across Disciplines

Initially, entrepreneurship researchers, especially those coming from economics and business management, often had strong roots in small business research. This is not surprising, given the tradition of SME research in Germany mentioned above. Today, there is not one single “entrepreneurship science.” Instead, a multifaceted ensemble of academic professions is simultaneously involved with research on new ventures. In part, this takes the form of researchers of different professional provenience working independently on entrepreneurship topics. On the other hand, explicit forms of cooperation and exchange have evolved that make a high degree of cross-professional integration a primary characteristic of the German research scene.

Taking as an example the professional background of the academic attendees at the *G-Forum* conferences, we find a diversified participant community, including delegates from Business Administration, Economics, Sociology, Geography, Spatial Planning, and Psychology. However, ranking these disciplines by their average annual number of academic participants in the conferences reveals that entrepreneurship researchers in Germany today are still mainly to be found in the management sciences. With about 65 participants on average, Business Administration alone accounts for almost 80% of all academic attendees. In addition, Economics and Geography show up as professions characterized by both a comparatively large number of participants and a small level of variation in the participating behavior—although with far lower attendance figures than applies to Business Administration (about five participants each). Interestingly, only few researchers continue to pursue the sociological tradition that Max Weber has paved. Flows of sociologists to the *G-Forum* are quite small in numbers (about two participants on average), and, moreover, highly volatile. The same characterization also fits Spatial Planning and—to a somewhat lesser degree—Law and Psychology.

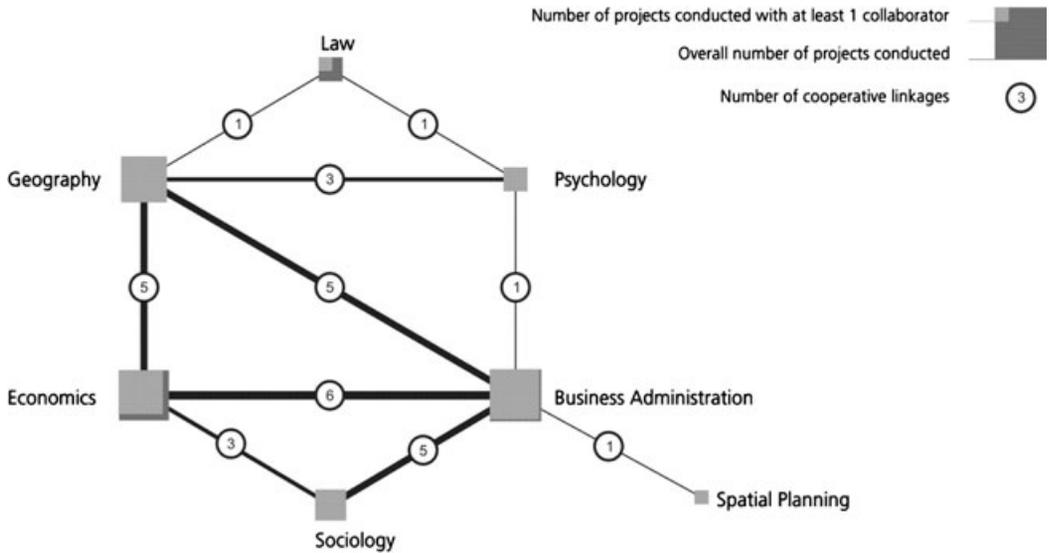
Generally comparable findings concerning the professional mix of actors and their relative importance evolve with respect to the first large-scale research program “Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Research,” which was co-chaired by one of the authors in the years 1998 to 2004⁵ (Figure 3). A major share of 14 projects included at least one participant from Business Administration. However, Economics and Geography also contributed substantially to the program (13 and 11 projects, respectively). Sociology, which appeared to play only a peripheral role at the *G-Forum* conferences, was engaged in five projects while Psychology and Law both entered three projects. Finally, Spatial Planning was involved in only one project. That is, although the professional structure of the research program appears remarkably less polarized than the one of the *G-Forum* conferences, Business Administration, Economics, and Geography are confirmed as the “landmarks” of the German research landscape.

Figure 3 illustrates that the multidimensional interest in the topic has also stimulated the creation of cross-professional linkages manifesting in project-bound research collaborations, which facilitate intellectual exchange and may serve as fundament for the development of a more holistic German view of entrepreneurship. Given this network-based perspective, another approach to structuring the national research landscape—in contrast to simply attaching weights to actors according to the number of projects they

5. The program, which was financed by the German Research Association (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [DFG]), contained three biannual project rounds, with participants stemming from seven different scientific disciplines, namely Business Administration, Economics, Sociology, Geography, Psychology, Law, and Spatial Planning. In total, 25 projects were supported by federal grants.

Figure 3

Cooperative Patterns within the DFG Research Program “Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Research,” 1998–2004



Source: Authors' investigations.

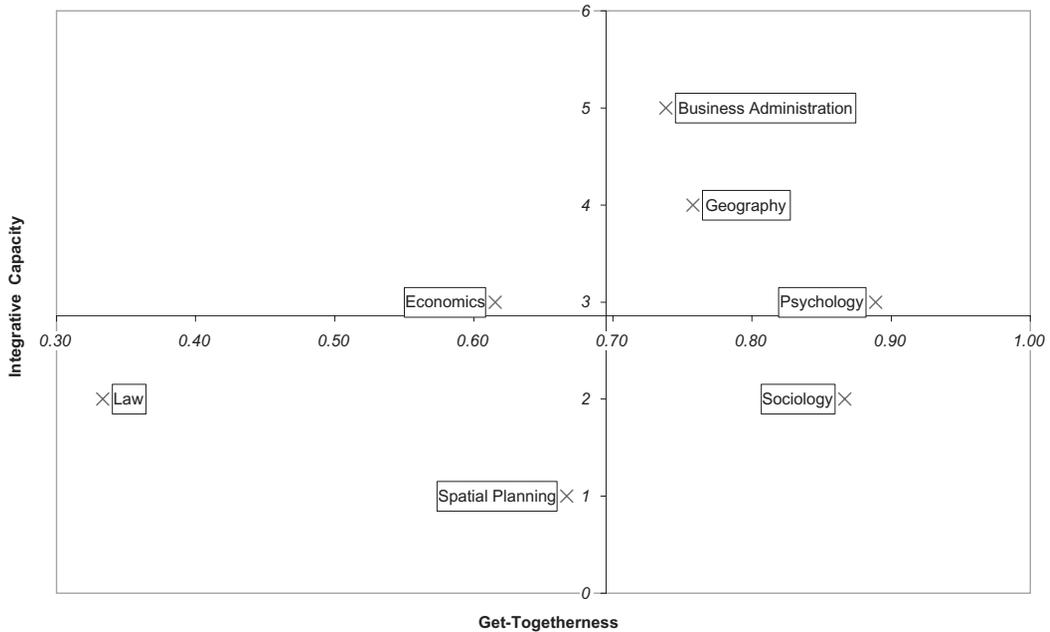
conducted—is to focus on the extent to which the different professions make use of and help to stabilize these collaboration channels.⁶

In order to analyze these questions, two measures are employed. First, the “Integrative Capacity,” IC_i , of each profession, i is assessed through the size of its focal network of collaborators (i.e., the number of *distinct* cross-disciplinary connections originating from i), which we believe to provide a crude approximation to the bonding function that i exercises within the network. Professions with a large “Integrative Capacity” can thus be assumed to contribute significantly to the internal cohesion of the multidisciplinary system of German entrepreneurship research. Second, an index of “Get-Togetherness,” GT_i , captures the degree to which cross-professional collaboration plays a role within a discipline’s entire research activities. For the latter, a measure of “Socialization,” S_r , was calculated for each project r by dividing the actual number of collaborators, C_r , by a maximum cooperation potential, CP_r . For defining a proper value for CP_r , we assumed that with going beyond a specific number of collaborators, organizational barriers arising from terminological, conceptual, and/or methodological variety act as the most important constraint of cross-professional cooperation—an idea that is verified by the data insofar as no single project in the program combined more than three different disciplines.

6. While the research program “Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Research” is a generally valid object to study such questions, substantial cooperative efforts may also occur through more informal channels, which are overtly disregarded by the analysis. Further concerns may arise from the fact that the data are restricted to realized projects—as opposed to all potentially planned collaborations. Keeping in mind these limitations, the results presented should be cautiously interpreted as yet another informative element in the holistic mosaic suggested by the evidence presented in this paper.

Figure 4

Interdisciplinary Engagement by Academic Disciplines within the DFG Research Program “Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Research,” 1998–2004



Source: Authors’ calculations.

Note: The location of the axes represents the mean value of both indicators calculated over all professions.

Therefore, CP_r was globally set to the value 3. After having calculated S_r for each of the 25 projects conducted, GT_i was obtained as the simple average

$$GT_i = \frac{\sum_{r=1}^{25} \delta_{ir} S_r}{\sum_{r=1}^{25} \delta_{ir}}$$

with δ_{ir} taking the value 1 if profession i was involved in project r and 0 if otherwise.

The results presented in Figure 4 provide some slight indication of a tripartite functional differentiation within the German research scene. First, Business Administration and Geography overtly appear as the most central mediators of cross-professional integration and cohesion, indicated by quite large values with respect to the “Integrative Capacity” measure. However, the medium-sized “Get Togetherness” figures signal that the bonding function of both disciplines becomes apparent directly and indirectly, i.e., through multiple small projects with different sets of partnering disciplines as well as through the involvement in large and diversified projects.⁷

7. Examples from Geography include the simultaneous presence of stable bipolar connections toward Economics (e.g., Grotz, Bonn, with Fritsch, Freiberg) and Business Administration (e.g., Sternberg with Backes-Gellner, both Cologne) on the one hand, and another more diversified core made up by Geography (Schmude,

Besides this first group, there is a second collective of actors made up by Law and Spatial Planning who contribute only marginally to the multidisciplinary development of the field. This finding is illustrated by the fact that Law occupies the top rank with respect to the relative number of projects conducted in complete isolation, while Spatial Planning was engaged only in one single project at all. Finally, Sociology, Psychology, and Economics are located in somewhat vague positions. On the one hand, Economics shows up as a comparatively well-connected actor while conducting a significant number of projects embedded in small teams or even completely isolated. On the other hand, the high degree of “Get Togetherness” characterizing both Sociology and Psychology is somewhat constrained by the narrow boundaries set by the diversity of these professions’ collaborator networks.

Due to the lack of international comparative figures, it is, of course, difficult to assess these results qualitatively. However, what can clearly be seen is that the claim of a multidimensional approach to entrepreneurship research (Steyaert & Katz, 2004, p. 180) has to some degree already become institutionalized in the German context. Even in the absence of comparative data, this is undisputedly a good sign.

Areas and Themes in German Entrepreneurship Research

The analysis now turns to the areas and themes of German entrepreneurship research. For this, we first assembled an overview of main publications since the early 1990s up to 2006 by searching electronic databases and drawing on the authors’ in-depth knowledge of the German research scene, acknowledging that this method might be criticized for being subjectively biased.⁸ We concentrated on output from German programs, workshops, and seminars, excluding monographs and proceedings from international conferences originating from Germany, such as the recently established *IECER* (Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research), with the exception of the proceedings of the *Rencontres de St-Gall* as the eldest SME and entrepreneurship conference taking place regularly in a German-speaking country.⁹

As entrepreneurship research in Germany is a (relatively) new field, academic dissemination still predominately takes place through edited volumes, (invited) special issues, and conference proceedings, with “regular” journal publications only recently gaining importance in concurrence with the general shift towards a more journal-oriented output strategy. This dissemination strategy directly reflects the adolescence of the field, which during the 1990s needed to build knowledge as well as reputation within the German scientific community.

Table 1 shows the number of volumes identified per year and the number of articles dealing with entrepreneurship topics within the different volumes. We deliberately refrain from assessing as to whether the overall number of articles is high or low, but the table demonstrates that the number of entrepreneurship papers is growing, albeit with erratic tendencies over single years. This is partly a result of our method, as we have mainly picked up articles published in edited volumes or special issues of journals.

Regensburg) and Psychology (e.g., von Rosenstiel, Munich), with varying collaborators stemming from Business Administration (Dowling, Regensburg) and Law (Ekkenga, Gießen).

8. For an analysis on entrepreneurship research published in mainstream German management journals cf. Kollmann and Kuckertz (2006).

9. We also left out a SME journal (*Internationales Gewerbearchiv*, today renamed to *Zeitschrift für KMU und Entrepreneurship—ZfKE*).

Table 1

Outlets for and Number of Entrepreneurship Papers from 1994–2006

Year	Editors	Event	Number of papers on entrepreneurship
1994	Schmude (a)	Workshop proceedings on interdisciplinary entrepreneurship research	20
1997	Thomas	n/a	14
1998	Pleitner	Proceedings of <i>Rencontres de St-Gall</i>	13/2 of German-speaking authors
	Schmude	n/a	7
1999	Bögenhold	Proceedings of workshop on labor market dynamics	10
	Bögenhold and Schmidt	Proceedings of workshop on labor market dynamics	8
2000	Ridinger and Weiss	Proceedings of <i>Round Table Mittelstand</i>	8
	Pleitner and Weber	Proceedings of <i>Rencontres de St-Gall</i>	15/5 of German-speaking authors
2002	Albach and Pinkwart	Special Issue of management journal “ <i>Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft</i> ”	8
	Heinze and Schulte	Proceedings of regional workshop	13
	Schmude and Leiner	Results of projects within first phase of DFG Research Program	9
	Fritsch and Grotz	Results of data project within DFG Research Program	9
	Fueglistaller, Pleitner, Volery, and Weber	Proceedings of <i>Rencontres de St-Gall</i>	19/5 of German-speaking authors
2003	Albach and Pinkwart	Special Issue of management journal “ <i>Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft</i> ”	8
2004	Achleitner et al.	Proceedings of <i>G-Forum 2003</i>	14
	Fritsch and Grotz	Results of data project within DFG Research Program	11
	Fritsch and Niese	Results of projects within 2nd phase of DFG Research Program	8
	Fueglistaller, Volery, and Weber	Proceedings of <i>Rencontres de St-Gall</i>	9/3 of German-speaking authors
	KfW	Results of different studies on women entrepreneurship	5
	Leicht and Welter	Results of research project on women entrepreneurship	9
2005	Achleitner et al.	Proceedings of <i>G-Forum 2004</i>	15
	Sternberg	Special Issue of economic geography journal “ <i>Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie</i> ”	7
	Wagner	Special Issue of economics journal “ <i>Schmollers Jahrbuch/Journal of Applied Social Science Studies</i> ,” proceedings of workshop on micro data	2
	Welter (a)	Proceedings of <i>Round Table Mittelstand</i> , 2000–2001	1
	Welter (b)	Proceedings of <i>Round Table Mittelstand</i> , 2002–2003	8
2006	Achleitner et al.	Proceedings of <i>G-Forum 2005</i>	14
	Fritsch and Schmude	Results of projects within 3rd phase of DFG Research Program	11
	Fueglistaller, Volery, and Weber	Proceedings of <i>Rencontres de St-Gall</i>	14/6 of German-speaking authors
	Welter and Wagner	Proceedings of Workshop on Entrepreneurship Research with German Micro Data, Special Issue of RWI: Quarterly	6

Source: Authors.

DFG, *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*; n/a, not available; RWI, Rheinisch-Westfälisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung Essen.

Overall, Table 1 also shows a changing pattern regarding publication outlets. In the early 1990s, entrepreneurship research was mainly disseminated through single, one-time events (e.g., Bögenhold, 1999; Bögenhold & Schmidt, 1999; Heinze & Schulte, 2002; Schmude, 1994b, 1998; Thomas, 1997). Regular events such as the biannual *Rencontres de St-Gall* or the *Round Table Mittelstand*, a high-level seminar of researchers, politicians, and practitioners (Ridinger & Weiss, 1999; Welter, 2005a) paid less attention to entrepreneurship topics, unless the seminar itself was concerned with entrepreneurship issues (e.g., Welter, 2005b). The pattern changed with the “Interdisciplinary Program on Entrepreneurship Research,” which brought a steady flow of edited volumes in the years 2002–2006 (Fritsch & Grotz, 2002, 2004; Fritsch & Niese, 2004; Fritsch & Schmude, 2006; Schmude & Leiner, 2002). Moreover, from 2004 onwards, the proceedings from the *G-Forum* conference have been published as the *Jahrbuch der Entrepreneurship-Forschung* (Achleitner, Klandt, Koch, & Voigt, 2004, 2005, 2006). As said earlier, journal publications only have gained importance in recent years, which becomes visible in the number of special issues in various journals (e.g., Albach & Pinkwart, 2002, 2003; Sternberg, 2005; Wagner, 2005; Welter & Wagner, 2006).

Moreover, the language of publications is changing, rendering the German research scene more international at least from this perspective. From 1997–2003, all articles and book chapters identified in Table 1 were written in German. The year 2004 saw one article in English (Sternberg & Wagner, 2004), while in 2005 and 2006, three articles each in English were published in the yearbooks of the national conference. Additionally, the final book out of the “Interdisciplinary Program on Entrepreneurship Research” was published entirely in English (Fritsch & Schmude, 2006).

In the next step, we identified the areas and topics that currently are popular in German entrepreneurship research. For that, we adopted a framework introduced by Gartner in 1985 that was later picked up and refined by others (e.g., Bruyat & Julien, 2000; Busenitz et al., 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), and which describes the phenomenon of new venture creation in terms of four areas, namely environment, individual(s), organization, and process. In order to identify the topics and areas dominating the German debate, the papers listed in Table 1 were systematically reviewed and classified,¹⁰ which, in many cases, necessitated our interpretation as to which category an article or a paper would belong. Therefore, our analysis is to be considered in general terms.

Moreover, we adapted the frameworks. First, we added a category, “conceptual,” in order to cover contributions that would not fit neatly into one of the other categories, as they discuss conceptual issues from a wider perspective. Second, we merged the category “organization” (Gartner, 1985) with the category “process.” “Organization” as defined by Gartner mainly refers to strategic decisions made in the venture creation process, and therefore is best included in the category “process/modes of organizing.” We also left out the category “opportunities” (Busenitz et al., 2003), as this overlaps with “process” as defined by Gartner.

The category “individual/teams” includes psychological and demographic characteristics of individual founders and founding teams, the influence of previous experiences and role models, as well as comparisons of different types of entrepreneurs/nonentrepreneurs. “Process” is concerned with the process of finding a business idea and setting up the venture, including opportunity recognition and exploitation activities as added by

10. We only left out those volumes which report on results from a data project carried out within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Program on Entrepreneurship Research (Fritsch & Grotz, 2002, 2004) as well as two special issues dealing with articles on micro databases (Wagner, 2005; Welter & Wagner, 2006).

Busenitz et al. (2003). “Environment” covers a range of various topics, such as governmental influences, resource availability, trends in entry and exit rates, support and policies, etc.

The picture emerging from our classification exercise is a surprising and interesting one: environmental research areas seem to dominate with 119 contributions,¹¹ which harks back to the historical roots of German entrepreneurship research. A closer look at topics and contents reveals an underlying temporal pattern. Many of the early contributions in the “environment” category study the development of entrepreneurship from a regional, sectoral, or economic perspective, which reflects the obvious need for a thorough overview on general trends in new venture creation in a German context. From the mid-1990s onwards, there is an increasing focus on the role of universities and entrepreneurship education and on specific features of the business environment, such as venture capital and business angels. Moreover, contributions in the category “environment” also show a strong focus on the political environment and support policies. The reason for this might be the strong interplay between academia and policy makers, but this also is explained by the origins of many entrepreneurship researchers out of SME research that traditionally had strong links to policy.

The same policy orientation also becomes obvious in papers discussing policy support from a conceptual basis (e.g., Fischer, 1994; Kirchhoff, Manstedten, Struck, & Klandt, 1994). Conceptual issues have been another strong theme in German entrepreneurship research (56 contributions). Especially in the early years, papers showed a strong conceptual orientation, for example in Thomas (1997), which is a collection of sociological papers dealing with different aspects of entrepreneurship, such as lifestyle, career decision, and behavioral patterns. This volume vividly illustrates how German entrepreneurship research in the sociological discipline, in the best Weberian tradition, links the individual phenomenon of entrepreneurship back to the wider context, in this case the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) of the entrepreneur. Conceptual papers mainly are not drawing on one single theory, but instead they strive to contribute to developing the entrepreneurship field in Germany as such, thus drawing on the historical origins in bringing a holistic perspective into the theory discussion.

Another stream in German entrepreneurship research is reflected in the 57 contributions in the area “individual/team.” Interestingly, relevant articles are less concerned with psychological characteristics of entrepreneurs that had been a dominant theme in early U.S. entrepreneurship research (e.g., Gartner, 1988). Similar to Hisrich and Drnovsek’s (2002, pp. 181–182) findings for Europe as a whole, there are a large number of studies on different subgroups of entrepreneurs, their demographic and socioeconomic background and problems. This includes studies of new entrepreneurs in East Germany (cf. Thomas, 1997), studies on women entrepreneurs (e.g., KfW, 2004; Leicht & Welter, 2004), or part-time entrepreneurship (e.g., Japsen, 2004; Piorkowsky, 2004). The reason for this concentration on different forms of entrepreneurship obviously is a lack of knowledge regarding specific subgroups. More recently published papers also research entrepreneurial intentions (e.g., Franke & Lüthje, 2004).

The 47 contributions in the “process” category mainly deal with issues of how to manage specific aspects of the venture creation process, and not surprisingly, these articles are mainly published in the special issues of the management journal *ZfB* (*Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft*). In line with Hisrich and Drnovsek (2002, p. 177), we

11. Articles could fall into more than one category.

find that research in this area is “predominantly normative and directed to practitioners and policy makers,” which often goes hand in hand with a descriptive and exploratory approach in the case of empirical data. Only few contributions in this area, mainly published in recent years, appear to be rigorously theory-driven. Even fewer pick up topics discussed internationally, which might signal German scholars’ insufficient integration into the international research community.

Assessing Entrepreneurship Research in Germany: Is the German Approach Distinctive?

The question remains how to assess the current trends in German entrepreneurship research when compared to the international mainstream debate. Following Blackburn (2001), topics in entrepreneurship and small business research can be classified into three categories: deadends, enduring, and novel. He based his classification on the level of knowledge accumulated: deadends have been researched extensively, therefore studies on these topics will most likely not contribute to generating (much) new knowledge. Examples as mentioned by De Bruin, Brush, and Welter (2007) would include descriptive studies or profiles of entrepreneurs and their businesses. Enduring areas refer to themes which have been on the agenda for some time already and which most likely will remain there. Such topics could be research driven, but they also could have developed out of political considerations, as is obvious in the German context regarding the ongoing discussion on entrepreneurship education or the more recent focus on women’s entrepreneurship—both areas were boosted by government programs. Finally, novelties are new and emerging topics in the scientific debate. In international mainstream entrepreneurship research, this would include opportunity recognition (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003), cognition (Wadson, 2006), decision-making styles such as bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005) or effectuation (Saravathy, 2001), corporate entrepreneurship (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999), family business (e.g., Chrisman, Steier, & Chua, 2006), and women’s entrepreneurship (e.g., Brush, 2006; De Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2006, 2007; Fuller-Love & Akehurst, 2006). More recently, we also can observe an increasing focus on normative and societal environments influencing entrepreneurship (e.g., Baughn, Chua, & Neupert, 2006; De Bruin & Dupuis, 2003).

Drawing on this concept, we can characterize the contents of German entrepreneurship research as follows: Few contributions in Germany so far echo the novelties in the “individual/team” area, namely opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial decision making, and the like, while there has been an early stream of research in women’s entrepreneurship (e.g., KfW, 2004; Leicht & Welter, 2004). There are several studies on apparent “dead-ends,” e.g., investigations of separate subgroups like East German entrepreneurs (e.g., Thomas, 1997) or part-time entrepreneurs (e.g., Japsen, 2004; Piorkowsky, 2004). On the other hand, the case of “part-time entrepreneurship” signals an interest in the household and family embeddedness of entrepreneurship, which only recently was put onto the agenda of the international research community as well (e.g., Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). A large part of research in the environment category focuses on “enduring” areas such as financing, the venture capital market, or policies to support entrepreneurship, resulting from an ongoing political interest in these topics.

After all, we find some pronounced differences in topics and areas as to the international debate, which comes as a surprise insofar as the international mainstream generally takes it for granted that current research topics in entrepreneurship would be of interest regardless of the national context. However, as is suggested by the ongoing German

interest in some “dead-ends,” there may well be situations where studying topics which are ignored internationally may still add value to a national (i.e., context-specific) understanding of entrepreneurship. Although our initial assessment of entrepreneurship research topics in Germany suggested a bleak picture, if put up against the mainstream entrepreneurship debate as reflected in current reviews (e.g., Busenitz et al., 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), we argue that up to now entrepreneurship researchers in Germany apparently have followed different principles for identifying their topics of interest. They obviously have paid more attention to the context in which entrepreneurship takes place, thereby implicitly continuing the historical tradition of interpreting entrepreneurship as a holistic, embedded, and context-specific phenomenon, but also anticipating and reflecting the contemporary discussion of entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon (Davidsson, 2003).

In this light, our initial assessment needs to be modified. As the field of entrepreneurship research is (still) emerging, researchers increasingly acknowledge the diversity of approaches as one of the important features in the search for suitable paradigms, theories, and boundaries of the discipline, thereby deliberately calling for “encouraging diversity and creativity in our inquiry paradigm” (Phan, 2004, p. 619). Steyaert and Katz (2004, p. 180) call for entrepreneurship to be considered in a multidisciplinary and multiparadigmatic way, as a phenomenon that takes place in multiple sites. Gartner (1995, p. 70) draws attention to the importance of balancing different perspectives on entrepreneurship because observers “have a tendency to underestimate the influence of external factors and overestimate the influence of internal or personal factors when making judgments about the behavior of other individuals.” Given these current calls for a conceptual and even paradigmatic shift, the German approach becomes not only another valuable variety. In addition, these claims imply an important role for research that is transgressing boundaries in a wide sense: boundaries between research areas and topics, between disciplines, and between academia and practitioners, respectively politics, thus bringing the context specificity of entrepreneurship to the foreground.

Assessing the German approach to entrepreneurship research in this light, we argue that a large number of entrepreneurship researchers in Germany has already applied such principles, albeit admittedly often not consciously. The predominant trend on environmental issues and phenomenon-driven research might therefore not only signal an absence of mainstream entrepreneurship topics and/or rigorous theory-driven studies, or a lack of scientific communication (Gartner, Davidsson, & Zahra, 2006). On the contrary, this also could be interpreted as an indicator for an ongoing focus on the embeddedness of entrepreneurship in different contexts, and that focus can be traced back to the works of Max Weber, Gustav Schmoller, and others, i.e., the historical roots of entrepreneurship research.

Outlook: Is There a Future for the German Approach?

A particular strength of the German approach to researching entrepreneurship has been outlined earlier: its consideration of context specificity and embeddedness, which obviously plays an important role in coining topics and themes, thus somewhat pre-empting the recent call of international entrepreneurship scholars to understand entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon (Davidsson, 2003). Moreover, German entrepreneurship research appears to be less exclusively grounded in management science compared with other countries (cf. Hjorth, in this volume), instead being covered by various disciplines, such as sociology, economics, and economic geography, although this

differs for actors, as most entrepreneurship chairs are set up in management faculties, and collaboration differs across disciplines as well.

Nevertheless, the current approach also may have its dark side. Contrary to Huse and Landström (1997), who state that internationalization began early in European small business and entrepreneurship research, German entrepreneurship research is less internationalized, which becomes apparent in the so far low number of researchers attending international conferences and publishing in international journals. One can assume that because of this lack of communication with the international research community, German entrepreneurship research appears to pay lesser attention to the mainstream scientific debate as the current “fashionable” discussion around opportunities. However, this is also partly due to its strong policy orientation, because there is a trade-off between developing the field scientifically, and a strong policy orientation that often requires researchers to analyze topics well known in an international context, but where the national knowledge base is lacking. Moreover, the German entrepreneurship research community is growing, as participation figures for the national conference illustrate, thus also reducing the need to converse internationally as would be the case for a smaller research community.

Nevertheless, the approach to “doing entrepreneurship research in Germany” is changing. This also is reflected in the convergence of methods. In 1988, Low and Macmillan called for sophisticated research designs and analytical techniques in entrepreneurship research (cited in Chandler & Lyon, 2001). More recently, Aldrich and Baker (1997) suggested that entrepreneurship is still in its nascence with regard to response rates, replication, and sampling. The picture emerging for Germany is a diverse one: research studying economic and sectoral trends often falls back on econometric modeling, while studies on individual entrepreneurs or subgroups include a large number of descriptive and explorative approaches. Earlier German entrepreneurship research was generally very descriptive, as it was grounded in small business research traditions with its strong policy and practitioner orientation. However, more recent studies converge on a “number-crunching” approach, with sophisticated statistical techniques dominating and few exceptions drawing on experiments or qualitative research methods. This is both related to the recent debate on evidence-based policies for entrepreneurship, but also to what is deemed an acceptable method for publishing in international journals.

With the growing number of students graduating from entrepreneurship programs at universities, we also observe a shift towards publishing internationally and picking up topics of the mainstream entrepreneurship debate, thus adding an international flair to the German research scene. Most of these younger researchers are no longer originating from other research areas such as small business research, which might foster a more open approach to entrepreneurship topics. They have lesser understanding of the specific background of German entrepreneurship research, but are instead more oriented towards “sexy” topics in the sense of publishable ones. Especially in entrepreneurship research coming out of the management disciplines, this often goes hand in hand with a lack of attention to the context in which entrepreneurship takes place, thus probably leveling out national differences and the distinctiveness of German entrepreneurship research in the long run.

While some might consider such a convergence advantageous, as it could facilitate the internationalization of the German research scene, there is a downturn here as well. As becomes apparent from the recent debate on the “everydayness” of entrepreneurship (Steyaert & Katz, 2004), context matters—and this article hopefully could illustrate that context matters not only for researching the country-specific facets of entrepreneurship, but that context also relates to the diversity of research done within a field. In that,

convergence in methods, topics, and languages¹² would narrow the field of entrepreneurship research as a whole. As to whether this is good or bad is left to the readers to judge. Before doing that judgment, the authors would like to suggest (re)reading the German classics in economics and sociology. Discovering the richness of these “old” ideas and conceptual approaches will probably influence your judgment—as we believe, for the good of today’s entrepreneurship research.

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12. Currently, German academics discuss the value of publishing and conversing in English, which is a growing trend even within Germany, e.g., the German Research Foundation recently has asked for applications for German excellence clusters to be written in English. Critics point out two major consequences of this: firstly, a growing communication gap between academia and the public, and secondly, a lack of depth in research because non-native writers will not be able to pick up nuances. Cf. http://www.bund-freiheit-der-wissenschaft.de/content/p_sprache_inw.htm.

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