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## Community entrepreneurship development: an introduction

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An emerging area of scholarship can be found at the nexus between entrepreneurship and community development. Beyond a mere focus on firms and their contributions, this growing nexus in the literature seeks to understand the complex ways that entrepreneurs benefit their communities, and that communities enhance or inhibit entrepreneurship. This exploration is fundamentally economic, sociological, psychological, strategic, behavioral, and cultural; it should incorporate many contributions of scholars across a wide range of disciplines. This introductory article examines the current state of research at the nexus of community and entrepreneurship, and conceptually positions entrepreneurship as deeply embedded in – and inseparable from – community, social, and economic structures. The article presents community entrepreneurship development as a multidimensional and challenging strategy economically speaking, but one that produces many benefits beyond economic growth. The article discusses both the challenges and benefits of promoting entrepreneurship in the community, presents the articles comprising the special issue, and ends with a call to action and scholarship in this exciting conceptual space.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship; economic development/assessment-economics; strategic planning; human capital; regional development

### Introduction to community entrepreneurship development

It is a privilege to present this special issue of *Community Development* on a topic that, the guest editors believe, deserves ongoing attention in the academic literature: community entrepreneurship development. Entrepreneurship continues to be a popular topic in the academic literature due to a growing fascination with many contributions of entrepreneurs to the broader community and economy. Entrepreneurs are widely considered to be an economic growth engine, catalysts of change and innovation, and often times powerful contributors to the local society (Baumol, Litan, & Schramm, 2007; Schumpeter, 1934). Naturally, community developers are paying increased attention to entrepreneurship because it is widely cited as playing a key role in economic development, job creation, and advances in well-being in capitalist nations (Baumol et al., 2007). Seventy-nine percent of Americans say that entrepreneurs are more important to job creation and the economy than big business, scientists, and the government (Kauffman Foundation, 2009a), and between 1980 and 2005, all net job growth in the United States was due to firms less than five years old (Kauffman Foundation, 2009b). Viewed through this lens, not much has changed since Schumpeter (1934) declared that the entrepreneur is the central player driving economic development.

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Research on entrepreneurship fills many academic journals, some of which are dedicated exclusively to entrepreneurship (and more are appearing every few years). A large portion of this literature focuses tightly on the traditional locus of entrepreneurial control: the firm, firm founders, and founders' strategies and decision-making processes. This focus likely exists for two reasons. One is cultural: the highly individualistic culture of the industrialized West mythicizes, even glorifies, the heroic attempts of entrepreneurs who create value for others using their creativity, resourcefulness, and managerial prowess (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Nijkamp, 2003; Schumpeter, 1934). The other is historical: entrepreneurship, as a field of study, never really had a home. Its roots can be found in economics, management, social and behavioral psychology, marketing, and even bits of sociology (Low & MacMillan, 1988). In each field, the entrepreneur is viewed as somewhat of a productive deviant, whose counter-intuitive actions break from established cultural pathways to produce immense value for others. Think of an entrepreneur who leaves a perfectly good job and gets a second mortgage on the family home to produce and market a new carpet cleaning tool. To many, this shirking of stability sounds like frivolous madness, but certainly not to any entrepreneur committed to an idea about which they are passionate. Studies from many fields have been committed to understanding why a few brave individuals take on enormous risks to chase a dream, and why some succeed while others flounder. The failure of each field of study to completely and adequately describe the entrepreneur is well recognized (Davidsson, 2009; Low & MacMillan, 1988), which may be why research on this elusive, diverse economic actor continues to coalesce into a rather confusing, complex pastiche of creative, risk-bearing, venture-launching behaviors.

Only more recently, the link between *communities* and *entrepreneurs* has also emerged as a new frontier in entrepreneurship research (Lyons, Alter, Audretsch, & Augustine, 2012). This perspective builds on the scholarship of social scientists observing that culture, local and state policy, social and physical infrastructure, and even the level of social interaction deeply influence entrepreneurial behavior. In fact, the social structure of communities may be a critical antecedent to entrepreneurial action by producing culturally supported relationships for sharing opportunistic information, collaborating for the benefit of the community or region, and creating an ecosystem that supports small businesses (Fortunato & Alter, 2011; Julien, 2007). The idea that economic action is deeply influenced by both society and policy is not a new one (Baumol, 1968; Granovetter, 1985), and there is a wealth of knowledge on the impact of both culture and policy on entrepreneurship rates and entrepreneurial attitudes (see the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Amorós & Bosma, 2014, for a major longitudinal example). The idea that culture may have just as profound an impact at the sub-national level – or even at the local level – is an idea that is likely to resonate deeply with scholars of community. The community is where we as humans get our first introduction to human society beyond our own family (Wilkinson, 1991). The impacts of culture within that society can therefore fundamentally shape our perception of reality, what is valued, and what is honorable (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Dana, 1995; Dana & Dana, 2005). It begs an important question: Can the culture, structure, and institutions of community profoundly impact whether or not entrepreneurship is valued? Can entrepreneurs conversely shape and impact the communities around them, for better or for worse? Perhaps the community is not only the next frontier for entrepreneurship research, as Lyons et al. (2012) suggest. Perhaps entrepreneurship is also an emerging and growing new frontier for community research as well.

If the community is indeed the next frontier of entrepreneurship research (or vice versa), and if entrepreneurs are an important key to healthy and vibrant local communities, then this brings the complicated nexus between the entrepreneur and the community into full view. Complicated, because both the terms “entrepreneur” and “community” have discordant, messy, evolving, and multifaceted definitions across the literature – and even across different academic fields. The link between entrepreneurship and community development is not, therefore, straight forward and linear. Entrepreneurs are a widely diverse group – perhaps as diverse as the businesses that they launch (Davidsson, 2009; Gartner, 1989). One could even say that entrepreneurs are as diverse as communities, and for readers of this journal, the diversity of perspectives on community represented in these pages over the years has been wonderfully immense. For this same reason, it is nearly impossible to isolate entrepreneurs as a type of individual or a set of specific traits found in a person (Davidsson, 2009; Gartner, 1989). If anything, entrepreneurship is a series of *behaviors* that are bounded, guided, enhanced, and restricted by the social, economic, and environmental context in which entrepreneurs find themselves (Julien, 2007; Shane, 2003).

This brings us to a special nexus in the literature that inspired this special issue: community entrepreneurship development. It is the study of how communities shape entrepreneurial action at the local and regional level through culture, leadership, institutions, policies, histories and narratives, and beliefs about what is possible. It is conversely the study of how entrepreneurs impact their communities – not just by creating jobs and increasing revenue, but by meeting unmet needs, solving local problems inclusively and holistically, resolving uncertainty, reviving the spirit of the past and/or future, giving back to the community: any impact, really, that entrepreneurs can make in order to make life better. This special issue is a call to research and action in entrepreneurship that, we hope, captures the nexus between entrepreneurship and the community in all its glorious messiness. It is an important opportunity to revisit the complex interaction between communities and entrepreneurs in the literature by presenting some of the latest scholarship available in this conceptual space. Most importantly, the guest editors hope that this issue sparks an ongoing discussion that pushes the boundaries of traditional entrepreneurship scholarship, leading to new theories grounded in understandings that span the Community Development Society family. The special issue thus embraces research from a wide variety of conceptual backgrounds, and also varied methodological traditions, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed method, and robust case study approaches.

This introductory article next attempts to illuminate the conceptual nexus between the entrepreneur and the community in the literature. Two important questions will be explored. Do communities catalyze growth, development, or both? Are communities supporting or leading players in cultivating entrepreneurial action? The examination of these two questions provides insights into the complex relationship between entrepreneurs and their surrounding community – with clues about how entrepreneurship can be supported more effectively at the local and regional level. The article ends by examining several of the benefits of entrepreneurship development beyond economic development, and focusing on how entrepreneurship can be a catalyst for improving overall community well-being. Finally, the outline of the special issue is presented, and the guest editors call readers of this special issue to action and scholarship following this important and multidimensional discussion.

### Entrepreneurs and the community

Before delving into the contents of the special issue, a bit of background is warranted. Entrepreneurship can be a deceptively simple topic. A favorite community engagement exercise of the guest editors is to ask a room of community members to raise their hand if they know what the term “entrepreneurship” means. Nearly every hand shoots up. Then, participants are asked to write down their definition of entrepreneurship, and pass it to the front to be read aloud. Naturally, the answers are wonderfully – even hilariously – diverse, and of course they would be! Entrepreneurship is a concept that most people grasp viscerally, but who is an entrepreneur, really? Is entrepreneurship about Silicon Valley-style, high-growth tech businesses? Is it about mom and pop boutique stores? Do entrepreneurs have to be in the community to have an impact? What about someone who launches a “non-business,” like a new club or program that serves the public good? How about entrepreneurial thinkers in existing organizations, or people in governments and nonprofits that launch new projects? All of these ideas are likely to appear, sometimes putting famous entrepreneurs like Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook at the same entrepreneur’s cocktail party as Cynthia from Cynthia’s Lawn Care in rural Missouri. How can we talk about entrepreneurship development when so many people have a different idea of what the target of that development should be? This can lead to some interesting discussion and even conflict, as some community members may value some types of entrepreneurship over others (“we should be focusing on high growth business, not little dinky mom and pops”). Or conversely, what some community members consider entrepreneurial may not seem very innovative at all (“what we really need in this town are healthier school lunches”).

Behind this diversity are different social and cultural values about who entrepreneurs are and how they are supposed to behave. If one sees entrepreneurs as a critical engine for economic growth above all other things, a focus on supporting small, existing businesses might seem like a waste of time and money. To others, if simply expanding the entrepreneurial mindset of current residents is an important goal, empowering local residents with knowledge about how to solve local problems and “launch new stuff,” then education and mentorship should be central. A focus on growth-oriented entrepreneurship may even seem completely out of line. The financial and institutional supports necessary for supporting an emerging biotech sector (skilled labor, high-tech facilities, links to research institutions) are vastly different from those supporting a new community supported agriculture initiative (latent demand, available land, organic agriculture knowledge) or a new river walk district (available real estate with frontage, shoreline improvements, retail consulting, a river). Merely supporting entrepreneurship as an economic development tool can lead to a great deal of local conflict, as the varied expectations of the underlying term can lead to confusion and disappointment about who gets supported, and what the outcome should be.

In our observations, there are two common narratives that appear regularly in both the practitioner and academic literature about the link between entrepreneurship and economic development. Each presents an opportunity to examine the nexus between entrepreneurs and communities through a different lens.

#### *Are entrepreneurs catalysts of growth, development, or both?*

One common narrative found in the economic development literature is the idea that entrepreneurship is being rediscovered as a way to catalyze economic and employment growth and wealth creation (Acs, 2006; Baumol et al., 2007; Wennekers & Thurik, 1999).

This narrative has emerged as industrial recruitment is increasingly viewed as a lackluster strategy – one that is unlikely for many rural and economically troubled communities (Mayer & Knox, 2006; Turner, 2003). It is easy to view entrepreneurs as economic heroes who can create massive value, even in the depths of a recession (Fairlie, 2013; Shane, 2011). In an economic climate where industrial recruitment is increasingly viewed as a failing strategy, who would not want to capture the creative growth potential of entrepreneurs within their own community? It is a promising narrative, but as we will argue shortly, it is an incomplete one.

In times of high economic uncertainty, and with the continued influx of capital, resources, and talent into high growth areas, many communities struggle to reinvent themselves. There is high pressure to attract new strategies for job creation that do not rely on outdated methods of industrial recruitment. Simultaneously, much of the literature focuses on what makes *firms* successful, rather than what makes *communities* successful. And, it is increasingly clear that high-tech, high-growth strategies that work in Silicon Valley, CA are not appropriate for many communities, with the exception of a few knowledge- and capital-intensive metropolitan areas (see Fortunato, 2014 for a fuller argument of this point). There continues to be a need to explore what entrepreneurship development can really do for communities beyond the traditional focus on economic growth: from enriching the local lifestyle to building self-sufficiency; from attracting new markets to rediscovering traditional work; from the highest tech enterprises to the most ancient crafts and trades.

Entrepreneurship as a development strategy is neither as easy nor as successful as it appears on the surface – and the biggest and best returns on this strategy often have nothing to do with traditional growth. Entrepreneurs are largely responsible for job growth in the aggregate (Kauffman Foundation, 2009b), but this does not mean that all entrepreneurs are equally successful, or have an equivalent impact on local society. Research has concluded that most high-growth entrepreneurship tends to be clustered around urban areas (Acs & Armington, 2006) or around major research institutions (Audretsch & Lehmann, 2005). Growth-oriented firms are not only spatially concentrated in some places (and virtually absent from others) (Acs & Mueller, 2008), overall, only a very small percentage of firms create enough jobs to have a major impact on economic development that could rival industrial recruitment (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010). “Gazelles,” or high-growth startups, typically start growing quickly when they have between 50 and 200 employees (Acs & Mueller, 2008): a high bar for some smaller communities to meet. Put simply, supporting entrepreneurs exclusively for their growth potential is similar to supporting race horses based solely on their winning potential. Not every horse is going to win every time, some horses never win, and it may take years for some horses to develop into true champions. It is a strategy that requires incredible patience over time, and the results are far from certain. It misclassifies many horses as failures just because they are not born to race, irrespective of their other talents and contributions. Such an economic development strategy may be wholly inappropriate given the culture, history, and values of the surrounding community.

In communities as in organizations, culture impacts strategy (Hustedde, 2007). If economic and community development policy uses traditional business strategies and means to support entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial development while ignoring culture, that strategy will likely fail or at best achieve sub-optimal performance. Residents understand the history of their community, the narratives that shape their sense of place, the nature of their relationships with each other, their ability to participate in collective decisions affecting the community, the interpersonal and



collective dynamics of power, and other such matters. How these understandings affect perspectives on future opportunities and thus impact strategy and its implementation in all domains goes beyond economic development strategy. Entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy needs to focus on relationship and community development as much as it concentrates on technology innovation, business plans, management fads, marketing strategies, and jobs and income. The point is not to focus on one or the other but to take a more holistic and pluralistic approach than is reflected typically in local and regional economic development policy. The result is a broadening view of the contributions of entrepreneurs beyond mere economic growth, opening the field to the myriad ways that entrepreneurs contribute to human well-being.

### *Are communities supporting or leading players?*

A second common narrative has to do with how entrepreneurship is supposed to work, and the roles played by entrepreneurs and by the community. In a more traditional view of the firm, entrepreneurs are individuals who are capable of reallocating existing resources to find more efficient outcomes (the Marshallian view, or “doing more with less”) (Marshall, 1997). Or, entrepreneurs might make step-wise, incremental innovations that advance upon other existing technologies (the Kirznerian view, or “building a better mousetrap”) (Kirzner, 1978). Or, in some cases, entrepreneurs might discover something so revolutionary that they create a rift in the current market space, causing old firms to become obsolete and new markets to appear (the Schumpeterian view, or “creative destruction”) (Schumpeter, 1934; also see van Praag, 1999 for a discussion of the contributions of these and other entrepreneurial theorists in context). In any of these cases, the centerpiece of the entrepreneurial equation is the entrepreneur, or more broadly, the entrepreneurial firm, where profit is a primary motivator for innovating competitively and taking on risk (Casson, 2005). Several scholars, including Shane (2003), have noted the importance of the entrepreneur’s environment in structuring opportunistic action (i.e. having good access to information, resources, suppliers, buyers, and so on). An entrepreneur’s networks, made available through a supportive environment rich with weak ties, can produce information critical to recognizing and exploiting opportunities (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Granovetter, 1973; Shane, 2003). Although the entrepreneur’s environment plays a crucial role in firm creation and growth in the traditional view, the entrepreneur is still, undoubtedly, the actor in the spotlight. That makes sense: entrepreneurs are the ones starting the business after all, not their friends and neighbors. This view does not say much about the role the community plays in an entrepreneur’s life. There is a clear recognition that culture is more than just context, but this relegates the community (and community developers) to more of a supportive role, when in reality, entire communities are capable of supporting entrepreneurship.

New research is emerging each year challenging traditional conventions about entrepreneurs, who they are, how they create value, and the kinds of impacts they are having on communities. A more community-oriented view of entrepreneurship sees the process of venturing not uniquely as a strategic behavior, but as holistic and humanistic – just like community life itself. This idea has deep roots in behavioral economics (Schmid, 2008) and institutional sociology (Granovetter, 1985), whereby too narrow a focus on individual, rational action produces an undersocialized view of society. The reality is far messier. Entrepreneurs are real people with real problems, real life circumstances, and real ideas – favoring a complex view of the interactions between firm and society over a profit-oriented, individualistic view of *homo aeconomicus*. Communities may likewise

support or discourage entrepreneurship in very subtle, often conflicting ways. A simple example might be a city council that prefers to invest in tax abatements to attract large businesses and national chains to a community, or the failure to include small business owners effectively at the Chamber of Commerce, or the cultural habit of referring to would-be entrepreneurs as “crazies” whose ideas will never work. Alternatively, communities could start a buy local campaign, feature local entrepreneurs prominently in local news, or step out on a limb and launch a co-working incubator space. These forces are acting upon local societies all the time, opening doors to entrepreneurship for some, closing doors for others.

Entrepreneurs are, as with all of us, immersed in a web of human relationships, interdependencies, and power that can be observed at the community level. Entrepreneurs both shape and are shaped by this web. The nature of those interdependencies creates different types of opportunities that are a function of particular situations in particular places. In fact, these opportunities are culturally situated, and change from place to place, even shaping whether or not entrepreneurship is valued, or whether people become entrepreneurs in the first place (Dana, 1995; Fortunato & Alter, *in press*).

Additionally, socially constructed formal and informal cultural “rules” (i.e. anything from cultural norms through formal, written policy) existing in those particular places at points in time and over time (Schmid, 2008) are critical to understanding entrepreneurial behavior and performance. Entrepreneurship does not occur in a vacuum, and it is certainly not just about the individual. Entrepreneurs are embedded in this dynamic web of relationships, and must be understood in this context (Granovetter, 1985). A focus on the heroic qualities of the entrepreneur, and his/her behaviors and strategies alone without a deep understanding of the society that helped to produce and support that entrepreneur, is insufficient. The field of entrepreneurship continues to witness a deep transition from thinking about entrepreneurship as an individualistic effort, supported by community actors – toward one that sees entrepreneurship as a socially embedded, community-wide effort where many actors can contribute. The business literature calls this an entrepreneurial ecosystem, which has little to do with individuals, and everything to do with the shared culture among them (Feld, 2012). Put simply, to have an innovative, entrepreneurial community requires having an innovative, entrepreneurial society that is willing to value and support entrepreneurial action (Julien, 2007).

Communities (or ecosystems) support entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship not just on a functional level (e.g. access to capital via banks, local tax and land use policy, availability of reasonable financing options), but also on a relational level. Relationships (the nature of the community field as noted by Wilkinson (1991)) matter to the extent they do or do not foster an enabling setting supporting entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs need each other, and they need other people from other sectors of the economy and society (Fortunato & Alter, 2011). All are a source of differing views, ideas, and approaches. At this intersection of difference is opportunity for learning, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Competition is important, but it is not the necessary condition for economic growth and development. Collaboration, a byproduct of community, is the key: to fuel growth and development, to unlock entrepreneurial opportunity and success, and to understanding and taking advantage of collaboration. In fact, at the individual and community level, creativity, innovation, growth, and development can be energized through collaboration because of the intersection of differing ideas that such boundary spanning entails. Collaboration holds the promise of positive sum outcomes for all individuals and communities, and is different from a narrow competition mindset, which connotes tradeoffs within an unchanged resource



endowment, and thus negative or at best zero sum outcomes for some interests, individuals, and/or communities. Interaction among entrepreneurs may matter even more to stimulating entrepreneurship locally than their interactions with local leaders (Fortunato & McLaughlin, 2012), demonstrating a unique sense of community among entrepreneurs even within the broader community. In this view, it is hard to relegate the importance of the community to a supporting role when both individual and collective imagination and creativity matter in supporting innovation and entrepreneurship!

### **A call to create many creative paths forward**

In the spirit of imagination and creativity, this special issue also serves as a formal call to action and publicly engaged scholarship about community entrepreneurship development. This area of inquiry goes well beyond a reductionist focus on economic growth, seeking to explore the broad range of the unsung benefits of entrepreneurship to communities everywhere. A comprehensive list of these benefits does not, and cannot, exist – innovative entrepreneurs and scholars will only find more. The following brief list is submitted by the guest editors as a starting point for scholarly discussion.

- (1) Entrepreneurship does not only improve local economies, it influences local well-being as well (Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, & Nucci, 2002).
- (2) Entrepreneurship, particularly social entrepreneurship, provides a pathway to local problem solving (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004).
- (3) Over time, entrepreneurship can provide some sustainable job creation and retention, even if small in scale (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010; Thurik & Wennekers, 2004).
- (4) Entrepreneurs have the power to diversify away from older industries, and therefore can diversify the local economic base (Clark, 2009; Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001).
- (5) Entrepreneurship can empower local citizens with greater control of their financial future, especially among marginalized groups (Oviawe, 2010).
- (6) Entrepreneurship has a deep basis in local culture (Dana & Dana, 2005), and may have greater attachment and applicability to the local community (Malecki, 1997).
- (7) Entrepreneurship can create positive disruptions in local economies that are economically stuck or recovering from the loss of industry, providing opportunities, and resources for economic renewal (Pe'er & Vertinsky, 2008).
- (8) As long as a supportive community exists, community-based enterprise can transform the lives of poor and economically distressed residents by providing an outlet for earning and economic self-expression (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006).

This special issue presents seven outstanding articles that capture a wide range of approaches and ideas for supporting entrepreneurship, and embracing the diversity of benefits entrepreneurs bring to their community. Because a diversity of approaches is likely to come from a diversity of people, this special issue pays special attention to issues of equity, accessibility, and social justice in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset across a wide variety of populations for the enrichment of the entire community. The special issue begins with an invited essay by Thomas S. Lyons that discusses the role that entrepreneurship plays in community development. Far from a simple economic development strategy, Lyons argues that entrepreneurship, if it is equitable and inclusive

in its intent, has the revolutionary potential to build upon local assets, culture, imagination, and skills in ways that other strategies cannot.

Such strategies often face very real constraints and challenges, as elaborated in the first article by Crowe, Ceresola, Silva, and Recker, who demonstrate that real barriers exist across many minority communities in the face of devolution. While appeals to cultivate the creative class in many historically African-American communities have failed, these authors show that formal education and economic development strategy is a successful way to engage the local population. One bright spot is the presence of community development financial institutions (CDFIs), providing essential startup capital to many disadvantaged entrepreneurs who otherwise would have little access to capital. An article by Patraporn examines the complex role of CDFIs in stimulating entrepreneurial activity among ethnic minorities in the United States, and through qualitative inquiry, shows how the unique interactions between CDFI staff and emerging entrepreneurs allows CDFIs to take on greater risks and help underserved populations.

Much of the power of community entrepreneurship development stems from its ability to build wealth from cultural assets that are unique to the community. The role of culture is not only a building block, but can also fundamentally inspire or inhibit entrepreneurship. Importantly, it is not only culture that matters to inspiring entrepreneurship, but how entrepreneurial action is perceived in that culture, creating very real supports and constraints in the minds of current and would-be entrepreneurs. Continuing with a focus on minority entrepreneurship as an example, Achtenhagen and Price Schultz demonstrate how the portrayal of entrepreneurship in American media can have a profound effect on the entrepreneurial aspirations of ethnic minorities. Examining the role of culture through a different lens, the fourth article, by Breazeale, Fortunato, Allen, Hustedde, and Pushkarskaya, examines the divergent role of rural and urban culture in supporting entrepreneurship, using survey data from Kentucky. These authors produce a scale for assessing the Entrepreneurial Community Culture of a place, and discuss the very different roles that local culture plays in supporting entrepreneurship in rural and urban areas.

Finally, the last three articles focus on applied strategies for supporting entrepreneurship locally by creating an entrepreneurial “ecosystem” – a whole system of diverse players with a common intent of working together to innovate, collaborating to solve problems, forming partnerships and friendly rivalries, and competing together as a team. Dye and Alter, authors of the fifth article in the special issue, offer a case study from Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada) demonstrating how governments can improve their efforts to support entrepreneurial ecologies, become more helpful, and overcome troublesome reputations when it comes to supporting entrepreneurship. In a similar vein, the sixth article by Vorley and Williams examines a community-based enterprise learning initiative in Rotherham (UK). These authors share the benefits of this approach, and provide constructive strategies for improving community-based learning efforts in other communities. Finally, Markley, Lyons, and Macke author our seventh article, providing strategies for improving entrepreneurial capacity locally by blending two compelling entrepreneurship frameworks to put entrepreneurs front and center in economic development efforts. For those readers who are keen to get to work supporting entrepreneurs in their own community, the guest editors are confident that this section of the special issue will be especially appealing.

As the fields of entrepreneurship and community development continue to evolve in positive and productive ways, we as guest editors of the special issue sincerely hope to encourage an evocative, evolutionary exploration at the nexus of these two fields.

Entrepreneurship and community development are messy, complex topics. For scholars of either (or both), this is great news! It means that there is no “one right way” to do entrepreneurship development, no magic bullet or panacea. There are, however, a multitude of effective approaches that can work in a variety of different local and regional contexts, and for a multitude of reasons. Thank goodness for that, because a diversity of entrepreneurs and development approaches means that communities can evolve to become as unique as the local businesses they help to support. Entrepreneurship in these communities may be viewed as a route to economic growth, or toward development and well-being. It may be a destination to raise the visibility of a place, or a journey toward resilience and a new vision. With many ways to convene entrepreneurs and support different types of entrepreneurship, even neighboring communities can collaborate without competing for the same set of opportunities. It is the goal of this special issue to underscore the diversity of approaches and outcomes that can help communities to transform into spaces of creative and opportunistic exploration.

Diversity is healthy for any local economy, but so is a call to creativity, imagination, and trying new things. Likewise, community entrepreneurship development can promote this idea by helping to build entrepreneurial ecosystems and safe spaces that promote the potential and possibility of citizens as a foil to everyday conflict, divisiveness, and narratives of defeat and pessimism. Best of all, entrepreneurs *and their supporters* can be active participants in this important journey. Absolutely anyone can take part in the action, and absolutely anyone can think like an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurial thinking is a skill that can be learned across the community (Lichtenstein & Lyons, 2010), and its scope can include the creation of highly profitable enterprises – or better – the broader pursuit of working with others to effectively launch new ideas that improve the community in a manner that makes sense for local citizens. For those who study entrepreneurship, community development, or those who are simply intrigued by the idea of empowering communities through these means of organizing, it is hoped that this special issue will inspire your own creative and entrepreneurial thinking in this important conceptual space. In the spirit of co-creating new knowledge and insight, and thus the spirit of both entrepreneurship and community, we enthusiastically welcome you to this discussion and hope this special issue fosters and feeds your curiosity, scholarship, and action.

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