Call for Papers – Special Issue

Challenging the legitimacy assumption in entrepreneurship

Guest Editors:
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There is a consensus in the field of entrepreneurship that all business ventures must find legitimacy, particularly if these want to survive past the early stages, which are said to be decisive (see, for instance, Delmar and Shane, 2004; Tornikoski, 2009: 123; Dobrev and Gotsopoulos, 2010). Entrepreneurs must therefore, in a more or less active way, take, a wide range of actions and strategies to shore up the legitimacy of the new venture. Resource acquisition from stakeholders is the expected result of this legitimization process. Research in this area has drawn heavily on neo-institutional sociology, which looks at the way in which organizations comply with the formal or tacit rules in place in their field, and has identified two main types of legitimacy: cognitive and evaluative legitimacy (Suchman, 1995: Uberbacher, 2014). More specifically, scholars try to examine how evaluators form social judgments on legitimacy, as well as which strategies and behaviors entrepreneurs develop to garner legitimacy capital (see, for instance, Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Bitektine, 2011; Lousbury and Glynn, 2001).

For example, the need for legitimacy manifests itself in the way in which the entrepreneurs have consistent recourse to tools such as business plans and market studies, are compelled to adapt their ventures and narratives to different evaluators, and feel forced to espouse a repertoire of language and symbols which is alien to them. This need is also propagated by public institution that produce a whole set of legitimization discourses providing a structuring framework for rational and acceptable behaviors (Perren and Jennings, 2005). Finally, academic (including pedagogical) discourses have also helped establish a benchmark for legitimacy, in particular by setting out what an entrepreneur is or is not, using—at least according to some—sufficiently substantial images to achieve that end (Jones and Spicer, 2009). All of these spheres of legitimization have far from neutral performative effects on identities and on how new ventures are founded and run.

This need for legitimacy is also crucial for the majority of entrepreneurs looking for financing. However, they often see this as a sacrifice to be made or as a constraint to which they are bound to submit, and that sometimes even makes them feel ousted from their own venture. In these cases, legitimacy may become a mechanism for submission
or a way of controlling the entrepreneur and his/her venture. We could even go as far as to maintain that the effect of an excess of legitimization in a new venture runs counter to the very reasons for starting a business and, therefore, the work of the entrepreneur. And yet, literature has only paid scant attention to the potential downsides of the need for legitimacy and the to consequences of multiple audiences’ potentially contradictory demands (Überbacher, 2014).

One potential way forward for entrepreneurship researchers would be to sideline approaches aiming to spot gaps in the corpus of supposedly unquestionable knowledge and instead challenge founding hypotheses of the discipline and try to question the assumptions which usually prevail in the field (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Rehn et al., 2013). Our special issue aims at challenging the embedded assumption of legitimacy in the entrepreneurship academic field, but also in entrepreneurial practices.

Novel and original papers with novel theoretical frameworks and with empirical grounding should include, but not be limited to, the following:
- Legitimation as a constraint and a test
- How to set up a new market or social category without accepting the constraints of legitimacy?
- How legitimating a new venture which escapes market and social categories?
- Legitimating distinctiveness: a step toward emancipation vs disguised conformity
- Legitimation versus resistance, emancipation and distinction
- Resistance, emancipation and distinction as sources of legitimacy
- Crowdfunding and alternative funding strategies to negotiate the legitimation constraint
- Tools, devices and models in entrepreneurial practice as constraints
- Incubators, ecosystems and support as performers of legitimacy
- Legitimation as a social practice of entrepreneurs
- Collective strategies and tactics to cope with legitimacy
- How entrepreneurs in the margins (necessity, refugees, social, artists, etc.) face the imperative of legitimacy?
- Start-ups and VC: theater of impressions or “mise en abyme”?
- Etc.
Some references:


SUBMISSION:

Papers have to be submitted by **April 30th 2018**. Submissions should be sent to legitimacySC@gmail.com

Original papers must be submitted using the Journal two-stage submission process; early submissions are encouraged. Authors of papers invited to revise and resubmit will be expected to work within a tight timeframe to meet the special issue’s publication deadline.

Please make sure to indicate that your submission is made for the special issue on: **Challenging the legitimacy assumption in entrepreneurship**.

Please refer to *Authors Guidelines* to write your paper: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099-1697/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099-1697/homepage/ForAuthors.html)
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