
COMMUNITIES AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

MSc IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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FORMALITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the reader with an overview of the findings of the extant literature on the role of communities on entrepreneurial activity via the use of a systematic literature review. The selected literature was grouped into themes by using inductive thematic analysis, and the main findings for each theme were reported using a combination of tables and narrative synthesis. The objective was to provide the reader with a structured overview of countries, theories, themes, research methods, and analytical methods, explored by scholars in this field in the past 20 years. There are four main results observable from the reviewed literature: 1) understanding the process of entrepreneurship requires a deep analysis of social processes and social behaviours at both a community-level and at an individual-level, 2) communal social capital is a recurring aspect examined by the literature, and the effects it has on entrepreneurship differ between different types of communities, 3) in absence of a pre-established entrepreneurial cluster, online communities in remote areas could hurt local entrepreneurs, and 4) there is evidence suggesting that communities and entrepreneurs benefit each other in a reciprocal manner.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 FOREWORD

This systematic literature review represents the first of a series of papers on the research topic of networks and entrepreneurship. The data used has been taken from a database created for a PhD research project by Karina Zittel, a researcher at the department of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management at the Technical University of Berlin.

More specifically, this study cuts through 3056 papers on networks and entrepreneurship published between 1888 and 2014 from 232 peer-reviewed journals, and is specifically designed to systematically explore and thematically organize extant academic efforts revolving around communities and entrepreneurship. Content analysis and thematic analysis are used to organize the literature, while narrative synthesis is employed to summarize the results. Obtained from a final sample of 39 papers from 22 peer-reviewed academic journals, the insights gained from the studies are used to shed light on the status of the literature on the topic, and to make recommendations for future research.

Due to the large number of papers analysed it was not practical to include the database and the extraction tables in the Appendix. If interested, please contact Karina Zittel (korinna.zittel@tu-berlin.de) for access to the database with the 3056 papers and the respective coding, and Nicola Pallotta (nicolapallotta@gmail.com) for access to the extraction tables and supplementary database.

1.2 THE TOPIC

There are several reasons for researching the fields of networks and entrepreneurship. From a theoretical perspective, Schumpeter, in his book *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1934) held entrepreneurship responsible for driving the change process in a capitalistic society. Arrow (1962) presents entrepreneurship as the process through which the entrepreneur converts technical information into products and services. More recently, Shane and Venkatamaraman (2000) point out that *“the absence of entrepreneurship from our collective theories of markets, firms, organizations, and change makes our understanding of the business landscape incomplete”* (p. 219).

From a practical perspective, it is hard to argue with the fact that entrepreneurship *“contributes to job creation, productivity and economic growth”* (Hopp & Ute, 2012, p. 917). Despite general agreement on the matter, mature economies like the USA and Europe are struggling to encourage ambitious entrepreneurs. As a matter of fact, statistical data from the latest Kaufmann Index of Entrepreneurial Activity shows that entrepreneurship in the US has been steadily declining in the past five years (Fairlie, 2013). The situation is not less dire in the Old Continent, where despite laptop-friendly hip-cafes in Berlin and London’s start-ups districts, *“European culture remains deeply inhospitable to entrepreneurs”* (The Economist, 2012).

From a policy perspective, it can be argued that the majority of policymakers account entrepreneurship responsible for economic development, and therefore design policies in support of entrepreneurial activity. In the European Union for instance, entrepreneurship is on the agenda of the current competitiveness and growth strategy described in details in the “Europe 2020” policy plan, and in the “Entrepreneurship 2020” action plan, *“a blueprint for decisive action to unleash Europe's entrepreneurial potential, to remove existing obstacles and to revolutionise the culture of entrepreneurship in Europe”* (European Commission, 2015). Furthermore, on a more regional level, local policy makers and other local institutions seek political fame by trying to imitate the success of the Silicon Valley, without having sufficient understanding of the mechanics behind entrepreneurial activities (Lerner, 2009). General advice on the matter instructs local administrators to endow their constituencies with all the necessary ingredients needed to bake a thriving entrepreneurial cluster - good ICT infrastructure, excellent universities, available venture capital funding, tax breaks, business incentives, and incubation programs (Feldman & Braunerhejelm, 2008; Lerner, 2009). Often, despite the effort, such initiatives fail to propel successful and

sustainable entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurship is more arcane than that. Berlin, one of the most hospitable European cities for young entrepreneurs, has achieved entrepreneurial growth with *“zero help from the state”* (The Economist, 2012). A plausible reason for the current policy ineffectiveness could be that while individual factors that facilitate entrepreneurial activities are better understood, a more holistic understanding of the institutional embeddedness of entrepreneurial behaviour (Hopp & Ute, 2012), and of the importance of networks – for instance communities – in the promotion of entrepreneurship is still needed by academics and policy makers alike.

From a theoretical standpoint, the contribution of networks to the development of start-up activity and entrepreneurship has been examined in a growing number of studies (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Baum, Calabrese, & Silverman, 2000; Birley, 1985). Networks, it is argued, not only act as a medium for information and knowledge transfer, they also provide the start-up with essential resources that can be critical for its survival (Steier & Greenwood, 2000). Some go as far as suggesting that the institution of networks is the principal factor in determining the success of any firm (MacMillan, 1983). One of the key resources that entrepreneurs can access by being part of a network is social capital. The concept of social capital can be defined as *“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”* (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). Therefore, in the context of entrepreneurship, it can be paraphrased that to possess social capital the entrepreneur has to be related to other people or institutions, which are the effective sources of the entrepreneur’s advantage, as they have the potential of providing the entrepreneur with access to a wide spectrum of resources - financial resources, human resources, technical resources, and more (Portes, 1998). In simpler terms, the ability of the entrepreneur to get access to resources relies on the motivation of others to make such resources available.

Among the many different typologies of networks, communities, Coleman (1988) explains, facilitate the transfer of social capital within a group of people, increasing the altruistic disposition of the members of the community towards each other, but not towards external actors (bounded solidarity), (Portes, 1998). Furthermore, *“community context profoundly influences both what kinds of entrepreneurial initiatives can and should be undertaken and how they are and should be performed”* (Hindle, 2010, p. 602). Subscribing to this narrative, this paper argues that communities are powerful institutional constructs, whose influence on entrepreneurship should be better understood by scholars, practitioners and

policymakers alike. Despite wide academic interest on this topic in the research field of entrepreneurship, with research stretching from local and ethnic communities to virtual and open source communities, the current literature lacks structure and direction.

The rationale for this study is rooted in the societal need for a more holistic understanding of entrepreneurship. For this reason, the theoretical aggregation of extant scholarly findings produced by this review is deemed necessary, not only to academically contribute to the current literature on the subject matter, but also to help policy makers and entrepreneurs develop a reliable and organized knowledge base on the matter at hand. As argued by Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart (2003), *“systematic reviews lie at the heart of pragmatic management research, which aim to serve both academic and practitioner communities”* (p. 220). Additionally, the systematic nature of the study makes it suitable to be used as a manual for fellow researchers who are interested in conducting qualitative systematic literature reviews in business research fields. The author gathered the methodologies employed here from a wide variety of respected sources from the fields of management, economics and healthcare.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of the findings of the extant literature on the roles of communities on entrepreneurial activity.

“What are the findings of the extant literature on the roles of communities on entrepreneurial activity?”

This question is answered by grouping the selected literature into themes using inductive thematic analysis, and by reporting the main findings for each theme using a combination of tables and narrative synthesis. The objective is to provide the reader with a structured overview of countries, theoretical frameworks, research methods, analytical methods, and themes explored by the scholars in this field.

The article is divided into four subsequent sections. In the next section - Section 2 - background theories and definitions are presented. In Section 3 the study design and the chosen methodologies are illustrated. In Section 4 the central findings of the review are synthesized. In Section 5 a conclusion with key findings, implications, limitations and suggestions for future research are advanced.

2 BACKGROUND & DEFINITIONS

The central theories of this review are entrepreneurship and network theory. Since the early Schumpeterian theorization of entrepreneurship in the first half of the 19th century, entrepreneurship research has come a long way. In the last three decades, entrepreneurship as a new scientific research program has expanded and consolidated, capturing the interest of both scholars and policy makers (Veciana, 2007) as entrepreneurs have been held responsible for the creation of many economies' wealth and dynamism (Cuervo, Ribeiro, & Roig, 2007). However, despite the large number of publications on the subject matter, no one conclusive definition of entrepreneurship has been established. Rather, the field of entrepreneurship remains a broad one, which can be synthesized on a matrix composed of four main theoretical approaches and three level of analysis (Veciana, 2007). Those are economic approach, psychological approach, sociocultural approach, and managerial approach, intersecting with micro level (individual entrepreneurship), meso level (corporate entrepreneurship) and macro level (international and national entrepreneurship) of analysis (Veciana, 2007). In this systematic review the initial selection of papers was made using a broad and inclusive definition of entrepreneurship, and studies in which entrepreneurship is broadly understood as the "creation of new enterprise" (Low & MacMillan, 1988) were considered relevant. However, during the coding phase a distinction was made between independent entrepreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship. Independent entrepreneurship was defined as the *"process whereby an individual or group of individuals, acting independently of any association with an existing organization, create a new organization"* (Sharma & Chrisman, 2007), while corporate entrepreneurship was defined as *"the process whereby an individual or a group of individuals, in association with an existing organization, create a new organization or instigate renewal or innovation within that organization"* (Sharma & Chrisman, 2007).

In the early stage of entrepreneurship research academics were more concerned with the cultural heritage and personality traits of individuals as determinants of entrepreneurial behaviour (MacMillan, 1983). This study, however, systematically reviewed literature that follows a more contextual, richer, and more dynamic approach with regards to entrepreneurship (MacMillan, 1983). More specifically, "network theories" were used in the review process to define different typologies of networks. For instance, as proposed by Birley (1985) a distinction was made between formal (banks, venture capitalists, consultants) and informal (family, friends, community) networks.

Both in theory and practice, networks have received increasing importance in the field of entrepreneurship. For instance, the emergence of incubator and accelerator programs around the world, and the successful companies that they produce give credit to the thesis that networks are indeed valuable, and, at times, indispensable for entrepreneurial activity. Authors including Vesper (1983) and Cooper (1986) have studied extensively the role of incubators as providers of networks to the start-up firm. Furthermore, Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) stress the idea that indeed businesses cannot be created as a result of individual acts, but rather as an evolutionary process embedded in a broader social context. Positive results in favour of the importance of networks for entrepreneurial activity are also found by Brüderl & Preisendörfer (1998), whose paper concludes that *“support from the personal network of a founder improves survival and growth of newly established business”* (p. 224), by Ostgaard & Birley (1996), whose theory on social networks suggests that *“through their personal networks, entrepreneurs of a new venture gather access to critical resources”* (p. 45), and by Hansen (1995), whose research finds a significantly positive relation between network size, degree of interconnectivity, and frequency of interaction of networks and start-up growth. Studies like these are a demonstration of how there is a strong case for engaging in research that follows network theories.

By looking at the results of this systematic review it is evident how researchers of entrepreneurship are concerned with many different typologies of networks. In fact, from the 1389 articles included in the final database, 38 different typologies of networks were identified. In this review, however, the focus will be exclusively placed upon studies revolving around communities and their role on entrepreneurial activity. Such a narrowly focused review is possible due to the existence of a substantial body of theoretical and empirical studies exploring the relationship between communities and entrepreneurship. For the purpose of this study, Hindle’s broad definition of community will be adopted (2010). A community is *“any context where a self-defined group of people see their mutual belonging to the community as distinguishing them (but not excluding them) from all other members of society at large and where continued membership of the community is valued highly enough to impose some constraints on behaviour”*. This definition is used so that the scope of this review remains wide and allows the inclusion of communities ranging from small local ethnic groups, to global online virtual networks.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 PLANNING THE REVIEW

The research design of this systematic literature review was determined by the central research question that the review is set to answer and by the great diversity in literature and study designs of the sample to be reviewed. Based on this, narrative synthesis – the best-known form of qualitative research synthesis (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003) – was chosen as the primary data synthesis type as the main focus of the author was to develop an understanding of the literature by creating a mosaic like overview (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006). However, with the ambition to systematise the data collection and data extraction phases of the review, other well-established review techniques were used. For instance, content analysis was used to filter and organize the studies into smaller groups and to make the process more manageable (Popay, et al., 2006), while thematic analysis was used to identify the main, recurrent and most important themes across the studies (Popay, et al., 2006).

3.2 CONDUCTING THE REVIEW

3.2.1 DATA COLLECTION

For the purpose of this review, only papers from peer-reviewed journals were included. As suggested by Ordanini et al. (2008) and Podsakoff et al. (2005), only journal articles represent validated knowledge and therefore have the highest impact in their field and *“tend to shape on-going theoretical and empirical work by setting new horizons for inquiry within their frame of reference”* (Furrer, Thomas, & Goussevskaia, 2008, p.2). Additionally, only journals written in English and with an impact factor greater than 1.6 were selected. *“Peer review and impact factor can be used to provide a gross approximation of the prestige of journals in which papers have been published”* (Thomson Reuters, 1994); however, the limitations of this choice will be discussed in the concluding section of the paper.

The initial sample of papers was pulled from a database compiled for a PhD research project by Karina Zittel, a researcher at the department of entrepreneurship and innovation management at the Technical University of Berlin. The database comprises 3056 papers from 232 peer-reviewed journals with a broad focus on networks and entrepreneurship. An illustration of the data collection process can be seen in Figure 1. The database and the extraction tables are available upon request as explained in the Appendix.

In the first stage of the review, content analysis was used to screen and code the titles and abstracts of 3056 articles assigning 1s to papers related to networks and entrepreneurship and 0s to papers that were not. As recommended by Boland et al. (2014) papers were coded using an inclusive rather than exclusive approach, with the aim of “*maximizing the chances of obtaining relevant full-text papers*” (p.279). The coding was carried out in Microsoft Excel independently by three researchers to control for coding errors, reduce subjective bias, and enhance validity (Ginsberg & Venkatraman, 1985). During the initial stage of the coding, definitions of networks and entrepreneurship were discussed and agreed upon (see Section 2 for definitions) to ensure that the reviewers had the same understanding on the data to be selected (Boland, Cherry, & Dickson, 2014). The coding from the three reviewers was then merged into a single excel workbook and only papers coded for both networks & entrepreneurship were included for the next stage. This resulted in a sample of 1389 papers.

In the second stage, titles and abstract of the 1389 papers were screened and organized into 45 sub-categories: 7 sub-categories belonging to the main category of entrepreneurship, and 38 belonging to the main category of networks. The sub-categories were chosen following an iterative process, which involved discussions among the reviewers. Like in stage one, relevant papers were coded with a 1, and a new column for non-relevant papers was added to the database. This second stage resulted in the exclusion of 612 papers, as they did not relate to at least one sub-category of both networks and entrepreneurship. The remaining 777 articles were assigned to the 45 sub-categories, however only the 77 articles belonging to the “community” sub-category were selected for the next stage.

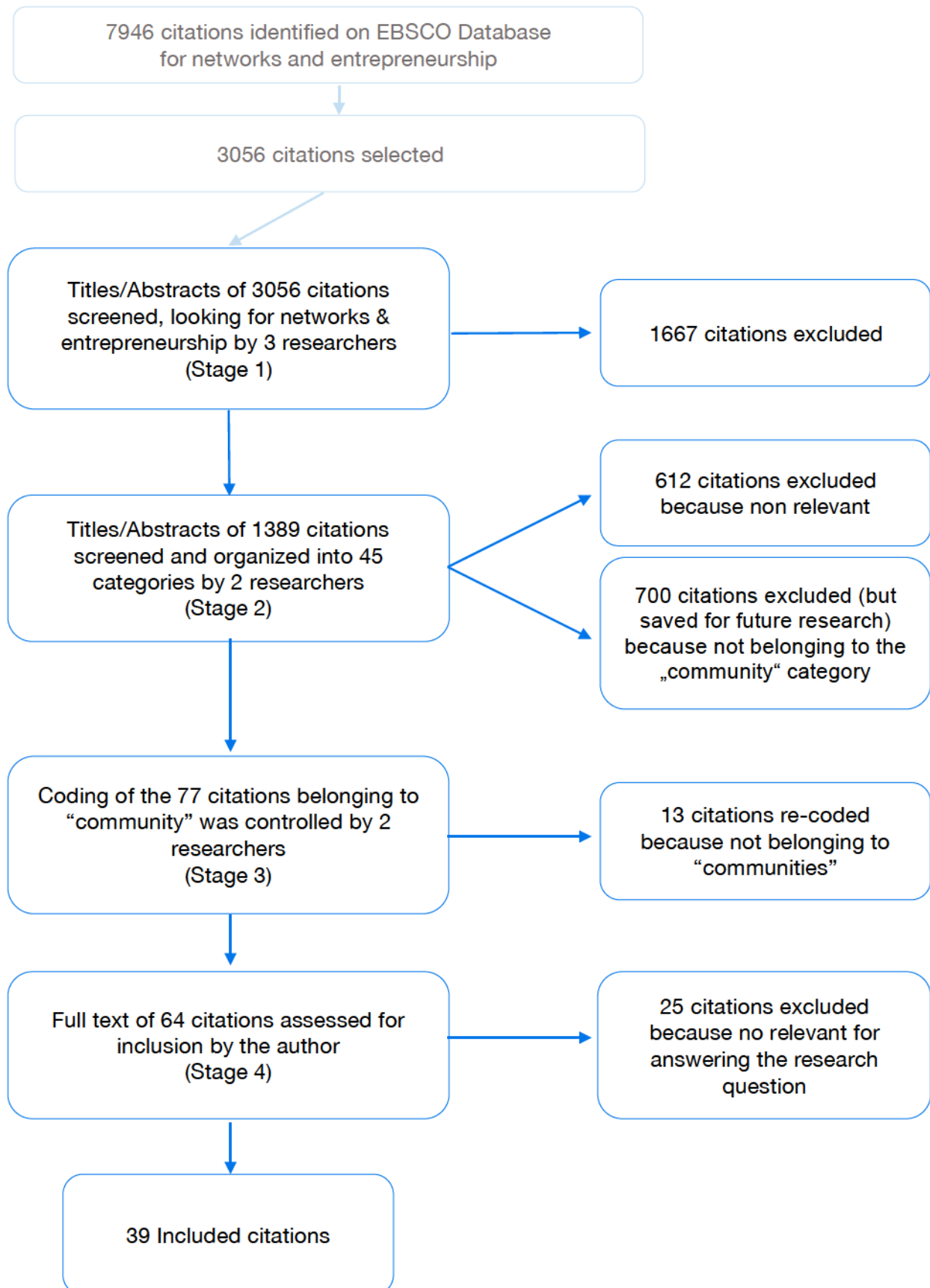
In the third stage, titles and abstracts from the 77 citations belonging to the “community” sub-category were compared between the two researchers. The coding was discussed and, after communal agreement, 13 papers were re-coded and re-assigned to other sub-categories because not belonging to the “community” sub-category.

In the fourth stage, the full text of 64 papers belonging to the category of “communities” was carefully read and, with reference to the research question, a decision was made about the applicability of each paper to the review. Of the 64 studies, 25 were excluded because not relevant for answering the research question. At this point, thematic analysis was conducted on the remaining 39 papers in an inductive manner, without having predefined themes (Popay, et al., 2006), but rather developing them from the type of community

explored in each individual study. Four central themes were identified and named “Social Capital & Ethnic Communities”, “Social Capital & Local Communities”, “Online & Peer Communities” and “Active Involvement & Reciprocity”. Each theme was refined throughout the whole data extraction period following an iterative approach. Additionally, for each theme several sub-themes were defined. It is worth mentioning that, as suggested by Fleeman & Dundar (2014), piloting was conducted at the beginning of each stage to prevent problems such as misunderstandings about definitions between the reviewers, or non-inclusion of certain sub-categories in the coding process.

Figure 1

The Data Collection Process



3.2.2 DATA EXTRACTION

Following the advice of Fleeman & Dundar (2014) data was extracted electronically (copy-paste) to both save time and reduce the chances of data-entry errors. A bespoke data extraction table specifically designed on Microsoft Excel was used to extract data necessary to answer the research question (see Appendix). Due to time constraints a single researcher extracted the data. Other systematic literature reviews with analogue research questions were consulted in order to have a better understanding of the data to be included in the extraction tables, and, after thorough consideration, data was extracted as follows:

- Type of Community
- Country of Community
- General theme based on type of community
- Content relevant to answer the research question
- Research methods for all included articles (i.e. empirical study, conceptual study, and literature review)
- Analytical methods used in the empirical studies (i.e. qualitative: semi-structured interviews, cases, focus groups, etc., and quantitative: moderated regression analysis, logit models, bivariate correlations, etc.)
- Details of the information source (title, authors, journal, publication details).

In the course of data extraction, each article was checked for quality and for relevance to the research question. Quality was defined as the *“degree to which a study employs measures to minimize bias and error in its design, conduct and analysis”* (Khan, Kunz, Kleijnen, & Antes, 2011, p. 39). The studies included in this review were collected from high-quality peer-reviewed journals, and therefore one might expect their quality to be inherently high. However, as Boland, Cherry, & Dickson (2014) suggest, one should not be *“lulled into a false sense of security by a journal’s reputation”* (p.137). For this reason and as advised by Khan et al. (2011) the quality of each study was assessed by 1) checking if the study describes quality assessment in the “method” section, and 2) evaluating if there is a fit between research methodology and research question (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). All the 39 included studies met the described quality criteria.

3.2.3 DATA SYNTHESIS AND INTERPRETATION

After thorough evaluation of twelve different qualitative approaches to research synthesis described by Dixon-Woods et al. (2004) – narrative synthesis, grounded theory, meta-ethnography, meta-synthesis, meta-study, logical analysis, data analysis techniques, metaphorical analysis, domain analysis, hermeneutical analysis, discourse analysis, analytic induction – narrative synthesis, a widely employed method to integrate findings in exploratory reviews (Hallinger, 2013), was chosen to synthesize the findings of the reviewed literature and describe the trend of the studies as a group (Gough, 2007). While allowing the author to be reflexive and critical (Hart, 1998), narrative synthesis provides “*deep and rich information and enable the wholeness of the studies to be maintained*” (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006, p. 219). Following this approach, the extracted data was summarized in a series of tables as well as accompanied by explanatory summary text (Fleeman & Dundar, 2014).

4 RESULTS

In this section the results are synthesized using a two-stage report as suggested by Tranfield et al. (2003). Firstly, a descriptive analysis of the field is provided with the help of tables. Subsequently, the findings are reported in a narrative fashion following the thematic categorization of the literature.

4.1 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

As described in the methodology section of this study, a content analysis was carried out to organize and filter the 3056 papers from 232 academic journals. Table 1 reports the results of Stage 2 of such analysis. Each reviewed paper could be assigned to more than one “typology”, therefore adding up the numerical values in the column “frequency” does not equal the 1389 papers reviewed in Stage 2. The table shows that the literature is divided into 7 typologies of entrepreneurship and 38 typologies of networks. Each paper was coded for both entrepreneurship and networks typologies. The 612 papers that did not qualify for at least one typology of both networks and entrepreneurship were coded as not relevant and were excluded from the study. Two researchers executed this process independently and in an iterative, inductive, and inclusive manner.

Additionally, the literature reviewed in this study is based on several theoretical frameworks from different disciplines. Not surprisingly, as shown in Table 2, social capital theory, ethnic entrepreneurship, and general entrepreneurship theories are the most used in the study of communities and entrepreneurship. Pooling the results of studies from such a great variety of theoretical backgrounds gives the author the possibility to create a comprehensive narrative that tries to represent reality as it is viewed from several different lenses.

Table 3 shows the different ethnicities of the communities studied in the articles reviewed. The most studied communities are local communities based in rural or urban areas in the United States of America. This is not surprising as a great number of papers are written by scholars in North American universities. Additionally, Asian communities were well represented in the studies, although most of the attention was given to Chinese and Indian communities. In most cases the studies concerned with Asian communities analysed the behaviour of those communities as immigrants, and in the majority of cases towards the United States, Canada and Australia. Surprisingly, the reviewed literature gives less attention to the roles of communities on entrepreneurship in Europe. A possible explanation

could be that this systematic literature review analyses only papers that are published in English, and therefore the papers on this topic written in German, Italian, French or Spanish might exist, but are not included in the sample.

Table 4 and 5 respectively show the research methods of all the 39 articles that were included in the review, and the qualitative and quantitative analytical methods used in the 29 empirical studies. According to Table 4, 72.5% of the studies use an empirical approach, while the remaining 27.5% are conceptual papers. Interestingly, no systematic literature review was found on this topic. According to Table 5, the most recurring qualitative methods are case studies and interviews, while in the case of quantitative papers there is no recurring analytical method. This might be due to the multidisciplinary of the research under scrutiny.

Table 1

Results of Stage 2 Content Analysis of 1398 titles and abstracts

Entrepreneurship Typologies	Frequency
Independent Entrepreneurship	389
Entrepreneurship in General	220
Corporate Entrepreneurship	101
International Entrepreneurship	46
Academic Entrepreneurship	34
Ethnic Entrepreneurship	33
Social Entrepreneurship	26
Networks Typologies	Frequency
Networks in General	143
Entrepreneur's Social Capital	117
Entrepreneur's Network	90
Partnerships & Alliances	77
VC Firms	72
Communities	63
Teams	60
Clusters	46
Family Networks	40
Cross-Border Networks	40
Science Collaborations	30
Inter-firm Network	23

Investment in General	23
Political Networks	22
Business Incubators	21
Third-Party Networks	19
Customers Networks	19
Banks/Debt Finance	16
Spatial Networks	15
Board Members	13
Supplier Networks	12
Angel Investors	11
Stakeholders Networks	10
Science Parks	9
Corporate VC	9
Organization's Social Capital	8
Competitors Networks	8
Institutions Networks	8
Employees	7
IPOs	7
Business Groups	6
Bootstrapping	4
FFF or Informal investment	4
Underwriters	3
Microfinance	3
FDI	3
Crowd Funding	2
Innovation Networks	1
Not Relevant Papers	612

Table 2*Theoretical frameworks used in the 39 articles reviewed*

Theoretical Frameworks	Frequency
Social Capital Theory	8
Ethnic Entrepreneurship Theory	4
Entrepreneurship Theory	4
Social Network Theory	3
Institutional Theory	3
Community Based Enterprise	2
Economic Development Theories	2
Immigrant Entrepreneurship	2
Action Theory of Entrepreneurship	1
Business Incubation Theory	1
Crowdsourcing Theory	1
Entrepreneurial Finance Theories	1
Economic Policy	1
Effectuation Theory	1
Biological Symbiotic Theory	1
Entrepreneurship Policy	1
Resource Based View	1
Evolutionary Psychology	1
Sponsorship Theory	1
Inclusive Fitness Theory	1
Industrial Cluster and Agglomeration	1
Innovation & Entrepreneurship Diffusion	1
New Product Development	1
Institutional Logics	1
Micro-Entrepreneurship Theory	1
National Culture	1
Open Innovation	1
Person-Culture Fit Theory	1
Relational Capital Theory	1
Social Economy	1
Social Embeddedness Theory	1
Stakeholder Theory	1
Global Action Network Theory	1
User Entrepreneurship	1

Table 3*Ethnicities of communities represented in the 39 articles reviewed*

Ethnicity of Communities	Frequency
North American	11
Multi Country (i.e. Virtual Communities)	6
British	4
Chinese	4
Indian	3
Korean	2
Samoan	1
Pakistani	1
Italian	1
Ismail	1
Danish	1
Cuban	1
Canadian	1
Spanish	1
Bangladeshi	1
African-American	1
Portuguese	1
Vietnamese	1
Argentinians	1
African	1
Pilipino	1

Table 4*Research methods of the 39 articles reviewed*

Research Method	Number of Articles	%
Empirical Paper	29	74,4
Conceptual Paper	10	25,6
Systematic Review	0	0
Total	39	100

Table 5*Analytical method used in the 29 empirical studies*

Analytical Method	Frequency
Quantitative	
Logistic Regression	2
Longitudinal Analysis	1
T-test	1
Instrumental Variable Regression	1
Bivariate Probit Regression	1
Econometric Estimates	1
Multivariate Analysis	1
Multinomial Logit Models	1
Moderated Regression Analysis	1
Bivariate Correlation	1
Cox-Proportional Hazard	1
Discrete Time Hazard Model	1
Qualitative	
Case Study	6
Interviews	6
Semi structured Interviews	4
Archival Research of News Papers and Reports	3
Ethnographic Interviews	2
Field Trip	2
Public Databases	2
Questionnaires	2
Archival Evidence from Bank Charter Applications to Regulators	1
Community Web Pages	1
Ethnographic Observations	1
Ex ante v Post ante Proxies	1
Focus Groups	1
Grounded Theory Approach	1
Participation in Workshops	1
Surveys	1
Weblogs	1

4.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Table 6 and Figure 2 provide a visual aid to the narrative discussion of the results of the thematic analysis that is to follow. The thematic map represents the four main themes and respective subthemes that are derived from the reviewed literature, while the table supplements the map by showing the number of papers for each of the themes. In what follows, the main findings for each theme will be narrated.

Figure 2

Thematic map

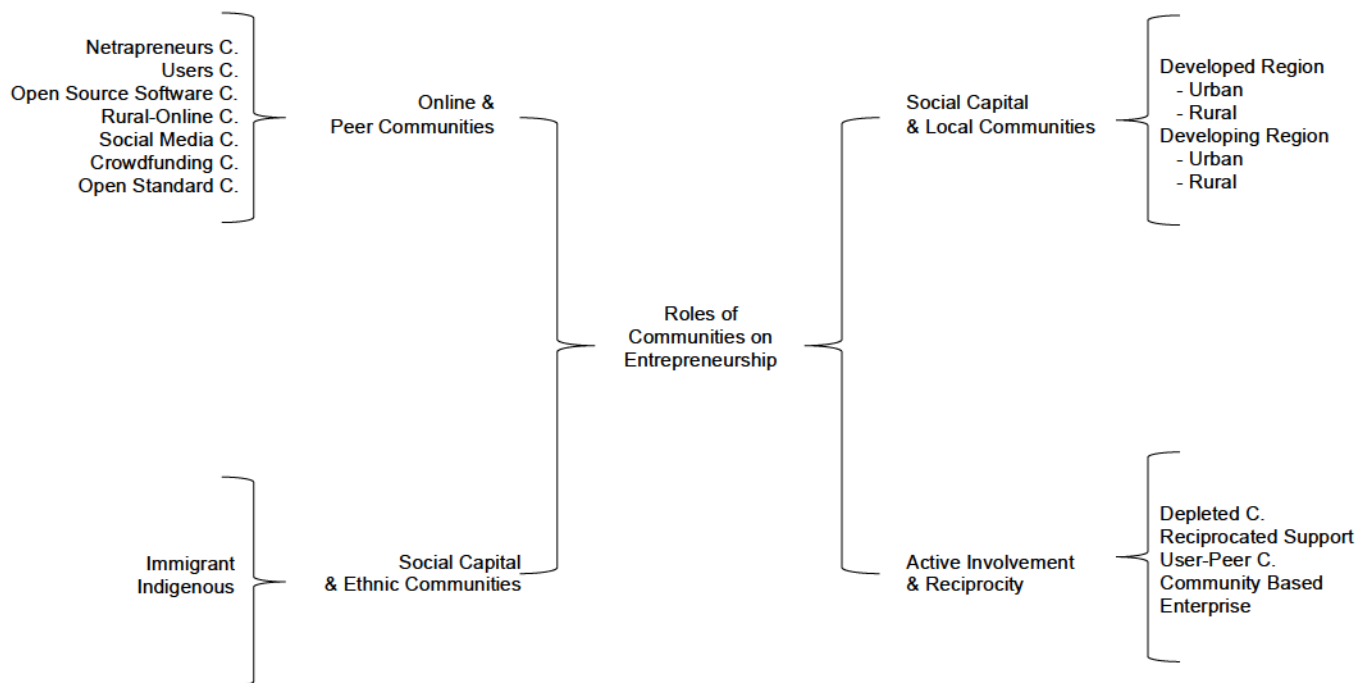


Table 6

Thematic coding for 39 "communities" papers

Theme	Frequency
Social Capital & Ethnic Communities	13
Social Capital & Local Communities	12
Online & Peer Communities	8
Active Involvement & Reciprocity	6

4.3.1 THEME 1: SOCIAL CAPITAL & ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

This thematic area includes the largest body of literature in this systematic review and covers papers that hold the ethnic aspect of communities and entrepreneurial activity as the focal point of their research. The aggregation of results shows that the socio-cultural environment within which entrepreneurs operate could shape the entrepreneur's perception of opportunities and has the potential to both facilitate and hinder the accumulation of the resources of the firm.

Evidence from a study conducted in a sub-arctic community in Alaska suggests that culture defines how entrepreneurs identify opportunities, meaning that entrepreneurs belonging to different cultures might respond differently to opportunities presented to them (Leo-Paul, 1995). Similarly, in another study conducted on a rural population on the Samoa Islands the researchers conclude that in an environment unspoiled by western capitalism the entrepreneur sees social and cultural capital resulting from the operations of indigenous business as important as financial capital (Cahn, 2008). These findings are particularly relevant in the development of policy aimed at integrating ethnic minorities in host countries as immigrant entrepreneurs might respond to local policy differently.

In support to the claim that communities can have a detrimental impact on entrepreneurial activity, Khayesi & George (2011) argue that the increase of network homogeneity that can result from increased communal interaction in highly communal oriented societies might limit access to business resources. More specifically, due to the social demands that the members of a community place on entrepreneurs, businesses with high communal orientation incur the risk of receiving fewer resources at higher cost through their social capital. In the worst-case scenario, this can result in low profitability and business failure (Khayesi & George, 2011). In support of this hypothesis, empirical evidence from a study on Asian immigrant-owned small businesses reveals that immigrant entrepreneurs that are the least oriented to employ co-ethnic labour and to serve co-ethnic customers are also the most profitable (Bates, 1994). Although this argument seems less valid in western economies where most business relationships are regulated by arm's-length principle, it can be speculated that in southern European regions with higher communal orientation social demands could be partly responsible for the low profitability of local businesses. However, empirical research is needed to support such claim. While these studies suggest that a too exclusive community involvement might damage the ethnic entrepreneur, the majority of research scrutinized in this systematic review advances hypothesis on how communities

can help entrepreneurs. Among Chinese communities, Guanxi - understood as *“the cultivation of a longer term relationship that implies mutual respect in the relationship and giving and receiving (gifts or favours), an exchange made out of friendship”* (Collins & Low, 2010, p.103) - is often used to help entrepreneurs start their businesses. Similarly, indigenous Samoan enterprises that are regulated by communal relationships seem to be more likely to succeed than the ones that are not (Cahn, 2008). Guanxi-like relationships present within ethnic entrepreneurial communities can therefore be held accountable for the success of a new immigrant firm in a host country. For instance, of particular interest is the role of Pakistani communities in the USA in helping new immigrant entrepreneurs starting up a business. In this regard, Greene & Butler (1996) describe how such communities perform functions that are similar to those performed by formal business incubators such as providing counselling, coaching, language classes, and, in some instances, going as far as raising capital from the members of the community to help the new business take off. In such cases communities become instrumental for business success; members of such communities have clear advantages over immigrant entrepreneurs that are not associated with any community. Greene (1997), using a resource based lens, suggests that certain communities, like for instance the Pakistani described above, can be the source of sustained competitive advantage for the entrepreneurs that are part of it, as their composition is *“imperfectly imitable due to unique historical conditions and a socially complex network of stakeholders”* (Greene P. G., 1997, p.64). A further observation on the effect of ethnic communities on entrepreneurship is the one formulated from an evolutionary psychological perspective by Yang, Colarelli, Han, & Page, (2011). The authors suggest that ethnic communities may help a business simply because individuals generally support companies of an associated community identity. This translates into the strategic need of new businesses to hire non-co-ethnic employees to widen the ethnic “coverage” of the business and, hence, attract more customers. It is worth mentioning, however, that this behaviour is allegedly more pronounced in immigrant entrepreneurs with low human capital, such as first generation entrepreneurs with little formal education and life experiences (Yang, Colarelli, Han, & Page, 2011).

By looking at these findings it is evident that the use of communal social capital, and the benefits that can be derived from it, vary greatly across different ethnic communities. Having a better understanding of the reasons behind such differences can have important implications for immigrant entrepreneurship in host countries such as the USA and Europe, where skilled immigrant are important contributors to national economies; but also in

developing countries where local entrepreneurship from indigenous communities can help overcome poverty. In a European context, for instance, the findings of studies in this field could assist policy makers develop more suitable immigrant integration programs, that in the long run would have the potential to leverage the skills and culture of the immigrants and at the same time benefit the European economy.

4.3.2 THEME 2: SOCIAL CAPITAL & LOCAL COMMUNITIES

This thematic area includes the second largest body of literature in this systematic review and cover papers in which locality, rather than ethnicity, is the level of analysis. Within this theme most papers are concerned either with communities in rural and urban areas in developed economies or with communities in developing regions of the world. In either case, the main focus of these papers revolves around the social aspects of local communities, and their impact on entrepreneurship.

Looking at the effect of communities on entrepreneurship on a local level is necessary as new firms and new industries tend to pool many of their resources from the local community (Manning, Birley, & Norburn, 1989). Policy makers intentioned to improve economic activity should therefore design policies that are rooted at the local level. While the resource argument is a valid one, in their recent paper on the local high-tech industrial cluster in Atlanta, Breznitz & Taylor (2014) suggest that while resources are important for the development of entrepreneurial activity, they are by themselves insufficient for the instauration of clusters. Entrepreneurs need a motive greater than resources to stay local. The authors argue that a true industrial community rich in social capital is necessary for a region to become a cluster. Being embedded in a local community with strong social ties and norms is likely to increase trust among the community members, and therefore facilitate the acquisition of important resources. Furthermore, in a study on the collective process of entrepreneurship in the context of new industry formation, the authors propose that *“during the emergence of a new industry, entrepreneurial behaviours in one population of the community may create opportunities for entrepreneurial behaviours elsewhere in the community”* and that *“the success of entrepreneurial behaviours in one population may be supported by entrepreneurial behaviours in other populations”* (Mezias & Kuperman, 2000, p.223). Similar findings emerge from a study of small foundries in an automotive cluster in western India, where the social capital that is created from business interactions between firms strengthens the entrepreneur’s feeling of community and acts as an incentive to contribute to the wellbeing of the region. This behaviour, exemplified by the active

participation of local industry groups in the improvement of the community, has a positive impact on the local entrepreneurs (Majumdar, 2010). In the same study, Majumdar (2010) also finds that entrepreneurs are keen to give back to the community, and they do so, for instance, by providing financial support to employees who are in need. While the effect of entrepreneurship on community goes beyond the purpose of this systematic review, such research topic could be of interest for future academic endeavours. Such results are not only observable within local communities in urban or industrial agglomerations, but also in small and economically depressed communities in rural regions. Networks of firms in poor rural community are expected to increase entrepreneurial activities within those communities and even between contiguous communities (Ring, Peredo, & Chrisman, 2010); and in the context of local bottom of the pyramid firms such networks, governed by voluntary compliance and norms of reciprocity, help reinforcing positive expectations that value can be created from such relationships (Calton, Werhane, Hartman, & Bevan, 2013).

Hopp & Ute (2012) hypothesize that the perception that entrepreneurs have about community support from local groups, local government, and local financiers increases their motivation during the venture creation stage, leading to a more likely successful outcome. Their study reveals that community-level cultural norms influence start-up motivation and entrepreneurial self-efficacy beliefs. A similar conclusion was reached by Almandoz (2012), whose study on new local banking ventures tells that entrepreneurs who are embedded in the community's logic seem to exhibit greater commitment to founding efforts. Community norms, altruistic behaviour, reputational concerns, and affective connections are all important factors associated with the degree of embeddedness of the entrepreneur in the community (Almandoz, 2012), and all seem to have an impact on entrepreneurial behaviour. Further evidence provided by Kwon, Heflin, & Ruef (2013) suggests that the social context of the community can have both positive and negative effects on the entrepreneurial level of the community. Like Almandoz (2012), Kwon, Heflin, & Ruef (2013) propose that the embeddedness of entrepreneurs within the community's social capital is an important contributor to entrepreneurial activity. Adding to these conclusions, in the same study the authors suggest that the interaction of community-level factors with the characteristics of individuals might strengthen or weaken entrepreneurial activity. More specifically, while the dominant groups of the community experience high level of entrepreneurial success due to the combination of high community-level and high individual-level social capital, in marginal members of the community the level of community-level social capital is not high enough to balance out the negative effects of low

individual-level social capital, thus, leaving marginal members of the community starve for entrepreneurial activity (Kwon, Heflin, & Ruef, 2013).

The main observation that can be drawn by looking at the literature included in this theme is that, irrespective of the type of local community (i.e. developed vs developing region, rural vs urban), in order to understand the process of firm and industry creation one should look at social processes and social behaviors at both community and individual levels, and how those affect the ability of the entrepreneur to acquire resources, and the motivation to forge ahead in his venture creation endeavours. As demonstrated by the studies in this section, a combination of social capital, social networks, cluster, and economic theory is necessary to unravel the effect of local communities on entrepreneurship. In addition, the theoretical contributions made by Kwon, Heflin, & Ruef (2013) should receive greater attention of policymakers both in developed and developing countries. As minorities and segments of the population with greater poverty and lower education have less individual level social capital, targeted policy measure could be designed to improve entrepreneurial opportunities of this group of individuals plagued by low individual- and community-level social capital.

4.3.3 THEME 3: ONLINE & PEER COMMUNITIES

The third theme of this review includes 8 papers investigating online and peer communities. The findings reported in this theme are particularly important as online communities have become ubiquitous. The Internet has provided entrepreneurs with a space to meet, becoming the Agora of modern societies where individuals go to socialize, shop, and exchange opinions. The Internet has changed geography, by figuratively eliminating distance. However, these dramatic changes present both positive and negative implications for entrepreneurship. On the positive side, research shows that the Internet, with the proliferation of online communities, allows proactive and creative individuals to become entrepreneurs. (Avgerou & Li, 2013) Platforms like Etsy, “*where people around the world connect to make, sell and buy unique goods*” (Etsy.com, 2015), or Kickstarter.com, where creative entrepreneurs showcase their projects and raise money from a global online community of lead users, are the perfect representation of the power of these new forms of communal institutions. In a recent study conducted among the large community of entrepreneurs active on the Chinese e-commerce platform Taobao, Avgerou & Li (2013) find out that indeed “*Web platforms create conditions of possibility for entrepreneurial activity that extend to business relations and markets beyond the entrepreneurs’ community*” (p.345). On Taobao, Chinese entrepreneurs learn how to be effective merchants, primarily

thanks to the sharing of experiences between the community members (Avgerou & Li, 2013). Another pivotal function of communities in promoting entrepreneurial activity is their effectiveness in reducing market uncertainty (Autio, Dahlander, & Frederiksen, 2013), arguably one of the greatest menaces of entrepreneurs. For instance, increasing the size of the community can reduce demand uncertainty, and the same is true for product and supplier uncertainty; they can all be reduced by the community attention to the new product or service (Autio, Dahlander, & Frederiksen, 2013). In the same study, the authors reveal that users who participate in more than one online community – community spanning – can reduce uncertainty even more, and in so doing facilitate entrepreneurial activity by gaining informational advantages, and by being able to benefit from different opinions about their product (Autio, Dahlander, & Frederiksen, 2013). Similarly, Haeflinger et al. (2010) show how product uncertainty can be reduced as *“members of the communities bring their individual domain knowledge to bear on technical problems, share solutions and develop and improve on technology”* (Haeflinger, Jäger, & von Krogh, 2010, p.1208). Borrowing from the open innovation literature, it can be argued that online communities represent important sources of external knowledge that is of paramount importance throughout the entire value chain, from ideation to commercialization. This argument is supported by research that measures the influence of Open Standards Communities on new entrepreneurial firms in the field of data communication. A surprising result of the study is that new firms attendance of communities’ events provides the start-up with benefits greater than for instance gaining endorsement of a standard (Waguespack & Fleming, 2009).

Further benefits of online communities emerge by looking at open source software communities. The authors of a study conducted on open source firms in an entrepreneurial region in northern Italy confirm that entrepreneurs who are members of the open source software community achieve greater innovation performance and thus gain an important competitive advantage (Piva, Rentocchini, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2012). Last but not least, important are the funding benefits that can be captured by participating in online crowdfunding communities, such as Gofundme, Kickstarter, and Indiegogo. In this context, a study conducted by Belleflamme et al. (2014) demonstrate that crowdfunding from a community of online individuals works because crowd funders feel that they are part of a community of special investors, *“which enjoy the benefits associated with either consumption or investment”* (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwienbacher, 2014, p.5) and which *“offers feelings of connectedness to a community with similar interests and ideals”*

(Gerber, Hui, & Kuo, 2012, S. 1). Thus, entrepreneurs intentioned to launch crowdfunding campaigns must make sure to provide their potential investors with such community benefits, for instance by opening up communication channels with the user-investor.

While the vast majority of the literature included in this theme highlights the benefits that communities confer to entrepreneurship, there is some evidence suggesting that small remote communities, whose members get sudden access to fast Internet and, hence, to larger virtual spaces, suffer from a decline in entrepreneurial activity (Cumming & Johan, 2010). While access to the Internet, blogs, wikis, and virtual communities of practice does open the doors to knowledge spillovers that should benefit local entrepreneurs, in truth, the open access to new information and new markets in the absence of a pre-established entrepreneurial cluster will mostly benefits competition from more established global firms, and will inevitably hurt local entrepreneurship (Cumming & Johan, 2010).

4.3.4 THEME 4: ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT & RECIPROCITY

The papers grouped under this theme all explore communities that contribute to entrepreneurship by being actively involved in local entrepreneurial activities and by being at the centre of the entrepreneurial process, rather than at the periphery. Furthermore, the relationship of reciprocity between communities and business success is another recurring aspect of the papers grouped within this theme.

The literature suggests the hypothesis that communities rich in social meaning can help entrepreneurship flourish even in places that suffer from depleted economic activity. In such communities, customers will buy from the local entrepreneur if they perceive that the business is contributing to the community (Johnstone & Lionais, 2004). This creates a relationship of reciprocal help between local businesses and community members that lasts even in times of economic distress. The event of *“communities acting corporately as both entrepreneur and enterprise in pursuit of the common good”* (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006, p.310) can be observed in multiple studies. In this context, the so-called phenomenon of community-based enterprises emerges as a response to failures of formal political, social, and economic institutions, when communities want to re-establish macroeconomic equilibrium. In working towards this goal, the community-based enterprise not only establishes infrastructures that are needed to improve the life of the community, but also, as a by-product, puts in place the necessary conditions for individual entrepreneurs to thrive (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Analogous conclusions were reached by research carried

out in Oxfordshire, a well-off region of England. Like in the previous study, the researchers find that there is a *“virtuous cycle of giving to, and receiving from, the local community”* (Sonnino & Griggs-Trevarthen, 2013). This is true in all cases explored by the researchers and the interviewed entrepreneurs describe how the support from the County Council, local volunteers, and local business, combined with commitment from the individual members of the community is instrumental in the profitability of the entrepreneurs in that region (Sonnino & Griggs-Trevarthen, 2013). Similarly, Kilkenny, Nalbarte, & Besser (2010) find that reciprocated community support positively contributes to business success. Armed with these findings, the entrepreneur can kick start reciprocal action by engaging in two activities. On the one hand, the entrepreneur could commit monetary donations to the community. On the other, he could engage in personal service to the community. The research shows that in both cases the entrepreneur will be reciprocated by active involvement of the community in terms of loyal patronage and promotion (Kilkenny, Nalbarte, & Besser, 2010). But communities’ active involvement in entrepreneurial activities not only serves as a boost for sales and marketing activities, it can also help the entrepreneur go through the innovation process. On this topic, research done in the field of product development shows that peer communities can play a *“crucial role in overcoming well-known barriers in the development and diffusion process of innovations”* (Hienerth & Lettl, 2011), and thus foster entrepreneurial activity. In one notable example, Berners-Lee – the father of the World Wide Web – describes how a community of peer users with analogous interests and needs quickly emerged and proactively helped him improve his idea. Hienerth & Lettl (2011) make several key observations that could help entrepreneurs speed up the development and diffusion processes of innovations. For instance, the authors write that *“the earlier members of the peer community are integrated into the evaluation and development of a lead user idea, the more likely a prototype will be developed”* (p. 189). Additionally, the heterogeneity of skills of the members of the community positively relates to speed of adoption of the innovation.

These findings are particularly relevant for start-ups in today’s business environment as product life cycles and product development time of incumbents become shorter and, thus, early entry to market can increase start-up success chances by both shortening the valley of death – i.e. the time that elapses between when a start-up firm receives an initial capital contribution to when it begins generating revenues – and by conferring first mover advantage.

While exploring the reciprocal relationship that emerges between communities and entrepreneurs was not the focal point of this work, the findings of the literature in this theme show that there is some evidence that indeed entrepreneurs and communities provide benefit to each other. Further research could be conducted to better explore this relationship.

While the themes presented above are the result of several stages of coding and of in-depth analysis of the papers included in the database developed by TU researcher Karina Zittel, a further exploration of the literature revealed that there is additional research in the field of communities and entrepreneurship that is not included in the database. For this reason, the author created a supplementary database (Appendix) from papers relevant to communities and entrepreneurship that appear in the bibliography of the authors of the final sample of the 39 papers analysed in this review. A preliminary and non-conclusive analysis of these papers shows that the themes developed in this review are adequate to categorize the new sample of papers, and while the author believes that including the new sample of papers in the analysis would not generate new conclusions, a further and more in-depth analysis of the full text of the papers included in the new database is needed to present more conclusive results.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study presented the findings of the extant literature on the roles of communities on entrepreneurship via the use of a systematic literature review. This was done by grouping the selected literature into themes using inductive thematic analysis, and by reporting the main findings for each theme using a combination of tables and narrative synthesis. Additionally, the study provided the reader with a structured overview of countries, theories, themes, research methods, and analytical methods, explored by the scholars in this field in the past 20 years. The database and the extraction tables used for this research are retrievable as explained in the Appendix.

5.1 KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study is not the first one to suggest that communities are important in facilitating entrepreneurial activity; however, it does contribute to the current literature by systematically gathering the findings from the most relevant literature in this field. The systematic review shows that the field of study revolving around networks and entrepreneurship is a vast one, where authors build on theoretical frameworks from several other disciplines. The large database that was organized to conduct the review identifies 38 different typologies of networks and 7 typologies of entrepreneurships, highlighting the need for systematic theoretical organization of the topic. This was done by scrutinizing 3056 papers on network and entrepreneurship published between 1888 and 2014 from 232 peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, a methodology was specifically designed to systematically explore and thematically organize the extant academic efforts revolving around communities and entrepreneurship. Content analysis and thematic analysis were used to organize the literature, while narrative synthesis was employed to summarize the results obtained from a final sample of 39 papers from 22 journals. It is worth mentioning that this review is not definitive, but rather serves as a preliminary research paper intended to lead the way to further research on the subject matter.

The focal point of the present study was to explore the role that communities have on entrepreneurship, and for this reason, despite the fact that the main database presents several different typologies of networks, this work only focussed on one typology of networks – community networks. Within this topic, the review highlighted a number of conclusions that, while being extrapolated from different studies based on different theories, when pooled together created an effective narrative that helps the reader to develop a more holistic view of the field.

The most significant findings can be summarized as follows:

- Firstly, it is evident that social capital is a very important aspect examined by the literature in each of the themes. Communal social capital, and the benefits that it brings to entrepreneurship, seem to differ between different ethnic communities.
- Secondly, understanding the process of entrepreneurship requires a deep analysis of social processes and social behaviours at both a community-level and at an individual-level.
- Thirdly, while it is true that online communities open the door to knowledge spillovers that could potentially benefit local entrepreneurs, such openness to information can, in absence of a pre-established entrepreneurial cluster, hurt local entrepreneurs.
- Finally, there is some evidence suggesting that communities and entrepreneurs benefit each other in a reciprocal manner.

These findings have relevant implications for both practitioners and policymakers.

Firstly and foremost, entrepreneurs can use this study as a conceptual toolkit or repository of behaviours to be followed to foster entrepreneurial activity in the context of communities. The results being split into four main themes help entrepreneurs to focus on their topic and literature of interest. Secondly, it is important that practitioners realize the importance of being embedded in a community context. They should consider meticulously the different behaviours that are required to build and sustain relationships with a variety of organizations within the community. This will have great impact on the success or failure of the entrepreneur. Perspective entrepreneurs should always remember that thinking about the well being of the community will eventually pay-off, and therefore should strive to engage in behaviours that create opportunities for others.

Bureaucrats of most countries seem to be concerned about promoting entrepreneurial activity to improve their economies, and while entrepreneurship has the potential to benefit the economy at both a national and regional level by respectively increasing economic growth and rejuvenating regional districts, the findings of the review show that the personal characteristics of the entrepreneur differ greatly based on both individual and community level characteristics. For this reason, when developing policies designed to foster entrepreneurship, it is of paramount importance that policy makers not only focus on national and cultural factors, but also take into account the specific community context. This is particularly relevant in Europe, where centrally designed policies cannot be expected

to have the desired effect on the diverse communities scattered around the old continent. Regionalism, as Fukuyama (1995) points out, remains a strong force in many nations. Additionally, as minorities and segments of the population with greater poverty and lower education have less individual level social capital, policy measure could be designed to improve entrepreneurial opportunities of this group of individuals plagued by low individual- and community-level social capital. Once again, in the political context of Europe, where immigrant labour from less developed countries plays an increasingly important role in the economic growth of the European economy, the findings of this review could assist policy makers develop more suitable immigrant integration programs that in the long run would have the potential to leverage the skills and culture of the immigrants, and at the same time benefit the European economy. Finally, while supporting the growth of the online economy and of the digital infrastructure of a country is without doubt the right thing to do, governments should keep in mind that the effect that the Internet can have on remote communities could be devastating. While access to the Internet, blogs, wikis, and virtual communities of practice does open the doors to knowledge spillovers that should benefit local entrepreneurs, in truth, the open access to new information and new markets in absence of a pre-established entrepreneurial cluster will mostly benefits competition from more established global firms, and will inevitably hurt local entrepreneurship. It might be wise, in this respect, to devise policies that help remote communities transition to the digital economy.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

While this study was carried out in the most transparent and replicable way possible following the advice of several methodology experts in the field of systematic reviews, like any other study it suffers from limitations. The three main areas of scrutiny are data collection, coding, and methodology.

In the context of data collection, only published papers were included in the database. The omission of unpublished work, doctoral thesis and other supplemental material might increase the potential for publication bias, as many studies which fail to reject the null hypothesis are less likely to be published. However, this problem is mitigated by the inclusion of a large sample of papers from a wide variety of journal articles, which, as Ordanini, Rubera, & DeFilippi explain (2008) represent validated knowledge and therefore have the highest impact in their field, and *“tend to shape on-going theoretical and empirical work by setting new horizons for inquiry within their frame of reference”* (Furrer, Thomas, &

Goussevskaia, 2008, p.2). A further limitation in the sample is due to the use of publications that are only written in English. Important publications, relevant for this review that are written in other European languages might be missing. Also, while the impact factor is a very popular metric used to assess the importance of a journal within its field, due to the multidisciplinary nature of the research analyzed in this review, using a single impact factor as a proxy for inclusion might not be the ideal way to select journals. Future reviews that include journals from several disciplines could apply separate impact factors for each field of study. Moving on to the coding part of the review, the majority of the coding was carried out by two or three researchers, however, the data in stage four was extracted only by the author of this paper. While this can be considered a limitation, data was extracted into an extraction table by copy-pasting the text from a digital copy of the article. This procedure helps reducing mistakes and eliminates interpretation problems. Additionally, the extraction table is available to the reader to allow for greatest transparency (Appendix). A final limitation worth mentioning is one related to the methodology, more specifically to thematic analysis. While a common technique used by many researchers for the analysis of qualitative data, the process of thematic analysis can be associated with lack of transparency as it can be difficult to understand the process behind the identification of the themes. Furthermore, *“the results of the synthesis might look very different if an entirely a priori, theoretically driven approach had been used as against an inductive approach”* (Popay, et al., 2006, p.18), like the one used in this systematic review.

5.3 FUTURE RESEARCH

While the aim of this study was to focus on finding evidence on the roles of communities on entrepreneurship, the literature analysed shows that there is a strong case for conducting further research on the impact that entrepreneurship has on local communities. Going even a step further, a comparative systematic review could be designed to shed light on the reciprocal relationship between communities and entrepreneurial activity and assess which direction of the relationship is stronger. The results of such a study could help policy makers design better and fairer incentive systems for entrepreneurial activity.

Also, due to the relevance of social capital theories in this field, and to the different kinds of benefits that communal social capital brings to entrepreneurship depending on the ethnicity of the community, future researchers could focus on understanding the reasons behind these differences. In today's political landscape, where governments across the world struggle to find the right policy to accommodate an increasing amount of immigrant labor

force, this kind of research could have important implications in both developed and developing countries. In a European context, for instance, where skilled immigrant are important contributors to national economies, the findings of studies of this kind could assist policy makers develop more suitable immigrant integration programs, that in the long run would have the potential to leverage the skills and culture of the immigrants and at the same time benefit the European economy. Keeping the focus on social capital, the analysed literature highlights a lack of research that focuses on the negative aspects of social capital. In fact, as described earlier in the study, while there is some evidence that supports the hypothesis that excessive social capital in a community might back-fire, there is a need for more empirical evidence to draw conclusions on this matter, especially in developed economies. An interesting empirical study could be carried out in mediterranean countries with high levels of communal orientation such as Greece or Italy to measure if some of the systemic economic malaise of such economies and the low profitability of their local businesses can be attributed, at least partially, to the high social demands placed on local entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, as the findings of this review show that understanding the process of entrepreneurship requires a deep analysis of social processes and social behaviors at both community-level and at an individual-level, future researchers could try to assess which individual-level social behaviors are more conducive to entrepreneurship, given different community-level social behaviors. Simply put, they could try to find out the best combinations of community-level social behavior/individual-level social behavior fit that best promotes entrepreneurial activity.

Finally, an area still open for exploration is one related to the long-term impact of the internet and virtual communities on remote communities without an established entrepreneurial tradion. As proposed earlier in the study, access to the Internet in those environmental contexts might have negative effects on local entrepreneurial activity. For instance, an empirical study that compares succesful and non-succesful cases of adaptation of remote communities to the internet and to online communités, and that synthesizes and organizes the practices that should and should not be carried out during the implementation of fast internet in remote communités could be extremely helpful in helping local governments develop better policy to cope with this issue.

On a separate note, if one broadens the focus of this review, additional suggestions for future research can be drawn by observing the categorization of the 1389 papers on the wider topic of network and entrepreneurship. By looking at how papers are divided into the 7 typologies of entrepreneurship and the 38 typologies of networks an interesting study could be one that analyses the relationship between venture capital firms and entrepreneurs. This is particularly relevant as over 60 papers explore the relationship between VCs and entrepreneurship despite the fact that the term “venture capital” was not included in the initial research strings that were used to identify the papers to be analyzed. Additionally, a systematic review on the literature belonging to the network typology of “teams” would be relevant for both academics and practitioners as teams are considered by many investors as the make or break issue for entrepreneurial success. There are over 60 papers belonging to this category that could be organized by theme and analysed in depth to extract practice-relevant deductions.

In conclusion, the coding exercise completed in this work shows that many are the opportunities for research in the field of networks and entrepreneurship. The idea of this study was to represent only the first of a series of papers on the research topic of networks and entrepreneurship, and a long lasting collaboration between the author and both the Technical University of Berlin and the University of Twente.

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7 APPENDIX

Due to the large number of papers analysed it was not practical to include the databases and the extraction tables in the Appendix. If interested, please contact Karina Zittel (korinna.zittel@tu-berlin.de) for access to the database with the 3056 papers and the respective coding, and Nicola Pallotta (nicolapallotta@gmail.com) for access to the extraction tables and the supplementary database with additional literature on communities and entrepreneurship.