

# Entrepreneurship as a Scientific Research Programme\*

José Maria Veciana

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

## Abstract

In this article *entrepreneurship as a scientific research programme* is developed and presented. In this relatively new field of study many different theories have emerged that try to explain the phenomenon of new enterprise or venture creation. After a brief treatment of the antecedents and historic development of entrepreneurship, the author discusses and suggests what should be the distinctive domain of entrepreneurship research. He then develops and presents the different paradigms or theoretical approaches that have emerged in this field. An attempt is made to classify the diverse theories based on the various theoretical approaches to the study of entrepreneurship. The aim of this paper is not only to delimit this broad field of study but also to offer a guide for future empirical research and theoretical developments.

## Objective

The aim of this article is to develop *entrepreneurship as a scientific research programme*. This is a relatively new field of study which, however, goes back to the writings of some classical economists in the 18th and 19th centuries. Anyhow, to understand the present “state of the art” we deem it advisable to give an overview of its origins and evolution.

Therefore, we will start with a brief treatment of the antecedents and historic development, in which we distinguish 4 stages. These will help us to better understand both its gradual development and present state as well as its future development possibilities.

For reasons of space limitation, the three first stages will be treated very briefly, focussing more on the fourth or present stage.

We will then treat entrepreneurship research as a distinctive domain, one of the most controversial but highly important questions for academic legitimization, thereby suggesting what should be the distinctive domain of this field of study.

The central part of this article deals with the development of the different paradigms or theoretical approaches that have emerged in the field of entrepreneurship. Under the four theoretical approaches we will present the different theories that try to explain entrepreneurship from very different perspectives.

The article ends with some final considerations.

---

\* Originally published in *Revista Europea de Dirección y Economía de la Empresa*, 1999, 8(3). The present version is a revised, updated and extended version of the original paper. The most relevant recent bibliography has been incorporated into it.

## Stages

### *First Stage: Defining the Entrepreneur*

This stage, which starts with Cantillon's work, goes from 1775 until the end of the 19th century.

Its main features are:

1. The authors working in this field try to define **who an entrepreneur is and what he does, that is, what the function that he performs in the economic process is, the so called "entrepreneurial function"**.

The main economists who write on the subject are: Cantillon, Say, von Thünen, Mill, Hermann, von Mangoldt, Clark and Marshall to mention only the most outstanding.

Notice that in this list neither Adam Smith nor David Ricardo are mentioned, since for them the **entrepreneur** does not exist; they only know the capitalist.

For reasons that we will mention later, these economists never came to an agreement on the definition of the entrepreneur nor on the entrepreneurial function.

In the last decades much has been written to analyse and reproduce what the above mentioned economists wrote on the entrepreneur, without achieving clarity.

Some writings worth mentioning are:

- Zieschang, H.O. (1936): "Wandlung des Unternehmerbegriffs in the Wirtschaftstheorie", Doctoral dissertation, Universität Köln.
- Turin, G. (1948): "Der Begriff des Unternehmens", Doctoral Dissertation, Universität Zurich.
- Redlich, F. (1964): "The Unternehmer", Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichliche Studien.
- Sanchez Gil (1969): "The nature and evolution of the entrepreneurial function"
- In Spain there have been several doctoral dissertations that have treated the subject as the central topic or obliquely (1).
- Hébert and Link (1982): "The entrepreneur".

As an example, we will quote Hébert & Link who have synthesized in twelve points, the ideas of the above mentioned economists on the entrepreneur's definition and function, i.e.:

1. The entrepreneur is the person who assumes the risk associated with uncertainty.
2. The entrepreneur is a supplier of financial capital.
3. The entrepreneur is an innovator.
4. The entrepreneur is a decision maker.
5. The entrepreneur is an industrial leader.
6. The entrepreneur is a manager or superintendent.