

African Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Form, Function & Structure Special Issue

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Background

While opinion and evidence of the economic development and growth trajectory of most African countries is mixed and at times contradictory (Carmody et al., 2020; Cramer et al., 2020), there is clear evidence that a large youthful population (Chigunta, 2017) and a strong desire for and interest in entrepreneurship, as evidenced by successive Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Reports will lead to the continued rise of startup businesses and entrepreneurial activity on the continent.

Since the early conceptualisation of entrepreneurial ecosystems (Bahrami & Evans, 1995), building on the work of Moore (1993) who brought the ecological term into the social sciences, there is an understanding that ecosystems represent ‘a biotic community, encompassing its physical environment, and all the interactions possible in the complex of living and nonliving components’ (Acs et al., 2017, p. 1). Despite periods of theoretical interest in entrepreneurial ecosystems, the field does not boast a unifying definition or a robust theoretical framework. While ecosystem components have been identified and mapped—both regional and nationally in many African countries, there is a continued call for localisation of form, function and structure to accommodate the uniqueness of each context. This is even more relevant to the African continent, which is often seen a single homogenous market rather than a heterogeneous descriptor of 54 individual nations.

Entrepreneurial ecosystems, on the African continent and elsewhere in the world, have been viewed and studied from several perspectives. For example, Malecki (2018) has considered them within the domain of economic geography, building on the work of regional innovation systems (Hekkert et al., 2007), and the importance of entrepreneurs to functioning of these systems. Spigel (2017) considered the interrelationship between ecosystem components, recognising that ecosystems are highly localised and that adopting policy wholesale without an understanding of context and the way culture, economics and policy interrelate was a theoretical and practical flaw in ecosystem research and practice. Roundy et al. (2018) have argued that prior research into entrepreneurial ecosystems has ignored the inherent complexity in these ecosystems, often overlooked as researchers look to a deconstructed analysis of well-functioning ecosystems as a framework for other regions or geographies. Recent research into the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem (Fuller-Love & Akiode, 2020) has built upon this notion of system complexity, considering the nature of transnational entrepreneurs and the role of the diaspora on entrepreneurial ecosystems.

While research into ecosystems has mushroomed across a wide range of domains and contexts (Ali et al., 2019; Benavides-Salazar et al., 2021; Hillemane, 2020; Jolley & Pittaway, 2019; Longva, 2021; Rashid & Ratten, 2021), what appears to be missing is a critical understanding of the key coordinates within ecosystems that serve to shift the leadership and hub positions, boundaries of ecosystems, and an acceptance of the diversity of institutions and businesses that play effective endogenous ecosystem roles as opposed to those that are free riding and parasitic.

This Special Issue seeks address how these issues can be given critical attention in African Entrepreneurial ecosystems either confirming a universal model or revealing unique systems of ecosystem formation, functioning and outcomes. The selected studies presented above serve as a broad backdrop to the opportunities for conceptual research into African entrepreneurial ecosystems and the development of theory and practice that is relevant to and contextualised in and on the continent.

Focus of the Special Issue

In this special issue we wish to curate and present original research that examines the nuances of African entrepreneurial ecosystems, in specific their form, function and structure. We wish to consider original empirical research that goes beyond the description of the elements of country-level ecosystems, towards an understanding of how both localisation and economic geography give rise to unique models of entrepreneurial engagement and ecosystems development and growth. We are interested in research that challenges prevailing models of entrepreneurial ecosystems development, in particular those inherited wholesale from different contexts and environments.

Focal themes are outlined below.

Focal Themes

- The nature and meaning of ecosystems within the complex fabric of the African continent.
- The role of policy and governance in the formation and support of African entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- The maturation and evolution of African entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- The function of cultural, social and economic specificities on African entrepreneurial ecosystem formation, development and growth.
- The role of diaspora networks, migration and transnational entrepreneurship on multi-country African entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- The impact of resource constraints on African entrepreneurial ecosystem formation, development and growth.
- The role of gender in ecosystem development and configuration, and the comparison between male and female intention and self-efficacy on the continent.

Timeline and Submission

All submission must be uploaded electronically at <http://peerreview.sagepub.com/eic>

Deadline for submission (full paper): March 2022

Expected publication date: January 2023

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