



The value of co-curricularity in entrepreneurial education

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Abstract

The Entrepreneurial University paradigm advocates the generation and maintenance of an entrepreneurial culture and behaviour at the academic institution. In this manner, the entrepreneurial thinking imprint and condition all university activities such as research, knowledge transfer, governance and education (Etzkowitz, 2004). In relation to the latter, the university has the role of generating entrepreneurial human capital that can be transferred to the ecosystem and society. Therefore, ensuring quality entrepreneurial education (EE) is understood as one of the main objectives and responsibilities of an entrepreneurial university. When defining EE, there is common to make a subdivision, differentiating curricular EE and co-curricular EE. The first relate to the formal activities developed at the university in relation with defined courses or degrees, while the second captures the wide range of activities in which students can participate to get entrepreneurial competences and experiences in contexts that are not strictly academic and for which they do not receive university credits (Debarliev et al., 2020). In this second group there is room for a wide range of activities such as mentorship or incubator programs, hackathons, workshops or entrepreneurship clubs (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Much research has been done on curricular activities but many of the aspects that define the nature and dynamics of co-curricular initiatives are still understudied. This is a research challenge that we take up in this study. Thus, the present research responds to the need to deepen the analysis of specific EE actions developed by universities, as well as to shed light on the actors involved (Fayolle, 2013; Ribeiro et al., 2022).

Based on the above, the present research aims to deepen the knowledge of co-curricular EE initiatives that complement the formal EE received curricularly, shedding light on the definition of such activities, their dynamics, the actors involved and the value created. The research also advances knowledge on the role of the university in the development of co-curricular EE activities, since they can be promoted institutionally, by other actors in the ecosystem or bottom up, by the participants themselves.

From a community of practice lens the objectives of this research are addressed through a qualitative methodology. The data is generated from in-depth interviews conducted with ecosystem actors involved in co-curricular EE (university, other ecosystem actors and students). A review of secondary sources that record existing co-curricular activities in the ecosystem is also used as complementary material. The research is developed in two phases, the first is the definition and mapping of existing co-curricular entrepreneurial initiatives, determining the actors involved and their role in the development of the activities. The second stage involves a deeper analysis of the level of and reasons behind actors engagement in co-curricular EE, as well as the dynamics underlying the development of co-curricular activities and the value created through them.



Initial results shows that the development of co-curricular activities encourages collaboration among actors, fostering more interconnected ecosystems. Participation in these activities allows students to immerse themselves in the ecosystem, which create value in terms of knowledge development, experiences, social capital and access to resources of various kinds. At the same time, students also confer value to the ecosystem through their participation in such activities (through the increase of qualified entrepreneurial human capital brought into the ecosystem). There are different types of co-curricular activities that can be differentiated according to several characteristics, such as their purpose (development of competences, ideation, support in the project development phase, acceleration and consolidation of entrepreneurial initiatives, growth and internationalization) and the actor promoting them (promoted by the university itself, organised by other actors in the ecosystem, proposed bottom-up by students, or jointly organised through any combination of the above possibilities).

This study presents theoretical contributions to the advancement of knowledge on co-curricular EE, highlighting its relevance as a value-creating element for the ecosystem. Furthermore, it also entails practical implications. The results can assist universities in the planning and management of informal education within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, fostering the development of qualified entrepreneurial human capital.

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