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Original article

ARGENTINE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM: DIFFICULTIES IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS

ECOSISTEMA EMPRENDEDOR ARGENTINO: DIFICULTADES EN LA ACCIÓN EMPRENDEDORA DE LOS DISEÑADORES INDUSTRIALES

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship in Argentina is a complex phenomenon and the entrepreneurial ecosystem is made up of a wide diversity of actors. Among the existing interdisciplinary relationships and practices, the industrial designer is included as a strategic agent in innovation processes. However, the figure of the entrepreneur that has been built by those who promote this form of insertion into the labor market, is loaded with values associated with optimism, creative freedom and personal development, minimizing other negative aspects such as informality, self-exploitation and multifunctional roles that blur the skills of the professional designer. These difficulties of the Argentine entrepreneurial ecosystem are addressed in this article.

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Keywords: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem; Industrial Design; Labor conditions and self-exploitation; Argentine Republic

Resumen

El emprendimiento en Argentina es un fenómeno complejo y el ecosistema emprendedor está conformado por una amplia diversidad de actores. Entre las relaciones y prácticas interdisciplinarias existentes, se incluye al diseñador industrial como agente estratégico en los procesos de innovación. Sin embargo, la figura del emprendedor que han construido quienes promueven esta forma de inserción en el mercado laboral, está cargada de valores asociados al optimismo, la libertad creativa y el desarrollo personal, minimizando otros aspectos negativos como la informalidad, la autoexplotación y los roles multifuncionales que desdibujan las competencias del profesional del diseño. Estas dificultades del ecosistema emprendedor argentino se abordan en este artículo.

Palabras clave: Ecosistema emprendedor; Diseño industrial; Condiciones laborales y autoexplotación; República Argentina

Introduction

Understanding the functioning of the entrepreneurial ecosystem entails a comprehensive assimilation of its constituent elements and the topography of the complex framework that links them. One of the definitions with the greatest consensus states it as:

> a set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors (both potential and existing), entrepreneurial organizations (e.g. firms, venture capitalists, business angels, banks), institutions (universities, public sector agencies, financial bodies) and entrepreneurial processes (e.g. the business birth rate, numbers of high growth firms, levels of 'blockbuster entrepreneurship', number of serial entrepreneurs, degree of sell out mentality within firms and levels of entrepreneurial ambition) which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment.[1]

The approach to this concept includes the qualities and individual motivations of entrepreneurs, as well as the regulatory conditions that regulate innovation processes. These rules are dynamic and make up the game rules of the ecosystem and in this context, the entrepreneur must take risks, overcome obstacles that arise and act in an environment full of uncertainty.

That is why the rules of the game and the geographical and political location will be key to define the sustainability and efficiency of an enterprise, giving rise to productive, unproductive or destructive projects, in terms of economic development.[2] This aspect is of utmost importance, especially for a country like Argentina, characterized by the instability of political and economic conditions, and at the same time, it forces us to reflect on what other roles or objectives each undertaking fulfills or ultimately pursues, in the individual experience and training of the entrepreneur, beyond the real economic impact.

Considering that traditionally, the evaluation of ventures is usually carried out from a predominantly quantitative approach, in terms of the performance of each project in the market (sales volume, billing, etc.). We argue instead that entrepreneurship can be understood from a qualitative perspective, as a seed

from which an industry could be born; a young and healthy industry that can be more supportive and environmentally responsible at the local level.

Below is a comparative diagram of the main aspects of the Argentine business ecosystem in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean (**Figure 1**).

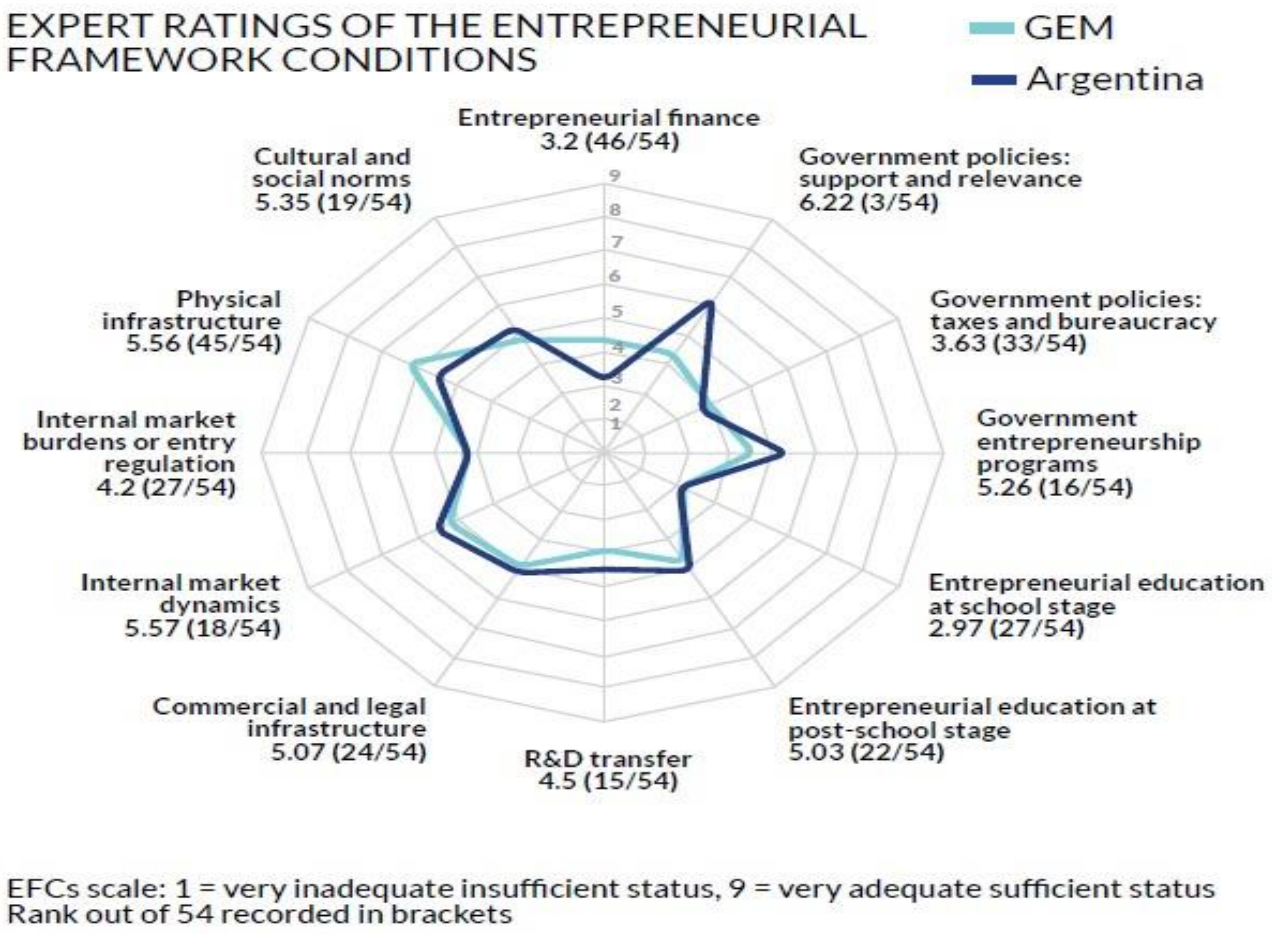

Figure 1. Comparative diagram of the main aspects of the Argentine business ecosystem in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean
Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2019)[3]

In the case of Argentina, there is a favorable aspect in terms of support for entrepreneurs and specific government policies. In 2017, the “Entrepreneurs Law” was enacted, through which “the development of entrepreneurial capital will be promoted considering the geographic presence of entrepreneurial activity in all the country's provinces, in order to promote the local development of the different productive activities." (Art. 1, Law 27,349 to Support Entrepreneurial Capital). Although, this shows that apparently entrepreneurship is a matter of State, its incipient implementation does not allow having clear indicators of its real impact on the Argentine entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The conditions of entrepreneurial viability in Argentina show a paradoxical scenario. Although, there is an encouraging context for entrepreneurship at the regional level, due to the growth of the entrepreneurial culture, the good conditions of demand and the strengthening of this ecosystem (which position Argentina in the top 5 among the entrepreneurial countries of Latin America), there are limitations associated with the lack of specialized human capital and low contributions from science and technology to innovation, which allow building trust bases that facilitate networking.[4]

A first approach to the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystem allows us to glimpse the importance of geographical and political delimitation, which makes it impossible to define a single type of entrepreneurial ecosystem, which serves as a model for different regions, so it is necessary that each environment be analyzed in a particular way.

Materials and Methods

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in Argentina and Latin America

First, we must understand that the entrepreneur is the protagonist of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, knowing his motivations and self-perceptions is a key resource to understand the hidden desire that leads him to undertake. Some of the variables that characterize this unique productive actor are listed below (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Self-Perceptions of the Argentine Entrepreneur

Fees	2017	2018	Average LAC*
Perceived opportunities	29.65%	35 89%	44.48%
Perceived capabilities	43.08%	48.79%	57.51%
Fear to fail	27.13%	31.92%	27.13%
Business intentions	13.36%	14.83%	32.64%

Source: Adaptation based on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2019)[3]

Although almost 50% of those interviewed perceive opportunities and believe they have the necessary capacities to carry out a company, the assumption of risks and the social shame associated with failure, in Latin America, slows down innovation, discouraging the assumption of risks on the part of entrepreneurs.[5]

In relation to these motivations, there is also an increase in both Argentina and LAC, in enterprises driven by the opportunity to improve or introduce new products, in contrast to those driven by need. The latter are usually more linked to the search for self-employment, by entrepreneurs who fail to enter the market in another way and the projection of these long-term ventures is usually low (see **Table 2**).

The social values inherent to the entrepreneurial phenomenon also play a relevant role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, since in some way; they shape in the collective imagination, the projected status of entrepreneurs in the rest of society.

Table 2. Entrepreneur motivational imaginary

Variable	2017	2018	Average LAC*
Entrepreneurial motivation (opportunity / need)	2.46%	1.35%	2.31%
Association of entrepreneurial success with social status	47,43%	49,96%	59,69%
Entrepreneurship as a good career choice	60,40%	59,39%	60,54%
Innovation and impact of entrepreneurs **	13,98%	32,17%	24,71%
Expectation in job creation ***	12,68%	11,75%	21,40%
** Entrepreneurs who indicate that their product or service is new and that few or no companies offer the same product.			
*** 6 or more jobs in 5 years.			

Source: Adaptation based on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2019)[3]

This aspect is specifically related to one of the problems linked to the approach of this work, since the figure of the "successful entrepreneur" is more often promoted, without making visible those cases where the enterprises did not achieve virtuous performance, which it generates stereotypes that are not representative of most businesses.

From an economic point of view, the scenario in Latin America is paradoxical, since it is a region with many entrepreneurs and little innovation. As stated in the 2014 World Bank report: "Latin American and Caribbean companies introduce new products less frequently than companies from other similar economies, the management of high-end entrepreneurs is often far from best practices globally, companies invest little in R&D and patent activity is clearly below reference levels".[6] This is reflected in the indicator of innovation and impact of entrepreneurs in **Table 2**. In this table, it is also verified that Argentine entrepreneurs have a low expectation in the generation of employment in the coming years.

Finally, we must dedicate ourselves to the high degrees of informality that are present within the entrepreneurial field. As mentioned by the sociologist Agustín Salvia (UCA):

> Not only is there a sector that is outside the regulations, which may be for convenience, but it is also very expensive to enter formality. The real problem is that the Argentine economy is dual: one part works outside the tax system, not because it ambitiously avoids for profit, but because productivity levels are very low in terms of competitiveness.[7]

Low capital investment ventures are not exempt from this phenomenon. In addition, entrepreneurs who work under these conditions, to a large extent, incorporate workers informally, which prevent the employment or underemployment of skilled workers or those with some type of specific training. In this way, a vicious circle is generated that threatens the development of long-term enterprises and negatively impacts their productivity.

Models of innovation and democratization of ideas

If a tour of the literature dedicated to the analysis of innovation is made, it is observed that although there was a taxonomic expansion of the various innovations according to their ontological character (technological, social, organizational, marketing, etc.), it remains in force the Schumpeterean idea of diffusion as a sine qua non condition to complete the innovation cycle. That is, the novelty proposed by

the entrepreneur must have a scope such that it generates an impact on society, so that we can evolve from an invention to an innovation.[8]

However, the most significant changes are reflected in the processes through which these innovations occur. Some of the characteristics of this transformation process that gave rise to new models of innovation are listed below:

1. It goes from a "science-push / top-down" model based on R&D to a "bottom-up" model, where innovation can come from any actor participating in the process.[8]
2. The three-helix innovation model, made up of: universities, the state, and the private sector, evolves, integrating civil society into this scheme as the fourth helix to achieve innovation.
3. The linear innovation model becomes a systemic, multidirectional and interdisciplinary model, which is characterized mainly by the plurality of actors and their hybridization.[8]
4. Democratization of the innovation process and the emergence of collaborative design and co-creation models that include users in the design process: experience design (UX), design thinking methodology as a creative tool in organizations, strengthening the open design and universal design. Even the emergence of "maker culture" and social creativity. As Rispoli affirms, thanks to these new practices: users go from being mere passive informants to legitimate participants in the design process, and designers transform from problem-solvers to facilitators of complex co-creation processes, capable of sharing their conceptualization and formalization tools instead of imposing them.[9]

In short, it is observed that the process of undertaking and innovating, like any creative process, is necessarily collective. Although an idea may arise from an individual, its socialization is necessary to achieve innovation (social creativity). In relation to this, Jorge Wagensberg affirms that:

> The creativity of the human mind requires three things: 1) have a good idea 2) realize that the idea is good 3) convince others of it. It is clear that the second does not happen without the first and that the third does not happen without the second. Each step is necessary to initiate the next, but none is enough for an idea to finally transcend. The three things do not always occur in the same person.[10]

Without going any further"71% of the new growth-oriented companies in Argentina, Brazil and Chile are carried out by entrepreneurial teams".[4] This aspect is important, since it contradicts (in good time), the installed vision of the designer as a creative genius or bearer of inspiration and poses creativity as a collective process fostering project culture.

From the training point of view, this democratization of innovation generates an interesting challenge for educational and governmental institutions, since spaces capable of providing tools to entrepreneurs, whose starting points are diverse, must be created. These institutions usually direct their efforts in three specific axes: training, mentoring or incubation and financial aid.

The industrial designer as a strategic agent

Industrial design, as a project discipline, has the methodological tools to fulfill a strategic role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, however, during undergraduate courses; products are developed with little

or no contact with other professional areas. This creates the illusion of self-sufficiency in the professional future and hinders their insertion into the labor system.

In the reality of the market, industrial design is one more specialty within a business system. It is vital that the industrial designer knows how to perform in a heterogeneous environment and challenge the mental micro-climatic models that were built in the span of his career.
In relation to this, we agree with Gerhard Trautmann that:

> real interdisciplinarity implies the existence of several autonomous specialties. A discipline that is defined as such assuming knowledge, methods, etc., from other branches of science would be inconceivable. Design, without a doubt, has had great difficulties from the beginning in creating a specific identity on the basis of which interactions with other disciplines could take place.[11]

Regarding the training of the entrepreneurial designer, López and Bergomi, point out that entrepreneurship "has been installed as a necessity within the socio-political system to mobilize the economy, with not always favorable results", however, this condition transformed into a trend, "it deepens and enters the educational field as a demand that must be covered through courses, seminars and university extension to train entrepreneurs in design".[12]

Traditionally, there has always been a tension between the designer focused (engrossed) in the product and the designer focused on the production system. This first disciplinary bias, many times, generates conflict in entrepreneurial groups, since ultimately; any solution to a problem must manifest itself as a specific product, service or experience.[13]

As stated by Kobrinsky:

> The first ventures usually start with the product, thus assuming that the demand is a consequence of the product. The reality of the market is responsible for pointing out the opposite, that is, the product is a consequence of demand. Industrial designers tend to lose sight of the organizational system that sustains the product in the market environment. So when the product doesn't work, you see the solution in the redesign of the product. Perhaps the solution was given by a change in the places of distribution of the product, or in the way of communicating the benefit of the product. This situation indicates an area of knowledge that, if incorporated by the designer, can radically increase its value in the market.[14]

In most cases, problems are complex and depend on multiple variables, among which product design is just one of them. Understanding the complexity of each production system is the great challenge for industrial designers. Therein lies their potential success of participation as entrepreneurs, in inter and transdisciplinary working groups.

In this logic, the designer must incorporate the systemic function of the product and understand how his decisions affect the actors that make up the system, which is intrinsically and extrinsically linked to the product he is designing.[15] That is, each decision made by the designer strategically configures the way in which the product's materialization will take place (intrinsic link), as well as its performance during use and its behavior in the market (extrinsic link).

Achieving this objective is one of the keys so that the designer can insert himself as a strategic actor, capable of interacting synergistically with other actors and achieving solutions that promote local development, based on the social capitalization of the resources and endogenous potentialities of a community portion, to deal with unfavorable exogenous variables.[16]

On the other hand, the designer has two and three-dimensional communication strategies to socialize his idea during the design process (models, prototypes, etc.). In general, this generates a high tendency to the premature materialization of solutions, which makes it not very participatory and leads it to impose its ideas at an initial stage, when the group has not yet matured the definitions of the problem and the possible solutions that require recipients.

This aspect is aggravated when the designer is part of an entrepreneurial team made up of actors who do not come from the project field and who have not made a clear definition of the problem to be solved. These are often attracted to these three-dimensional representations, which relegates the designer as a mere configurator of the shape of the object, giving rise to what Bonsiepe calls: "the spectacularization of design", a process in which the term "design" is taken as a mere adjectival feature of an object, as if it could be added to an object, showing only the design as a result and not as an intelligent problem-solving process.[17]

Industrial design, which has been formed in this field and logically in practice can give comprehensive answers (due to its multidimensional reasoning), is capable of leading the feasibility analysis processes, which are generally dominated by economics graduates.

Results and Discussions

The phenomenal complex of entrepreneurship in Argentina

Between 2007 and 2016, approximately 70,500 companies were born per year and 69,000 closed. That was the growth of companies in net terms. However, in recent years, the number of new companies has decreased and closures have remained constant, resulting in a net drop in the total number of active companies.[18]

Likewise, we understand that sustaining a new venture over time is a difficult task and this is reflected in the survival rate of new companies. In Argentina, 8 out of 10 new companies reach 2 years of life and only 3 out of 10 reach 8 years. In comparison, in Chile, this value rises to 5 out of 10. Generally, the companies that remain in the market tend to be the most productive; they become stronger and gain scale, thus increasing their probability of surviving another year.[18]

In the Special Report on Business Birth Rate and Productive Development, prepared by the Observatorio Pyme, it is stated that the decision to undertake:

> It is conditioned by the technical capacities and abilities of the entrepreneurial potential (the "know-how"), the availability of own capital (and of third parties) to finance the start of the activity, the tax burden that weighs on the nascent companies and the level of "Environmental risk" (labor relations, degree of certainty about the rules of the game, operation of justice, etc.).

> All these conditions determine the business birth rate and, consequently, determine the final stock of existing companies in a country.[19]

And continues;

> If the individual chooses to undertake, there is still a second decision that he needs to make: to start his business activity in the formal sector or in the informal sector. The benefits of formal activity (such as access to credit) are compared with the costs of formality (such as, for example, the tax burden). The final result of this calculation determines the degree of formality of the nascent company.[19]

In Argentina, in the entrepreneurial process, formality and informality inevitably coexist as sides of the same coin. In 2012, 40% of the enterprises operated informally and their managers stated that their main motivations for formalizing their enterprises were: to comply with the law and make possible agreements with clients and suppliers, which require this type of commercial conditions, while that tax rates and the high degree of bureaucracy discouraged this initiative.[20]

In many of these cases of ventures that cover up practices of informality, job insecurity and self-exploitation, without which it would seem impossible to carry out the venture, thus generating a certain form of "self-deception" on the part of the entrepreneur, which in case of regularizing these practices, would highlight the lack of real viability of the venture and its respective business model.

These situations, which are first perceived as temporary or occasional competitive advantages, which once removed, put the survival of the enterprise at risk. Some examples of this problem could be: tasks performed by entrepreneurs without accounting or assigning a value, use of physical spaces provided by the entrepreneur's network of contacts, obtaining fortuitous and discontinuous raw material (discarding), informal contracting or subcontracting of labor (among others), which ultimately results in the entrepreneur considering a fictitious cost structure, causing instability in the production process and threatening the life of the enterprise.

In addition, the idea is being installed that the first years of the life of the enterprise should be at a loss and highlights the close relationship that exists between the growth of the enterprise and the (parental) wealth of the entrepreneur who often acts as support. Above all, this advantage occurs when access to credit is difficult and your network of contacts has greater influence than that of an entrepreneur from the lower classes.[20] This aspect puts in tension the idea that is sought to be transmitted, that anyone who wants to can carry out an undertaking and only needs a proactive spirit.

In addition, sustaining ventures in the early stage often forces the entrepreneur to have more than one source of income. The number of hours that entrepreneurs work in Argentina exceeds the 48 hours per week stipulated as a working day in Law 11,544, hovering around 49.6 hours / week and increasing to 51.9 hours / week, in the case of Greater Buenos Aires.[20]

These data show side B of the "entrepreneurial dream", contradicting the idealized notion of the path towards the creation of a new company or industry, as a way to achieve work independence or individual development.

In addition, this unfavorable scenario leaves us with some questions that may guide future research, for example: do young entrepreneurs know the potential of industrial design for the realization of products? Do they consider it useful? And in any case: would they be willing to invest in design in the initial stage of their undertaking, in which the budget is usually limited? The answer seems to be discouraging and makes us think that this situation also occurs in relation to other disciplines, that is, initially all tasks are carried out by the entrepreneur, regardless of his training or skills. This generates, in our opinion, a lack of professionalization and consequent loss of efficiency in the ventures.

A tentative hypothesis can be argued with the fact that the design has failed to massively legitimize its professional scope. Furthermore, entrepreneurship is a phenomenon with a high degree of uncertainty and is not exclusive to a particular profession. Rather, it is related to the spirit of carrying out ideas, facing the risks involved in innovating, and anyone who meets these characteristics will be considered an entrepreneur. This discourages the possibility of nuclearizing all the necessary knowledge in a single disciplinary field, and even more, it hinders the academic approach and the insertion of these topics in the curricula of industrial design careers.

In this way, there is a mutual ignorance between the various agents of the entrepreneurial system. On the one hand, in pioneering industrial design careers, they still do not have a specific training in entrepreneurship, and on the other, there are close project disciplines such as architecture and engineering, which have achieved a greater degree of legitimacy and social recognition and institutional. This inevitably generates a lack of demand for industrial designers for projects in which they could perfectly act as a strategic manager.

We even believe that the incorporation of the industrial designer in the various constitutive areas of the entrepreneurial ecosystem would be conducive, not only as a promoter of an enterprise but as part of an entrepreneurial team. Among these constituent elements we can identify:

1. Institutions / Organizations that provide services directly or indirectly to entrepreneurs and whose organizational charts are usually made up of professionals from the economic sciences.
2. Companies (both to satisfy their demands and to participate in projects incubated within them).
3. Universities and Science and Technology Bodies, through training and applied research, with real links to the productive sector.[21,22]

Conclusions

The analysis carried out makes it possible to make visible the problems associated with entrepreneurship in Argentina and shows a certain intention on the part of those who promote this type of labor practice, to hide its most vulnerable edges. Informality, self-exploitation, lack of tools on the part of entrepreneurs, among other aspects, seem to be legitimate characteristics when it comes to entrepreneurship.

In addition, the figure of the entrepreneur seems to be the dominant discourse by those who define the productive destiny of some economies, to disengage from the generation of employment, installing a meritocratic system in which each entrepreneur must survive in the ecosystem of the "other economy".[23]

Finally, the democratization of innovation processes is made visible, which represents a positive development in terms of inclusion, social creativity and local development. However, inherently there is

a training deficit on the part of entrepreneurs, who are increasingly gaining prominence and seeking to acquire new tools and resources to carry out their projects.

In short, meeting this demand represents the greatest challenge faced by institutions linked to entrepreneurship (Universities, States and companies), which must rethink their role in the productive system, as well as the role that entrepreneurship fulfill, establishing an articulated dialogue with all the actors, to achieve an efficient ecosystem, so that the enterprises improve their conditions and are not just another expression of disguised self-employment.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Authors Contribution

- Federico Del Giorgio Solfa: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Research, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing, Original draft, Writing: review and editing.
- Enrique D´Amico: Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Writing, Original draft, Writing: review and editing.