Introduction

The unique Regional Studies Association Research Network on Citizen Entrepreneurship (RSARNCE) will carry out critical and systematic research and development activities on the involvement of citizens, as producers, users, innovators and environmental gatekeepers of new forms of entrepreneurial activity in urban regions. The network’s distinctive proposition centres around an extended definition of regional entrepreneurship, based on the collaboration of citizens with entrepreneurs, policy makers, and urban activists to create sustainable capacities for entrepreneurial governance of regional and local resources, as part of the urban commons. Building on antecedents provided by Citizen Economics and Citizen Science, the network introduces a novel dimension to the idea and practice of regional innovative entrepreneurship through the engagement of citizens. The network will build on an inaugural presentation of the key concepts and early framework of the project at the EU Regions Week in Brussels in October, 2019.

Aims and Objectives of the RSARNCE Network

The aim of RSARNCE is to develop an enhanced and critical research and development capability for investigating the pro-active involvement of citizens in different forms of business, social and public new venture creation and development. To this end the main objectives are to:

1) Study the phenomena of CE, exploring how and why citizens are engaged as producers, consumers, users, innovators and environmental gatekeepers, individually and collectively, to foster sustainable development in the urban commons;

2) Exchange effectively the results of studies already done in various parts of the world;

3) Develop a robust conceptual framework and an evaluative space for CE;
4) Elaborate a set of relevant methodologies for conducting various studies, comparing and contrasting, and where appropriate, reconciling the territorial, institutional and cognitive diversity in the cases studies;

5) Organise regional R&D, engagement and dissemination events to develop and promote the capabilities of researchers; and 6) Work towards developing regional CE plans in conjunction with regional institutions, entrepreneurs and government for alternative forms of sustainable economic and social development in local communities.

**Background**

The network’s programme of ideas is influenced by the ideas of Elinor Ostrom’s (2014) ‘Commons’, and, by extension, the ‘Concept of “Commoning”’ in the context of the urban commons, Amartya Sen’s (1993;2008) pabilities Approach linked to a Schumpeterian approach to organisational innovation and entrepreneurship for economic development (Schumpeter, 1927;1930;1931). The underpinning literature provides for the prospect of defining entrepreneurship and innovation as the process of creating social goods, the development of which is enabled by the contribution, collaboration and co-creation efforts of citizens. Citizen involvement in this process engenders the achievement of their capabilities as a skilled, knowledgeable and empowered urban collective engaged in entrepreneurial governance of economic and social activities.

The organizers will select cases from Germany, Poland, Denmark and the UK to show a comprehensive, multifaceted picture of CE in the EU and demonstrate how multiple ways of CE engagement can contribute to achieving social and economic cohesion and integration. All four countries have well-established citizen engagement initiatives that address critical issues of economic and social sustainability, such as improved ways of living (Hanover, Germany), greening economic, social and personal spaces (Sonderborg, Denmark), neighbourhood improvement (Lodz, Poland) and crime reduction (Glasgow, Scotland). We see the possibility of some synergistic overlaps with existing (2019-2022) EU Cohesion Policy #CPnet and (2017-2020) Polycentric Urban Regions (PURs), as well as the Co-Cities and Mapping the Commines projects. Our distinctive contribution centres on citizen engagement with multiple forms of regional entrepreneurship.

**Proposed Plan of Events and Activities with Indicative Dates**

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We plan five events - four developmental events and one final dissemination event. These five events will be supplemented by the two special sessions at RSA conferences. The proposed plan is shown in the table below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Event 1 Research workshop on CE theoretical framework: “Developing the idea of Citizen Entrepreneurship”</td>
<td>June 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event 2 Research methods workshop: “Citizen Entrepreneurship in European countries”</td>
<td>January 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event 3 Policy workshop: “Towards involvement, inclusion and integration of citizens in entrepreneurial Europe”</td>
<td>October 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event 4 Paper presentation: “Lessons from Citizen Entrepreneurship”</td>
<td>November 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event 5 International Conference as part of the International Entrepreneurship Forum*</td>
<td>December/January, 2023</td>
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The Themes of the Proposed Events?

The main themes of the proposed events are:

- Developing the idea of Citizen Entrepreneurship: Commons, Collective Action Efficacy, and Capabilities for sustainable Entrepreneurship at the regional level (addressing theoretical and conceptual framework issues);

- Case Study Presentation and Development: From Theory to Practice and Re-exploration (plural case methodology development, citizen inclusion in research projects and identification of measurement indicators);

- Working towards involvement, inclusion and integration of citizens in entrepreneurial Europe” (collective action on developing a range of policy dimensions about citizen engagement and governance); and


Underpinning Research Questions

The project is exploring five research questions:
Research Question 1 (RQ1): What determines the pro-active involvement of citizens in productive and entrepreneurial social and economic projects that offer new ways of using technology, and harnessing a common pool of resources?

Research Question 2 (RQ 2): How can citizens’ entrepreneurial aspirations as users, producers and consumers be effectively harnessed in collective action at local and regional environments?

Research Question 3 (RQ 3): What policies tools and instruments are necessary to develop a Citizens’ Entrepreneurial Plan for the design, creation, development, implementation and governance of sustainable entrepreneurial initiatives at the regional and local level?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): Why is it necessary to develop a replicable and polycentric research network project especially across disparate regions?

Research Question 5 (RQ5): Which factors determine the specificity of CE in various territorial contexts and which mechanism of collective action are universal or plural?

The Significance and Timeliness of Research

In many parts of Europe, we see diminishing perceived legitimacy of EU institutions, national governments, and local authorities, as demonstrated for example in the UK (BREXIT), Germany (the rise of the Eurosceptic party AFD), Poland (the crisis of constitutional democracy and calling into question local self-government’s autonomy) and most recently France (the gilets jaunes movement). Decreasing trust in institutions in Europe (Di Mauro & Serricchio 2015) is occurring at a time of rapid digital transformation of society, which is changing the flow of information as well as opportunities and constraints of engagement for people and organisations (Castells 2001, Newell & Marabelli 2015). In the European context, the dislocation manifests itself, inter-alia, in terms of a rise in populism, disproportionate levels of wages and wealth inequality, poor arrangements for the effects of migration and social integration, deskilling or the prospective disappearance of meaningful labour, work, and a sense of abrogation of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the wake of tumultuous change. Much of this turbulence is occurring in urban environments. These problems are exacerbated by high levels of inequality often generated by concentrated wealth creation and accumulation by high octane entrepreneurial organisations with little relevance to the sustainable livelihood of citizens in specific regions. Taken together we witness at least three different issues straddling across ecological, financial, technological, income and wealth, leadership, ownership, consumerism and governance domains: a) surface symptoms; b) structural disconnects and c) systemic limits (Scharmer, O and K. Kaufer, 2013). Citizens’ capabilities are confined to voting rights rather than a pro-active engagement in the creative possibilities in their neighbourhoods, cities and regions.

In the face of the crisis of traditional democratic institutions and the growing sense of insecurity of the middle class, we observe also an emergence of new forms of satisfying the needs of local and regional communities. At the same time, we are witnessing a crisis of traditional forms of democracy and the emergence of new forms of governance in the immediate neighbourhood. More and more often, these are urban citizens defending the rights to the city and looking for new forms of governing commons. These citizen entrepreneurs initiate discussion on urban transition, monitor and evaluate the activities of traditional self-government structures, and popularize the participatory model of local

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and regional management. They are also the pioneers of non-technological and social innovation, albeit based on communication technologies and social networks (Rifkin 2016). In the case of urban commons, this form of citizens’ reaction is interpreted as an entrepreneurial answer to the “regulatory slippage” when local and regional authorities’ capabilities to the maintenance and delivery of public goods is clearly and steadily declining. In such cases, citizens themselves are active in creating and maintaining, for example, community gardens, or protecting public green spaces. They organise themselves in social security patrols, set up co-working urban labs and coordinate the small business activities within so called Business Improvement Districts. They also set up community land trusts to better manage their housing neighbourhood or form cooperatives to provide urban infrastructure (example of the Berlin energy system).

RSARNCE will seek to a) influence policy debate and practice by investigating various good practice initiatives and case studies on CE across Europe; and b) prove how effective policy could be developed to leverage multiple forms of citizen engagement in the entrepreneurship process.

The Benefits of the RSARNCE project to different Communities of Interest,

Specific communities of interest (COI), environments and organisations that are likely to benefit from the CE Research Network include Citizens and Community organisations, regional, local and national government agencies and public institutions, research bodies and agencies, universities, schools and tertiary institutions, industry federations and non-governmental agencies.

The COIs referred to above are most likely to benefit because they will be involved at all stages of the project – from conceptualisation, to design, implementation and evaluation. They are also likely to benefit directly because they will be key architects of a ‘commons’ approach to entrepreneurship, innovation and economic and social development. This is because the research and developmental unit of analysis is the ‘commons’ of all these players. They are also expected to develop significant new capabilities to be able to adapt to and adopt innovative new ways of introducing practical ways of creating new work agendas. At the same time, we expect each of the group of players to enhance their individual capacities and capabilities of working as part of compact for a commons-led approach to entrepreneurship development. Most notably, the expected evolution of citizens as informed, technical collaborators and co-workers on both research and implementation activities, will be a distinctive factor for this project.

Anticipated Influence and Value of Outcomes of the RSARNCE project

We expect our proposal to enrich, inform and enhance academic policy and practice in a number of distinctive ways.

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Scale and scope of research
First, there is likely to major differences in the scale and scope of research, the kind of lay citizens involved, the development of strategies for retaining volunteers, assuring data quality because of disparate sources of data, and in future, sources of project funding. Mobilising a varied community of participating citizen entrepreneurs to address social, economic, environmental, business and community problems provides for new opportunities.

Extending meaning and application of key concepts
Second, the critical characteristic of CE is that as a set of activities it is potentially available to all. The broadening of the participant pool is not a function of the increase in the prevalence rate of business entrepreneurs. It has two distinctive lines of development: a) To extend the scope of entrepreneurship to cover a wide range of social and economic projects that need opportunity identification, mobilisation of resources, capabilities development, implementation and governance; and b) For citizens to engage in entrepreneurial activities not only as entrepreneurs but a catalysts, resource people, gatekeepers, non-executive, community based governance managers.

Generating New Methods and Quality Assurance
Third, by taking advantage of crowd-based, digital information resources the CE project will have access to new methods of keeping a diverse community engaged and ensuring their involvement meets scientific standards of quality, including consistency, rigour, error-checking and validation.

Enhanced Connectivity
Fourth, the CE project could help reduce the cost of doing large scale research projects involving citizen volunteers by aiming to connect providers and users’ computers and other resources.

Enhanced Impact
Finally, the critical involvement of citizens increases the potential value that is generated for them by research projects, thus enhancing the impact of the project at all stages of its development. At a time of public resource constraints, the diversification of sources of resources makes it more attractive to government and other agencies.

The Project Team Members
- Professor Jay Mitra: jmitra@essex.ac.uk
- Professor Ursula Weisenfeld: weisenfeld@leuphana.de
- Dr Mariusz Sokolowicz: mariusz.sokolowicz@uni.lodz.pl
- Dr Agnieszka Kurczewska: agnieszka.kurczewska@uni.lodz.pl/

Project Web ID
https://www.regionalstudies.org/network/citizen-entrepreneurship/

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