

## Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Based on extensive fieldwork, this book demonstrates how gender is an organizing principle of entrepreneurial ecosystems and makes a difference in how ecosystem resources are assembled and how they can be accessed. By bringing visibility to how ecosystem actors are heterogeneous across identities, interactions and experiences, the book highlights the role and complexity of individual, organizational, and institutional factors working in concert to create and maintain gendered inequities. *Entrepreneurial Ecosystems* provides research-driven insights around effective organizational practices and policies aimed at remedying gendered and intersectional inequalities associated with entrepreneurship activities and economic growth. Proposing a typology of four ecosystem identities, it highlights how some might be more amenable and organized towards gender inclusion and change, while others may be much more difficult to change, reorganize and restructure. It offers scholars, students, practitioners and policymakers insights about gender in relation to analyzing entrepreneurial ecosystems and for fostering inclusive economic development policies.

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research strives to improve our understanding of entrepreneurial support organizations, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and corporate and family business, particularly with respect to governance, inclusion, politics and gender equality. Recognitions for this research include a grant award from The Kauffman Foundation, the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship's ('USASBE') best paper in entrepreneurship and ethics award in 2017, USASBE's best paper in family business honorable mention in 2014, and best paper in women's entrepreneurship at the International Council for Small Business in 2011.

# Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

## A Gender Perspective

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## Preface

This book is the result of many years of fieldwork, spanning multiple cities in the United States, with the aim of understanding the drivers and mechanisms of gender inclusion (and exclusion) in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Our approach has been multifaceted, deriving insights from feminist scholarship in entrepreneurship, sociology, and economics to highlight assumptions in entrepreneurial ecosystems research and frameworks. It has taken many iterations and years of writing on this topic to provide a holistic framework that not only brings together different disciplines but does so in a manner that pushes forward research and thinking in entrepreneurship studies. We have found much support for our research but have also been forced to answer ongoing questions about why gender matters. It seems that the scholarly community in entrepreneurship still considers gender as a variable or an identity dimension rather than an organizing principle of society and the economy – something we explicitly address and debunk in our book.

With these considerations, our goal is to critically examine underlying assumptions about the homogenous nature of ecosystem actors to highlight how identities, interactions, and institutions impact how and why certain entrepreneurs may find themselves distanced from the resources existing to support entrepreneurship activities. Rather than relying only on one dimension or level of analysis to explain the marginalization of women with respect to accessing networks, resources, and funding in ecosystems, our research points to a multilevel and complex system of individual actions, organizational practices, and institutional factors working concurrently. Taken together, these attributes contribute to the production and replication of entrepreneurial ecosystem dynamics that are gendered and racialized. In other words, economic activities

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in the form of entrepreneurship are always embedded within power dynamics of social structures, giving way to gendered social relations that impact how and why women, particularly women of color, continue to face organizational and institutional barriers.

In outlining these factors, we contribute to a much more complex understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems as sites where gendered reproduction of social relations takes shape in the context of economic exchanges. By doing so, we provide insights about different types of entrepreneurial ecosystems through our concept of “ecosystem identity.” This provides guidance about the complexity of simultaneous factors that define an ecosystem’s ability to engage in social change, namely that of gender inclusion. We hope that our research findings and recommendations for policymakers and leaders in ecosystems provide much-needed insights about why gender inclusion remains elusive even in contemporary times and despite its value in promoting economic growth. Moreover, our research changes the conversations around the ways in which we understand how “gender makes a difference” in our lives and in our scholarship.

Banu would like to thank her family for their unwavering support during the writing of this book, including during the pandemic. And a special thank you to Lila and Noah for helping pick the design cover and Jeff for supplying coffee!

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