



**GLOBAL,  
REGIONAL,  
AND NATIONAL  
ENTREPRENEURIAL  
ECOSYSTEMS**

*Exploring the Interplay  
Within the MENA Region*

**EDITED BY**

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# **Global, Regional, and National Entrepreneurial Ecosystems**

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# Global, Regional, and National Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Exploring the Interplay Within the MENA Region

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## Chapter 1

# Global, Regional, and National Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Exploring the Interplay Within the MENA Region

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### Abstract

Although there has been increased attention around entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs), much of the discourse remains conceptually focused, with limited empirical exploration, particularly in resource-constrained and emerging economies such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This edited volume examines the interplay of MENA's global, regional, and national EEs, addressing literature gaps and offering nuanced insights into their operation across diverse socio-economic contexts. By exploring the structural, cultural, and policy dimensions of EEs, the book highlights their critical elements, ranging from institutional support to individual perceptions of opportunities and barriers. It delves into the multi-level dynamics that shape entrepreneurial activities, emphasizing the importance of micro-level strategies and meso-level interactions often overlooked in traditional macro-level analyses. The chapters collectively underscore the role of local configurations, diaspora connections, and

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sectoral intersections in driving entrepreneurial innovation while acknowledging the region's unique challenges, such as resource dependency, regulatory hurdles, and socio-cultural constraints. Contributions include empirical studies and theoretical advancements on themes such as venture capital development in Saudi Arabia, women's entrepreneurship in the Gulf, and the integration of micro-entrepreneurship education in MENA. By leveraging diverse methodologies and frameworks, the book highlights on how tailored strategies can enhance the effectiveness of EEs in transitioning toward knowledge-based economies and fostering sustainable development. This volume is an essential resource for policymakers, academics, and practitioners seeking to understand and contribute to the evolution of EEs in the MENA. It offers actionable insights to design more inclusive, context-sensitive ecosystems that nurture innovation and resilience in a rapidly changing global economy.

*Keywords:* Transnational; entrepreneurial; ecosystem; Middle East; North of Africa; diaspora

## **Introduction**

The discourse on entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) has increasingly shifted toward refining its theoretical foundation, as much of the existing scholarship is predominantly conceptual (Kansheba & Wald, 2020). While definitions vary, the critical distinction in recent interpretations lies in specifying elements constituting an EE, broadly classified as social, cultural, or material (Spigel, 2017; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). This conceptualization of EEs as systems helps identify their elements, provided they are sufficiently developed. The ecosystem's output encompasses any entrepreneurial activity that directly or indirectly contributes to the economy's net output or enhances the capacity to generate additional output, thereby increasing aggregate welfare (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021). Therefore, it proposes a connection between the elements of EEs and entrepreneurial activity – a relationship that recent studies have begun to empirically examine (Queissner et al., 2024). While a vibrant and supportive EE is necessary for the start-up and growth of an enterprise, the entrepreneurial undertaking would largely depend on the entrepreneurs' ecosystem perception (Manimala et al., 2019). This perception is shaped by individuals' evaluation of their surroundings, which in turn conflict the overall attractiveness or repulsiveness of the ecosystem, consequently affecting their entrepreneurial intentions (Elnadi et al., 2020; Kumar & Das, 2019; Olutuase et al., 2018). This opportunity identification represents a unique entrepreneurial behavior, yet its processes and dynamics remain mysterious (Gaglio & Katz, 2001). The problem with studying EE from the system perspective is that it focuses on understanding them at the macro level, failing to incorporate other relevant variables or treating them as simple control or exogenous variables such as context and location (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021; Welter, 2011). Stam and

Van de Ven (2021) framework highlights the influence of cultural, social, political, and economic structures on EE dynamics, emphasizing the need for research to engage with diverse geographic contexts. Therefore, investigating the micro and meso levels is critical in shaping a holistic understanding of EEs, which, unlike clusters or innovation ecosystems, place individual entrepreneurs, rather than firms, at the framework's core (Stam & Spigel, 2017; Wurth et al., 2022).

For instance, Banc and Messeghem (2020) observed that actors' micro-level strategies often remain understudied despite their pivotal role in catalyzing entrepreneurial micro-ecosystems. Moreover, most EE research has focused on advanced economies, leaving significant gaps in understanding how these ecosystems operate in emerging or resource-constrained environments (Cao & Shi, 2021; Harima et al., 2021; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). Policymakers in these regions face unique challenges, as the models that succeed in resource-rich contexts are often not directly applicable (Roundy, 2019). Furthermore, location-specific studies further emphasize that ecosystems in less urbanized regions require tailored approaches. For instance, small-town ecosystems and their unique entrepreneurial characteristics have mainly been overlooked despite their potential contributions to economic development (Roundy, 2017). Similarly, the dynamics of stagnated ecosystems – those that once thrived but are now inactive – represent an underexplored area deserving of attention (Roundy, 2019). Melchor-Duran and Villegas-Mateos (2024) highlighted the diversity of EEs in Latin America and the Middle East regions, stressing the importance of adapting frameworks to account for local conditions.

## **Current Challenges**

Undeniably, building EEs relies on the concerted efforts of diverse actors in a determined community. For Feld (2012), what academics call clusters or ecosystems are what he calls startup communities and are a result of a network society that defuses energy, activity, and innovation. In this approach, people drive the ecosystem building with stakeholders' communities. The people involved represent diverse stakeholders, such as government agencies, accelerators, universities, venture capitalists, and entrepreneurs (Cohen, 2006). These stakeholders operate at various levels within the EE, which Stam and Van de Ven (2021) describe as an infrastructure for entrepreneurship. This infrastructure encompasses broader concepts like institutions and resources, operationalized through 10 elements, with entrepreneurs positioned as the central focus. This EE model is an integrative model of previous academic studies (Feld, 2012; Isenberg, 2010; Stam, 2015; Stam & Spigel, 2017; Stam & Van de Ven, 2021; Van de Ven, 1993; Woolley, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2013) and is a systemic model at the macro-level widely used by academics and practitioners. The core benefit of this systemic integration is that it includes the relevant literature streams accounting for the context in which entrepreneurship takes place and the explicit focus on the entrepreneur and entrepreneurial activity as an output (Queissner et al., 2024). Nevertheless, most studies fail to incorporate context and other relevant variables as independent variables, leaving them as simple control or exogenous

variables (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021; Welter, 2011). Therefore, EEs must place individual entrepreneurs, rather than firms, at the framework's core (Stam & Spigel, 2017; Wurth et al., 2022).

The systemic approach to EEs tends to overlook the significance of individual perspectives held by those occupying various stakeholder roles within the ecosystem. Additionally, a critical entrepreneurial dilemma emerges in the interplay between risk-taking, happiness, and entrepreneurial intention, as highlighted by Abrardi et al. (2024). A novel approach to address this gap in the literature and increase our understanding of EEs is to incorporate individual perceptions of the EE elements in which they conduct entrepreneurial activities. This is relevant because where the “rules of the game” facilitate market-based innovation, entrepreneurs engage in productive activity; where the rules facilitate corruption or rent-seeking, entrepreneurs choose unproductive and destructive ends (Boettke & Coyne, 2003, 2009; Lucas & Fuller, 2017).

Thus, the EE concept is related to the capacity of a territory (context) to create good conditions that enable productive entrepreneurship (Purbasari et al., 2019). Even though “starting a business” and “productive entrepreneurship” are often treated as virtually synonymous, the second also includes “market innovation” and the “creation of social value” (Lucas & Fuller, 2017). For Stam and Van de Ven (2021), productive entrepreneurship is any entrepreneurial activity the EE produces as an outcome. Moreover, Ahmad and Seymour (2008) emphasize that entrepreneurial activity can manifest within high-growth enterprises, reflecting the broader notion that entrepreneurship is not solely dependent on the presence of an individual entrepreneur. This creates an essential distinction between entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial activity. There will always be entrepreneurial activity where there are entrepreneurs, but it is important to note that the activity is not dependent on the entrepreneur's existence. This is significant as individuals within businesses can exhibit entrepreneurship without holding ownership stakes. Companies, whether owned by shareholders or trust funds and managed by salaried directors, can still operate entrepreneurially, influencing and benefiting other entrepreneur-led businesses. Also, economic theory often considers firm owners as “entrepreneurs” (e.g., Bitler et al., 2005; Jensen & Meckling, 1976) even though many shareholders are passive portfolio investors and many entrepreneurs do not incorporate firms. Shareholders generate value through dividends or capital gains upon selling shares. The critical point, however, is that entrepreneurial motivations are inherently aligned with the broader interests of all shareholder categories, irrespective of their specific roles or investment strategies (Adams et al., 2011).

Consequently, over the past 10 years, the EEs concept has gained prominence in entrepreneurship research, drawing notable interest from academics and practitioners alike (Acs et al., 2014; Brown & Mawson, 2019; Lafuente et al., 2022; Wurth et al., 2022). This growing focus stems partly from the value EEs bring in providing a fresh perspective on why entrepreneurial activity varies across regions (Audretsch, 2015; Autio et al., 2014; Fischer et al., 2022; O'Connor et al., 2018; Wurth et al., 2022). It is widely recognized that a combination of diverse elements – often called actors and factors, pillars, elements, or conditions – creates an ecosystem in a specific region, leading to entrepreneurial activity as an output

(Acs et al., 2014; Queissner et al., 2024; Spigel, 2017; Stam, 2015; Stam & Van de Ven, 2021). Other related concepts are studied and tested under the umbrella of the EEs literature across the book chapters using different empirical methods throughout the MENA region to contribute to our understanding of EEs.

## **Other Related Concepts**

Entrepreneurship is the process of starting new businesses or developing new projects within existing organizations. It is usually done by individuals or groups who share a common interest, identifying and balancing perceived opportunities and risks. The term “entrepreneurship” comes from the French word “entrepreneur,” which refers to someone who starts something new and takes risks based on it (Carvalho & Madeira, 2021). Entrepreneurs are the backbones of companies, they respond to changes in the economy, and act as economic agents, converting demand into supply (Say, 1803). Innovation is the fundamental tool entrepreneurs used to turn change into an opportunity to create valuable new businesses or services (Carvalho & Madeira, 2021; Ratten, 2023). The use of digital media and technologies can be beneficial, along with reorganizing existing resources or creating new ones, to achieve the desired goals (Ratten, 2023). According to the Oslo Manual, there are two main types of innovation: Product Innovation and Process Innovation. Product Innovation involves providing new or improving existing products and services. Process Innovation involves implementing new or significantly changing existing processes to enhance efficiency and increase competitiveness (Carvalho & Madeira, 2021). Innovation and Entrepreneurship are positively related (Autio et al., 2014; Carvalho & Madeira, 2021), and they are essential drivers of economic growth and competitiveness. Both contribute to job creation and overall economic development (Carvalho & Madeira, 2021).

### ***Importance***

Entrepreneurship and innovation activities are of significant importance at all levels, including the economic and social levels. These activities contribute to creating new businesses, thus creating jobs (Muhammad Ali Al-Tahana, 2022), then reducing the unemployment rate and increasing individual income (Jain, 2022; Muhammad Ali Al-Tahana, 2022), which reflects positively on the country’s economy and increasing the national product (Alerasoul et al., 2022). These actions lead to wealth generation among societies (Brem, 2011; Muhammad Ali Al-Tahana, 2022), increasing investment (Bagheri, 2017; Muhammad Ali Al-Tahana, 2022; Urbaniec, 2018), and overall increasing the prospects of sustainable prosperity. Other important regulations that also contribute to overall development and growth are enhancements to productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness among all industries through innovation and technology development (Alerasoul et al., 2022; Brem, 2011; Jain, 2022; Muhammad Ali Al-Tahana, 2022). Its innovative and disruptive nature contributes to tackling multifaceted societal challenges, including poverty alleviation, transformative advancements in healthcare, and fostering environmental sustainability (Jain, 2022).

## ***Analyzing Activities in Different Sectors***

### *Service Sector*

Entrepreneurship in the service sector is a pivotal driver of economic growth, primarily through creating new job opportunities associated with business establishment and expansion (Dóbon & Soriano, 2008). This sector includes many industries providing intangible services or products, such as banking, hotels, transportation, and healthcare (Dóbon & Soriano, 2008; Oliva et al., 2019). Entrepreneurs in this sector use modern technology to improve their services and create new business models to ensure continuity and development (Oliva et al., 2019).

### *Food Sector*

As is the case with the service sector, as previously mentioned, the food sector plays the same role from an economic standpoint in terms of growth opportunities and creating new job opportunities (Martín-Navarro et al., 2023). The food sector comprises the actors involved in producing, processing, and distributing food and agricultural products (Martín-Navarro et al., 2023). Ferraris et al. (2021) highlight the food industry's status as a well-established sector, marked by structural maturity and constrained growth dynamics relative to more rapidly evolving industries, which underscore its reliance on innovation and efficiency improvements to sustain competitiveness and address evolving consumer demands in a saturated market. Despite the importance of this sector and its global impact, it faces some challenges, such as supply, security, or food waste, which could happen and provide exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs in the future to develop innovative solutions to these difficult problems (Martín-Navarro et al., 2023).

### *Technology Sector*

Entrepreneurship in the world of technology is known as “Technopreneurship.” Entrepreneurship in this sector requires constant innovation and adaptation to rapidly evolving market demands. It is characterized by revolutionary technologies and business models, requiring entrepreneurs to be agile and forward-thinking. It is worth noting that creativity and innovation in this sector ripple onto other sectors, given the central role technology plays in the functioning of these sectors. Information Technology (IT) is essential for creating and sustaining organizational competitiveness in the global market. Its importance in the business sector resides in its capacity to optimize and improve operational activities, fostering efficiency and innovation. Entrepreneurial activities in the technology sector primarily focus on strategically using intellectual property and knowledge-based assets to promote high-growth enterprises. Entrepreneurs utilize technical expertise and commercial acumen to effectively harness technological breakthroughs to achieve corporate objectives and ensure long-term value generation. Some of the difficulties they may encounter include a lack of funds for research and development and governance policies and resistance to change (Fowosire et al., 2017).

### ***Intersectional Perspectives in Analyzing Innovation Activities***

#### *Study of the Impact of Intersectionality Between Different Sectors on Innovation Activities*

The intersection between different sectors, such as food, service, and technology, significantly impacts innovation. The common goal of this intersection is to solve economic, social, and environmental problems, and it can contribute to long-term competitive advantages (Klein & Spsychalska-Wojtkiewicz, 2020). Moreover, this intersectionality leads to the concept of “Cross-Innovation,” which is defined by (Klein & Spsychalska-Wojtkiewicz, 2020) as

a process in which creative industries share information, cooperate, and support the development of other sectors to promote a new way of thinking. Cross-sectoral innovation is based on the philosophy that a company’s needs have already been met somewhere else, and another industry has long since solved any problem a company faces.

For example, introducing technology like machine learning, AI, or big data into the food industry could, one way or another, ensure the optimization of supply chains and food safety and promote the sustainability of agricultural technologies (Asseng et al., 2021). All this will eventually lead to the development of new food technologies that can directly affect production efficiency. Undeniably, these innovations are connected to entrepreneurial activities and might result in new companies or enhanced performance of existing ones investing in their innovations. Furthermore, this intersection enables better alignment with consumer preferences, which results in healthier and more sustainable food systems (Asseng et al., 2021).

#### *Analysis of Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration Between Different Sectors to Enhance Innovation*

Knowledge exchange can enhance competitiveness by several methods, including creating valuable business networks, increasing cost efficiency, and enhancing supplier and other industries’ performance. This means that cross-sectoral collaboration is essential to foster innovation, which becomes a source of competitive advantage and growth. Moreover, the knowledge exchange can be external, such as technologies developed by other organizations or their R&D services, in addition to innovative ideas that can be extracted from suppliers, competitors, or customers (Klein & Spsychalska-Wojtkiewicz, 2020).

Castaneda and Cuellar (2020) argue that organizations that foster knowledge exchange will likely create innovative ideas and have increased inventive potential. Knowledge exchange is a tool used to change tacit knowledge to explicit, and the two kinds of knowledge are requisite inputs for innovation. Learning and acquiring knowledge and skills via cooperative efforts have been demonstrated as practices that can optimally help achieve innovation. Knowledge, as a critical

resource behind product development capability, is expressed through sharing, which helps create innovations resulting from ideas. Such collaborative activity makes new services, products, business models, and processes. In particular, knowledge exchange is essential to innovation because it transfers experience, skills, and information into practice. Moreover, it is also associated with technologies like the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence, which are the great drivers of innovations (Castaneda & Cuellar, 2020).

### ***R&D Activities and Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms***

#### *Role of Research and Development in Fostering Innovation*

Every organization needs R&D projects to support innovation, which can be key in supporting competitiveness in the market. These successful projects are essential to maintain innovation in aligned company techniques to create stakeholder satisfaction and deliver sustainable results (Csiszarik-Kocsir & Dobos, 2023). Furthermore, participating in these implementations helps develop cooperation with specialists and achieve meaningful results for both parties in the future. This collaboration enhances innovation capabilities and improves knowledge sharing within the industry (Csiszarik-Kocsir & Dobos, 2023). The study of (Mairesse & Mohnen, 2004) shows that R&D is positively correlated with all measures of innovation output, and all other things equal, more correlated than size to innovation. This shows why innovation models like the Technology Push and Market Pull models are helpful since they create knowledge and the new products needed to meet society's needs (Ekolu, 2018). In addition, a specific focus on the importance of research in economic development confirms a positive correlation between the research output, gross domestic product, and the number of patents per country (Ekolu, 2018).

#### *Mechanisms for Transferring Knowledge from Academic and Industrial Research to the Market*

There are several ways to transfer knowledge from academic and industrial research to the market (Shu & Chen, 2010). Such mechanisms include research cooperation between universities and firms, technology licensing and transfer agreements, university-industry collaboration, spin-off companies, technology incubators and accelerators, and knowledge exchange networks. All these mechanisms are vital in closing the gap between research and commercialization to allow the spread of innovations and technologies into the market for economic development (Meireles dos Santos et al., 2020). Other channels by which knowledge from academic and industrial research can shift to the market include patent and intellectual property protection, technology transfer offices, conferences and workshops, and technology and innovation centers (Torcătoru, 2019). These mechanisms enable the exchange of knowledge, skills, and resources between academics, practitioners, and entrepreneurs (Meireles dos Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, these specific mechanisms can efficiently translate research findings into practical applications, driving economic growth and meeting societal needs.