

# Entrepreneurship research in Spain: Developments and distinctiveness

José C. Sánchez and Andrea Gutiérrez  
Universidad de Salamanca

This article presents a review of research on entrepreneurship in Spain, paying particular attention to its beginnings, nature and main focus of interest. We have developed a database based on the review of 471 works produced between 1977 and 2009, including articles published in national and international journals and dissertations (read in Spain) that allowed us to extract the following results. There is a preference for qualitative methods, conceptual contributions and the entrepreneurial process as the privileged research theme. There is also a strong focus of interest on micro and small enterprises. These characteristics of Spanish research in areas of entrepreneurship can make a distinctive contribution to international research. However, the dissemination of knowledge and inadequate strategies for international publication limit the diffusion of Spanish research in entrepreneurship. Lastly, we discuss the implications for future research.

*La investigación del emprendimiento en España: desarrollos y características propias.* Este artículo presenta una revisión de la investigación realizada en España sobre emprendimiento, prestando especial atención a sus comienzos, naturaleza y principales focos de interés. La revisión de 471 trabajos producidos entre 1977 y 2009, entre artículos publicados en revistas nacionales e internacionales y tesis doctorales, leídas en España, nos aporta una base de datos que nos ha permitido extraer los siguientes resultados. Existe una preferencia por métodos cualitativos, por contribuciones conceptuales y por el proceso emprendedor como tema de investigación principal. Existe también un fuerte interés por estudiar las micro y pequeñas empresas. Estas características de la investigación española en temas de emprendimiento pueden hacer una contribución distintiva a la investigación internacional. No obstante, la diseminación del conocimiento y las insuficientes estrategias orientadas a la publicación internacional limitan la difusión de la investigación española en emprendimiento. Se discuten las implicaciones para futuras investigaciones.

The theme of entrepreneurship is achieving considerable interest, driven in part by global political, social, economic and technological situations. Governments are primarily interested in supporting and encouraging people who are starting a business because it benefits the country's economy. Hence, in the last two decades the study of business venture and entrepreneurship has taken on special significance.

This socio-economic interest has been accompanied by a scientific curiosity. The study of entrepreneurship is a relatively young research field, which in recent decades has managed to arouse the interest of the scientific community beyond the typical areas of management studies or strategic direction. In the 70's and 80's societies around the world underwent many changes (e.g., the oil crisis, economic recessions, technical progress, an increase of the internationalization of economies, etc). These changes have created a level of uncertainty and instability and a fertile environment for the innovation and entrepreneurship. It was in this context where the interest in entrepreneurship research began

to develop. Entrepreneurship as a field of study is thus no more than 30 years old, but has developed significantly during that short period of time.

## Theoretical framework

Some authors have discussed how to create and develop new scientific fields (Sánchez, 2011). Hansson (1993), for example, suggests two approaches to the development of knowledge «technical» and «theoretical». Recent research fields, compared to more developed areas, are characterized, at first by a technical approach: researchers focus their attention on the object of study (as opposed to the theories and methodologies) and on ascertaining knowledge that can be applied in a practical situation.

However, because of the lack of a conceptual framework, knowledge is rather fragmented. Following the reasoning of Hansson, we must point out that the field of entrepreneurship is characterized by a technical approach, although we must point out that in recent decades, this approach is moving towards of a theoretical approach in which the quality of empirical research has improved (Chandler & Lyon, 2001).

We believe that the current state of entrepreneurship research lies somewhere between the applied and technical, or between the theoretical and a mature approach to knowledge development. If the field is moving towards maturity, the accumulation of knowledge

should reflect, for example, a stabilization of the subjects, a higher level of specialization among groups of researchers and an identifiable research community led by a large group of influential researchers in the development of the field. In this respect we must point out the existence of studies that have analyzed the state of the art in entrepreneurship in different countries, e.g. France (Lasch & Yami, 2008), England (Blackburn & Smallbone, 2008) or Germany (Schmude, Welter, & Heumann, 2008), among others. The absence of studies reviewing the current state of research on entrepreneurship in Spain has led to the present study.

To determine how mature this research field is in our country we examined the research produced in the period 1977-2009, analyzing the various topics studied throughout these years and determining whether the researchers had provided the necessary foundations for the systematic advancement of the discipline. To do so, we used data from the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and from the Institute of Information and Documentation in Social Sciences and Humanities (ISOC). This approach is not unique and has been applied in other studies (e.g., Cornelius, Landström, & Persson, 2006; Liberatore & Hermosilla, 2008).

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we make a review of papers published in both, national and international journals during this period. Second, we analyze the theses read in our country on this subject. Finally, in view of the results some conclusions will be developed.

## Method

### *Participants, instruments and procedure*

Our database is composed of items in the Social Sciences Citation Index Web of Science's Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) written by Spanish authors that includes the word «entrepreneur\*» in the title, keywords, or abstract and the word «Spain» in address from 1977 until December 2009. A total of 155 articles met these conditions. For publications on Spanish journals it was analyzed the ISOC database of the Superior Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), conducting the search with the descriptors «entrepreneur\*» and «entrepreneurship». A total of 282 articles met these characteristics.

To collect the theses we used the THESEUS database, from its inception until March 2010. As search criteria we used the following descriptors: entrepreneur, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Thirty-four theses were found.

### *Data analysis*

The database comprises 471 works, including articles and theses. It was analyzed by taking into consideration the following criteria: changes in productivity, labor productivity, collaboration index, journals, language, institution, related areas and study topics.

In order to describe the nature and focus of research on entrepreneurship in Spain a bibliographic method was used based on the recognition of science as an organization and consists of analyzing scientific literature as a source of information on the detection of variables influencing the development of science. This provided us with information about the interests and aspirations of academic researchers during that period. We then read and classified each article of the sample for subsequent analysis.

## Results

### *Articles*

With respect to the changes in productivity, the first study to addresses the issue of entrepreneurship is Rodriguez's article (1977). Scientific productivity has increased, from 1977 until now, most of it concentrated in the first decade of the present century (Table 1). Thus, in the ISOC database, the period 2006-2010 is when the greatest number of publications appears, mainly in 2006, with 56 publications.

This tendency is also reflected in the ISI database, 2009 being the year in which more articles were published: a total of 48 articles, representing 31% of published papers by Spanish authors included in this database.

A more detailed analysis of these data shows that the rate of productivity per author is quite low. On the ISI review there are a total of 287 different authors, of whom have published only one article. Authors who have published the most articles are Soriano and Urbano with five articles, respectively, Amoros, Casillas and Moreno with four articles, respectively.

A Similar situation arises when we consider the reports in the ISOC database where we found 422 different authors for a total of 282 articles, with Garcia (4 articles) and Entrialgo (4 papers), being the authors with the most publications. The rest of the authors (87.44%) showed a single article each, which again underscores the low productivity per author.

Scientific collaboration is a characteristic of modern science and also a sign of maturity and the degree of professionalism achieved in different scientific fields (Arora & Pawan, 1995; Beaver & Rosen, 1978, 1979; Pao, 1982). With respect to our field of study, we found that collaboration is present, although this cooperation rate is not very high. In the ISI database, we found 155 papers written by 287 authors, giving us a collaboration index of 1.85 and in the ISOC database we found 282 works from 422 authors, which provide a collaboration index of 1.50. These rates are far below those found in other countries with the best research traditions.

The total number of journals in the ISI database that publish studies about entrepreneurship is 88. Of these, there is a core of six journals with four or more articles about entrepreneurship published in each, representing 26.45% of the articles: Journal of Business Venturing, Small Business Economics, Service Industries Journal, Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, Journal of World Economics and Technovation. Secondly, there are 25 journals representing 36.77% of the total which contain between 3 and 2 articles in this vein. Finally, another core group of 57 journals can be distinguished, each of which has published one article in the field, making up 36.78% of the total number of articles.

The Spanish scenario reflected in ISOC is larger as regards number of journals. Listed are 151 journals and seven of them

Table 1  
Number of articles in the ISI and ISOC databases

Artículos de revista	Total	1977-1989	1989-1999	2000-2005	2006-2009
Revistas españolas	282	3	48	111	120
Revistas extranjeras	155	0	6	31	118

include 26.26% of the 282 articles. These are: *Industrial Economics*, *Ekonomiaz*, *Bulletin of Economic Research*, *Harvard-Deusto Business Review*, *Economists*, *Business Information Spanish* and *ICE Economic Bulletin*. We note, therefore, that these keep Bradford's assertions (1934) in his distribution of the literature theory are thus more than confirmed and it can be said that the most specialized journals in entrepreneurship are: *Industrial Economics*, *Ekonomiaz* and *Bulletin of Economical Studies* in Spain and beyond our borders, *Journal of Business Venturing* and *Small Business Economics*. With regard to language, in the ISI database we found 134 articles written in English (86.5% of the total) while only 21 are in Spanish.

As for the workplace or institutions, and taking as a reference the ISI database which in this sense is more complete than ISOC, we noted that the topic of entrepreneurship has been addressed in 126 different institutions, especially universities, like the University of Valencia, which publishes the highest number of articles, followed by the Autonomous University of Barcelona, representing 11.5% and 9.7% of the jobs respectively.

Analyzing the source area of the various articles we see that these come mainly from the field of economics and business, 80% (e.g., *Business and Management*), with smaller percentage originating in the field of sociology (4.5%), psychology (3.2%) or education (1.3%).

With respect to specific topic of the articles, there are no differences in the main focus of interest according to whether they are published in Spanish or English, except for the issue of internationalization, which has a major presence in the articles collected in the ISI database. In general, the entrepreneur is considered a key factor of change, and therefore authors try to study entrepreneurial characteristics in different levels: personal (psychological, cognitive, e.g., Sánchez 2010a,b), organizational, demographical and the motivational (Brunet & Alarcon, 2004). The role of the entrepreneur in improving competitiveness has also been analyzed (Ares, 2004).

In this vein, the study of the entrepreneur's profile is among the main topics discussed in published papers. Entrialgo, Fernández and Vázquez (2000) found that entrepreneurial companies are run by persons with high internal control, a high need for achievement and a good tolerance of ambiguity, i.e., there is a relationship between the skills of an entrepreneur / manager and the adoption of entrepreneurial behaviors in SMEs. In addition, the most entrepreneurial companies are run by management teams, whose members are middle-aged, and highly trained technically, and include a high proportion of managers with previous experience and significant diversity with respect to training and functional expertise.

Moriano and Palací (2005) found that individualistic values, internal locus of control, having friends who are entrepreneurs and having experience as an entrepreneur is positively and significantly associated with entrepreneurial behavior. Other variables that predict the intention to create a business or become self-employed (Moriano, Palací, & Morales, 2006; Sánchez, 2009) are family, work experience, education towards self-employment, social support, perceived barriers and values. As regards psychology, the variables that determine the intention of undertaking are proactiveness, risk-taking and self-efficacy (Sánchez, Lanero, & Yurrebaso, 2005).

In the analysis of entrepreneurial behavior and its relation to the strategy, the industrial environment and company success, it was found that configurational approaches based on the consistency

of entrepreneurial behavior, strategy and environment have a higher predictive power than contingent approaches (Entrialgo, Fernández, & Vázquez, 2001).

In the configurational approach, certain authors (e.g., Díaz, 1999) have tried to identify the contextual features that are good predictors of entrepreneurial behavior. These are: the demographic dimension (which includes variables representing the family environment, family responsibilities, age and educational level), the labour dimension (which groups the professional experience, job dissatisfaction and unemployment variables), the psychological dimension (which includes the motivation for attainment, risk, causal attribution and values variables) and the environment dimension (which includes variables such as financial facilities, funding and the existence of agents of influence).

In recent years the literature has added new topics such as immigration (Coduras, 2008), women (Fuentes, 2006) and social entrepreneurship (Martín, Hernangómez, & Rodríguez, 2005), together with the analysis of the University as a trainer of new entrepreneurs (García, 2008). In this vein, it has been observed that students attending university more recently show higher entrepreneurialism rates the ones preceding them (Olmos & Sastre, 2007; Sánchez et al., 2005).

With regard to research on ethnic entrepreneurship, a review of studies that have examined this issue shows that foreigners are proportionally more entrepreneurial than native Spaniards, and the relative weight of their initiatives is gradually increasing in the total rate of entrepreneurial activity in our country (Coduras, 2008). For Arjona and Checa (2006, 2008) immigrants who come to Spain find a segmented market and often engage in activities that are considered of less value, working in construction, agriculture, the hotel and restaurant business, etc. Some made attempts to get out of that market and build their own business. Thus, immigrants create an ethnic economic system where employees speak their mother tongue, are from the same ethnic group, and the products they sell are typical of their community. The ethnic economy combines some of the characteristics of the primary and secondary markets and becomes an alternative only for those immigrants who have a chance of starting or running their own businesses.

Gender studies (e.g., Veciana, Aponte, & Urbano, 2005) show that men are more willing and they consider themselves more capable of self-employment than women. This is especially significant for women in rural areas who tend to be less involved in entrepreneurial activities and are less optimistic about their abilities as entrepreneurs, although the fear of failure is not a significant impediment to starting business (Driga, Lafuente, & Vaillant, 2009). This highlights the need to offer educational activities aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among women as a strategy for personal and professional development (Martínez, 2009).

Another recurring topic in the articles is social entrepreneurship and, among others, the search for new forms of organization to achieve social integration of people at risk of exclusion and to increase employment opportunities for job placement. In particular, there is great interest in Spain in the full social and occupational integration of persons with disabilities (Red, Fernández, Marbán, & de la Puente, 2008) and in the process of integration of people at risk of social exclusion.

For other authors the key to entrepreneurship is the University. We found articles referring to how the university must move from being just a starring actor in the «knowledge society» to becoming a prominent agent of the «society of entrepreneurs». We propose

that the universities and other bodies and institutions involved in development and innovations should take on the role of relevant actors, or «principal agents form employment», (Navarrete, 2008) and should also be considered as such in the modern active policies for the labour market and economic growth.

*Theses*

Research at the doctoral level is an important indicator in clarifying the position of a scientific field as it reflects the academic tradition or theoretical or methodological preferences, and topics of interest. It also shows the transmission of knowledge and skills from the thesis director to the generation of Ph.D. candidates as future actors and leaders of the research community. The thesis is also an indicator of the emergence and life cycle of specific subjects and academic fields.

Theses read in Spanish are the result not only of the interest generated in recent years in entrepreneurship, as reflected in various studies, but of the many training activities focused on the area of entrepreneurship and the importance that the governments of various countries are attributing to it by driving the small business sector, proposing and developing political programs and initiatives dedicated to promote business venture (Ibáñez, 2001).

The first thesis in this area dates back to 1999, but 2008 can be considered the most important year in terms of PhD theses related to the topic of entrepreneurship, it can also be affirmed that this same year was when it started to become a recurrent topic (Table 2).

The topic of entrepreneurship has been studied in different Spanish universities, and although there are some schools where

more theses have been submitted relating to the subject, we can say that no one university stands out in this sense. Research in entrepreneurship takes place throughout the whole country, in both public and private universities.

Regarding the topics of doctoral theses, it can be said that the issues most frequently chosen are those that revolve around entrepreneurship, the study of contexts in which an entrepreneurial activity can be carried out and developed, and the relations between them.

Within entrepreneurship there are many theses that have focused on the psychological characteristics of an entrepreneur (Krauss, 2008; Comeche, 2003), highlighting the possibility of identifying entrepreneurs versus non-entrepreneurs or psychologically differentiating people who are planning to create their own business (Uriarte, 1999).

Also considered is how the environment may influence entrepreneurship, linking educational aspects, work experience and personal values with the initiative to undertake a business (Moriano, 2004) either by indicating that the family environment where entrepreneurship is forged (Ibáñez, 2001), or by specifying the role of training in entrepreneurial activities and its relation to entrepreneurship (Martínez, 2008) or the role of public financial resources available (Crecente, 2009).

Another group of studies seeks to relate entrepreneurship to economic growth, considering entrepreneurship as an engine of the modern economy and the development of society (Gomez, 2010); others are devoted to the study of the development and growth of new enterprises (Angulo, 2000) and still other studies address the boost provided by business incubators for the creation and development of business ventures, and the ensuing economic development (Camacho, 2000).

In short, doctoral theses devoted to entrepreneurship are something relatively new. It is a subject that is currently attracting more and more interest, especially starting in 2008, when a substantial increase in such studies took place.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to deliver a first account of the specific research being done in Spain on entrepreneurship. We have analyzed the emergence, nature and focus of entrepreneurial research in Spain in order to provide a panorama of the state of the art. Our results reveal a differentiating «Spanish style».

The main facets of Spanish entrepreneurial research that we were able to identify in our study are summarized as follows: it is a rapidly growing emerging field that is still suffering from insufficient social recognition; there is a preference for theoretical contributions, and the study of entrepreneurship in small size organizations; a key issue is the entrepreneurial process, and research results lack sufficient internationalization.

The issue of the internationalization and the visibility of the research results reveals specific channels for the dissemination of knowledge, research traditions, networks, etc., which, at least partly, explain the insufficient level of exchange with the international community. Collaboration with non-Spanish author is very low.

One of the results of our analysis reveals a strong research bias towards the economic perspective. Entrepreneurship, as a scientific discipline, is in a pre-paradigmatic state and it needs to adopt theories from more established disciplines such as

*Table 2*  
Number of thesis read in Spain about entrepreneurship

Thesis	Total	1999-2001	2002-2005	2006-2008	2009-2010 (March)
	34	6	10	11	7
University	Number of thesis				
Granada	4				
Deusto	3				
Mondragón	3				
Sevilla	3				
Antonio de Nebrija	2				
Valencia	2				
Alcalá ,Almería, Autónoma de Barcelona, Católica de Valencia, S. Vicente Mártir, Complutense de Madrid, Huelva, León, Lleida, Málaga, Navarra, País Vasco, Politécnica de Cartagena, Politécnica de Catalunya, Ramón Llull, Salamanca, UNED, Zaragoza.	1				
Topics*					
1.	Organization and Business Management				
2.	Economic Sciences				
3.	Technological Innovation				
4.	Economic Development Studies				
5.	Psychology				
6.	Technology Transfer				
7.	Economic Activity				
8.	Organizational Behavior				
9.	Professional Vocation				
10.	Regional Development Planning				
11.	Economic Policy				
12.	Social Psychology				

psychology or sociology, not just the economics. Our study reveals that most authors work within the fields of economics or business administration and management. However, many of them resort to psychological theories to perform their studies, revealing that psychology is a discipline that substantially contributes to the development of research in entrepreneurship. Unlike other countries, in Spain there are very few researchers in psychology who address entrepreneurship as their object of study.

These implications are, in our view, for fostering research in entrepreneurship in Spain from various fields and for increasing the international visibility of Spanish scholars.

As our study suggests, the development of Spanish research in entrepreneurship offers important promise regarding the contributions of Spanish scholars to the research community in the future. This development will require not only increasing the participation and consolidation of research groups in this field, through the contribution of new theories and models from different disciplines (and not just studies limited to replicating what other foreign authors have investigated), but also internationalizing the studies already performed and cultivating the specificity of Spanish entrepreneurship.

The limitations of our study are linked to its epistemological nature. Classifying research into topics and issues is not an exact science and requires a certain level of interpretation. The data addressed here include articles from publications in national and international journals and from doctoral theses read in Spanish universities. However, it could be useful to extend the analysis to papers presented at conferences, congresses and forums, both national and international (e.g., INBAM, RENT, BCERC, etc. in an attempt to complement the positioning of Spanish academics found in our study.

Looking for future research, it would also be of interest to focus more specifically on processes as the most important topic and on the methods used for describing the special background in conceptualization and theorization of Spanish academics.

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