ISSN (PRINT): 1994 - 7658 ISSN (ONLINE): 1314 - 0817

VARNA UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT

European Journal of Tourism Research

http://ejtr.vumk.eu

Entrepreneurial ecosystems in tourism: An analysis of characteristics from a systems perspective

Monika Bachinger [1*], Ingrid Kofler [2] and Harald Pechlaner [3]

[1] University of Applied Forest Sciences, Rottenburg, Germany. E-mail: bachinger@hs-rottenburg.de
[2] Center for Advanced Studies, EURAC Research, Bozen/Bolzano, Italy. E-mail: ingrid.kofler@eurac.edu
[3] Catholic University Eichstaett-Ingolstadt, Germany. E-mail: harald.pechlaner@ku.de

*Corresponding author

Abstract

This paper transfers the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) to tourism. First it investigates the characteristic of an EE in tourism by comparing it to an existing model. Second, the sector-specificity of the EE in tourism is discussed by referring to the system's boundaries, operations and purposes, thus linking research on EEs in tourism more strongly to key concepts of systems theory. This is done by evaluating 19 interviews from South Tyrol in a qualitative approach using GABEK (Holistic Processing of Linguistic Complexity), which includes rule-based coding of interviews and visualisation of results in a network graph. Results show that the evaluated EE in tourism shares features familiar to EEs in other business sectors. This is an elevated role of long-standing entrepreneurs, social networks, governance, shared knowledge and learning. However, there are also tourism-specific features, such as culture and landscape, which directly provide resources for entrepreneurship. Governance does not emerge from the interaction of entrepreneurs, but from public bodies. The system's output is not ambitious entrepreneurship, but innovative, sustainable and collective entrepreneurship. However, there is the need for further research to clearly determine the system's sector specificity.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, Systems Perspective, Qualitative Research, South Tyrol.

Citation: Bachinger, M., Kofler, I. and Pechlaner, H. (2022). Entrepreneurial ecosystems in tourism: An analysis of characteristics from a systems perspective. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 31, 3113.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, extensive research on competitive advantage from a territorial perspective has emerged, some of it relating to regional innovation systems, industrial districts or clusters. These theories emphasize the competitive advantage businesses gain from linking into regional knowledge and into a shared institutional setting. None of these, however, puts entrepreneurship as output of regional contexts centre-stage. Here, the concept of EEs (entrepreneurial ecosystems) is able to make valuable contributions: EEs explain how "*high-growth entrepreneurship*" or "*ambitious entrepreneurship*" emerge from a regional context (Colombo *et al.*, 2017; Malecki, 2018; Spigel & Harrison, 2018).

The concept of EEs assumes that territorial contexts influence how entrepreneurial individuals start and grow successful businesses (Acs *et al.*, 2017; Autio & Levie, 2017; Brown & Mason, 2017). EEs have been described as "*supportive regional environments*" that promote high-growth entrepreneurship (Cavallo, Ghezzi & Balocco, 2018; Stam, 2015). Potential entrepreneurs access these supportive environments as "*common good*" (Autio & Levie, 2017) or as a collective "*capacity of the territory*" (Neumeyer & Corbett, 2017).

Vice versa, entrepreneurs feed back into their contexts and shape their environment and its capacity to induce new ventures (Cavallo *et al.*, 2018; Malecki, 2018). These entrepreneurs include potential or nascent entrepreneurs; successful, long-standing entrepreneurs are, however, of special importance. There is a "*virtuous self-reinforcing cycle*" (Cavallo *et al.*, 2018) of entrepreneurs shaping the features of their own ecosystem. Entrepreneurs and their contexts thus form a unity, which supports new business formation (Acs *et al.*, 2017; Colombo *et al.*, 2017).

In describing the elements of EEs, Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021) present a model that contains three layers of elements: framework conditions, systemic conditions, and outputs. Systemic conditions are the "*heart*" of the EEs, which determine the success of the ecosystems (Stam, 2015). Framework conditions, instead, relate to the social context of EEs (Cavallo *et al.*, 2018). Lastly, outputs describe the entrepreneurial activity, which results from the system's functioning and which yields regional effects, such as jobs or economic prosperity. The following sections of this paper refer to this model of EEs, adopting the layers of systemic conditions, framework conditions and outputs.

Due to the specific characteristics of tourism, EEs might be composed differently in this industry than proposed by Stam and van de Ven (2021), who mainly looked at manufacturing industries. Understanding how EEs in tourism operate, however, is an important premise for the promotion of tourism entrepreneurship: If the elements of tourism EEs were better known, strategies and measures to promote the system's outputs could be formulated. Looking at EEs in tourism from a systemic perspective is, furthermore, novel. Recently, tourism has been more intensively looked at from a systemic perspective (Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011, Bassano, Pietronudo & Piciocchi, 2018). A great number of publications, however, while talking about tourism systems, address value-chains (Varvaressos, 2018) or networks (Scott, Baggio & Cooper, 2011). Romero-Garcia *et al.* (2019) thus contend that the use of truly systemic approaches in tourism still holds great potential. This paper investigates the characteristic of a tourism EE from a systems perspective in order to gain insights on EEs in tourism with regard to their systemic qualities. It does so by referring to basic propositions of systems theory, that is the system's boundaries, its operations and purposes.

We look at the empirical case of South Tyrol from the systemic perspective to see whether Stam's (2015) and Stam and van de Ven's (2021) model of EEs may be applied in a tourism context. In doing so, we try

to understand of which elements an EE in tourism is composed. We choose South Tyrol, because tourism businesses in this destination exhibit a high degree of innovativeness and entrepreneurial activity. Since these outputs have been described as characteristic for EEs, we expected South Tyrol to dispose of structures that come close to what has been conceptualised as EEs. Looking at these structures enables us to gain insights into how a tourism-specific EE may look, and whether it resembles the model developed by Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021).

We are interested in these questions, because tourism is often conceived as a job engine and income generator. However, in many cases, tourism businesses lack innovation and entrepreneurial activity (Weidenfeld, 2013; Björk, 2014). Furthermore, tourism businesses have been severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, inducing the question as to how resilience strategies could look like. EEs might contribute to the revival of tourism, because they explain how "*high-growth entrepreneurship*" or "*ambitious entrepreneurship*" emerge (Brown & Mason, 2017). Both forms of entrepreneurship go beyond the ordinary and make perceptible contributions to economic growth (Stam, 2015; Stam & van de Ven, 2021). Applied to tourism, the approach of EEs could help understand how value-generating entrepreneurship may be promoted, therefore helping the industry to regain economic traction after COVID-19. Our insights might therefore be of interest not only from a conceptual point of view, but also for practical recommendations on how to promote tourism entrepreneurship.

Against this background, the present paper pursues two aims. First, by looking at South Tyrol, characteristics of an EE in tourism are compared to the model of EEs of Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021) and similarities and differences are identified. Furthermore, by looking at the EE's systemic qualities, the existence of a sector-specific – that is, tourism-specific – EE is discussed. Addressing these two questions is important as tourism, being hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, depends heavily on entrepreneurial activity. Since EEs are acknowledged for fostering entrepreneurial activity, a better understanding of EEs in tourism provides valuable information on how tourism entrepreneurship may be supported. In this, the paper bridges an identified research gap (Bachinger *et al*., 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

According to Spigel (2017), EEs are defined as "*combinations of social, political, economic, and cultural elements within a region that support the development and growth of innovative start-ups*" (Spigel 2017: 50). This definition links with how ecosystems are understood in nature sciences. There, ecosystems describe the interaction between living organisms and their physical environment (Colombo *et al*., 2017). Similarly, EEs are seen as consisting of systemic elements such as entrepreneurial individuals, mentors and investors, which interact with each other, but also with their environment. Systemic elements and contexts together create an atmosphere which is conducive for new venture creation (Stam & van de Ven, 2021; Colombo *et al*., 2017; Malecki, 2018). In the following, the elements of EEs are described more closely, as found in literature.

A pronounced role in EEs is attributed to entrepreneurial individuals (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). Entrepreneurship is considered a social process (Cavallo *et al*., 2018). Long-standing entrepreneurs are considered particularly important: "*Entrepreneurs with a long-term commitment to the ecosystem are often best positioned to recognize the opportunities and restrictions of the ecosystem and to deal with them*" (Stam, 2015: 1761) Their experience-based knowledge supports nascent entrepreneurs. Furthermore, they feed back money into a region's EE or they articulate needs of the entrepreneurial community to public authorities (Acs *et al*., 2017; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). In doing so, experienced entrepreneurs take on leadership (Acs *et al*., 2017). Above that, in tourism, lifestyle entrepreneurs take

on a special role in EEs. As Cunha, Kastenholz and João Carneiro (2020) show, lifestyle entrepreneurs may act as role models in EEs, sharing knowledge, supporting and inspiring others to follow their example.

A series of papers highlight networks as another essential part of systemic conditions (Neumeyer & Santos, 2018): "*Networking is crucial as entrepreneurs encounter new situations and arrange networks according to their needs*" (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017: 892). Networks serve for identifying business opportunities and providing resource inputs (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Neumeyer & Santos, 2018). Furthermore, networks create social capital between tourism businesses (Prats, Guia & Molina, 2008) and contribute to trust, lower transaction costs, and increased willingness to share (silent) knowledge and to learn from and with each other (van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). Networks are considered as "*mechanisms of social control*" (Prats, Guia & Molina, 2008), which mediate between different tourist service providers. They reduce uncertainty by enhancing communication and joint planning. Especially in tourism, networks contribute to entrepreneurial activity and innovation (Novelli, Schmitz & Spencer, 2006; Kofler et. al., 2018). Destinations with strong networks are therefore considered more competitive (van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015).

Other important elements in EEs are a talented workforce, financial means for entrepreneurial activity, and supporting organisations or intermediates such as business consultancies. In tourism, furthermore, the customer significantly contributes to the tourism product. According to the service dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2006), customers are "*resource integrators*" who combine both their own and external resources to meet their needs (Prebensen, Vittersø & Dahl, 2013). The customer and his or her demand therefore forms another important element in EEs.

As for the system's environment, institutional contexts play an important role. Entrepreneurial activity is perceived as being embedded in institutional contexts, which encourage network development and learning (Scaringella & Radziwon, 2018; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). Of particular importance are context characteristics such as a region's business-friendly administration, or tax benefits (Spigel, 2017). Such localised factors frame how the system's elements interact. In this, the concept relates to features of other territorial approaches: EEs reside in a given territory with a unique set of common values, culture and routines, which allow actors to interact trustfully (Scaringella & Radziwon, 2018).

Based on Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2019), these characteristics may be integrated into a model. The model contains three layers (see figure 1): framework conditions, systemic conditions and outputs. Systemic conditions comprise networks of entrepreneurs, financial resources for entrepreneurial activity, intermediaries, leadership, talented workforce, knowledge and the demand of consumers. These elements are decisive, since they "*predominantly determine the success of the ecosystem*" (Stam, 2015: 1766). Framework conditions, in contrast, relate to the social and institutional contexts of EEs (Cavallo *et al.*, 2018). They consist of the cultural context, formal and informal institutions, such as business regulation or social norms. Physical infrastructures are also part of the institutional framework conditions. The output of EEs is conceptualised as entrepreneurial activity, especially productive entrepreneurship, which means entrepreneurship which "*contributes (in)directly to net output of the economy or to the capacity to produce additional output*" (Stam & van de Ven, 2021: 814). Figure 1 below illustrates the elements of an EE, its layers and their relationships. In the following section, we look at how boundaries between system and environment are described in literature. We furthermore look at how the undertakings of EEs have been operationalised and how the purpose of EEs has been discussed in literature.

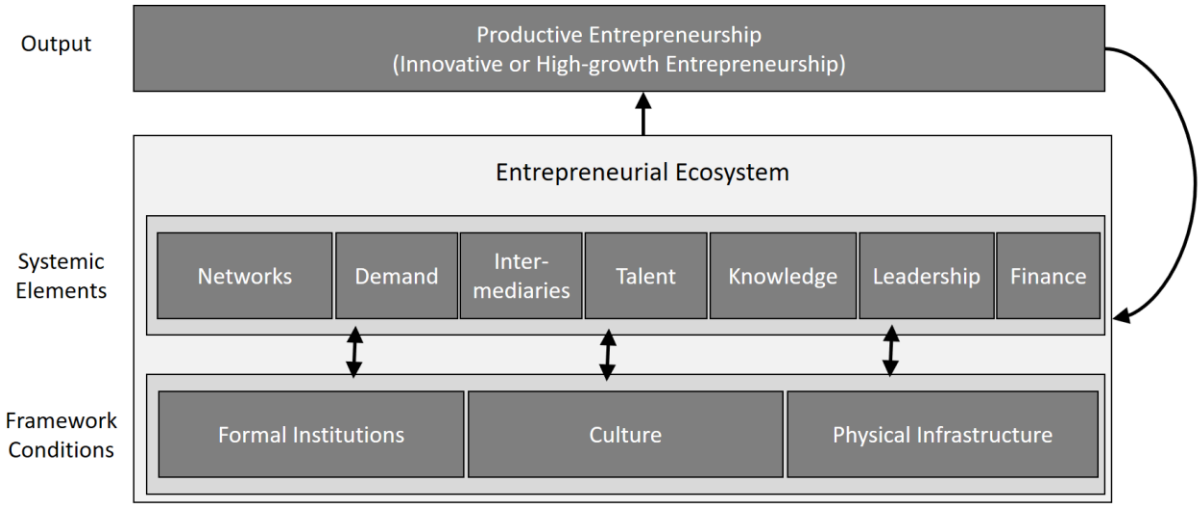

Figure 1. *Model of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, adapted from Stam (2015) and Stam & van de Ven (2021)*

2.2. Systemic Features in Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

In the following, the layers of the model deduced from Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021) are related to systems theory. In doing so, three characteristic propositions of systems theory are employed in order to better understand the composition of EEs from a systems perspective: First, systems emerge by differentiating themselves from their environment. This differentiation emerges from operations. Secondly, by autopoetically reproducing these operations, boundaries emerge which discriminate system and environment from each other (Altmann, 2017). Third, by conducting their operations, systems target specific purposes (Bausch, 2015). Below, all three aspects – the EE's boundaries, operations and purpose – are explained in greater detail. It is important to note that the following sections are not tourism-specific, but refer to general insights on EEs. These general insights will be confronted with tourism-specific findings later on.

2.2.1 Boundaries

In EE research, entrepreneurial individuals form the system's core. Furthermore, all those elements are considered, "inside" the system that directly support the creation of businesses. For example, interaction of entrepreneurial individuals provides for knowledge flows, for access to a skilled workforce or to capital, which all directly determine opportunities for entrepreneurial activity (Spigel & Harrison, 2018). Leadership, furthermore, provides direction and orientation and therefore helps guide entrepreneurial activity. Summarising this, Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021) consider networks of entrepreneurs, leadership, finance, talent, knowledge, the customers' demand and support services as systemic elements. Their presence and interaction thus indicates the systems boundary.

The framework conditions or "the outside", instead, contain all elements that support entrepreneurship indirectly. These elements encompass regional culture, institutional framework, and physical infrastructure (Stam, 2015). Of special importance is a region's entrepreneurial culture, which consists of positive norms toward entrepreneurship and encourages individuals to embark on entrepreneurial ventures (Malecki, 2018). These framework conditions, however, are not finally defined. For example, whereas Stam (2015) attributes physical infrastructure to framework conditions, Stam and van de Ven

(2021) see them as part of systemic elements. The same applies to networks: Stam (2015) groups them into the systemic conditions, while Stam and van de Ven (2021) attribute them to the framework. Regarding these two elements, this paper adheres to the conceptualisation of Stam (2015); see also figure 1. This means that networks are seen as systemic elements, whereas physical infrastructure remains framework.

2.2.2 Operations

In EE literature, networks, governance, and network-based learning are important system operations. For example, the system's network mediates resources for entrepreneurial activity such as financing or mentoring (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). Over time, network members develop routines, which help govern network interaction (Scaringella & Radziwon, 2018). Networks, governance and network-based learning are therefore described in greater detail below.

As for networks, nascent entrepreneurs might not be as strongly embedded in regional networks as long-standing entrepreneurs (Neumeyer & Corbett, 2017). Nevertheless, nascent entrepreneurs need networks in order to recognise business opportunities and to source resources for venture creation (Spigel, 2017). Successful EEs enable entrepreneurs to enter social networks and to increase their ability to build trustful relationships. They help them to build social capital as an important resource for entrepreneurial tourism activity (Borlido & Coromina, 2018).

In EEs, individuals interact non-hierarchically. Since they might differ in interests, their interaction needs coordination (Colombo *et al.*, 2017). Governance in EEs implies network-based mechanisms of self-coordination (Spigel, 2017). These mechanisms consist of network structures and of relational capital such as shared norms or shared mental representations (Scaringella & Radziwon, 2018; Kofler & Marcher, 2018). However, up-to-date governance mechanisms in EEs are not satisfactorily understood (Colombo *et al.*, 2017).

As for knowledge, nascent entrepreneurs need access to a wide variety of knowledge. This may be technological or managerial knowledge (Brown & Mason, 2017). Literature on EEs considers knowledge on how to start a business as decisive for entrepreneurial activity (Nicotra *et al.*, 2018). This is knowledge on the entrepreneurial process, on opportunity identification, pitching for investments and business planning. Long-standing entrepreneurs dispose of experiences that relate to a high degree of tacit knowledge, which might not be easily shared. Young entrepreneurs may access this knowledge through advice-seeking, which does not only mean receiving information, but also guidelines on how to interpret this information. Advice-seeking thus supports young entrepreneurs in learning (Glückler, Lazega & Hammer, 2017).

2.2.3 Purpose

In most cases, EEs are understood as supporting the emergence of entrepreneurship that exceeds the average, such as "ambitious entrepreneurship" or "high-growth" entrepreneurship (Neumeyer & Santos, 2018). In some contributions, however, the purpose of EEs is less ambitious and described as creating, discovering and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). Against this, a broad spectrum of entrepreneurship might be output of EEs, even everyday entrepreneurship (Neumeyer & Corbett, 2017). The least common denominator is that EEs' basic purpose is new venture creation (Autio & Levie, 2017). EEs are thus not defined by a certain type of successful businesses, but rather by successful interaction between systemic elements and their ability in providing a supportive environment for new venture creation (Spigel, 2017).

2.3 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Tourism

As mentioned, the body of literature on EEs in tourism is still small. Kline *et al.* (2014) found that representatives of the creative class (Florida, 2019) may induce EEs in rural areas. Flores, Pereira and Graça (2017) employed action research to induce knowledge transfer between privates, publics and academics and to prompt an EE in tourism. In a special issue on EE in tourism (Bachinger, Kofler & Pechlaner, 2020), Cunha, Kastenholz and Carneiro (2020) show how long-standing lifestyle entrepreneurs contribute to economic development in peripheral regions. In the same special issue on EE in tourism, Bichler, Kallmuenzer and Peters (2020) show how entrepreneurs, striving to achieve well-being, feed back into their local communities. This relates to research on tourism entrepreneurs' quality of life and its relation to business growth (Peters, Kallmuenzer & Buhalis, 2019) as well as to research on tourism entrepreneurs' role in the process of sustainability transition (Hoppstadius & Möller, 2018). Furthermore, two papers address the importance of smart technologies in EEs (Milwood & Maxwell, 2020; Eichelberger *et al.*, 2020), thus bridging the gap to research on smart-tourism destinations (Boes, Buhalis & Inversini, 2016; Errichiello & Micera, 2021) and the role of ICTs in tourism entrepreneurship (Mihalič & Buhalis, 2013). The following study links into this literature by exploring the characteristics of EEs in tourism.

3. Methodology

An empirical study was conducted in South Tyrol in 2017, 2018 and 2020, applying a qualitative research design. The sample region is the Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, being one of the top 20 regions in Europe in terms of overnight stays. In 2017/2018, more than 33 million overnights and nearly 7.5 million arrivals were recorded. The added value of accommodation and gastronomy accounted for 11.1% of the regional GDP in 2016 (ASTAT, 2019). In 2017, 20.1% (8.266) of enterprises in South Tyrol were in the hospitality industry, thereby generating a turnover of 2.7 billion euros (ASTAT, 2020). In general, compared to other sectors, there is a low number of start-ups in tourism – rather, the industry is characterised by company succession. However, quality in the sector has been steadily improved. Since 2016, tourism in South Tyrol has been governed by IDM (Innovation, Development and Marketing), a regional development agency that coordinates three sub-regional destination management units.

The authors decided to apply a qualitative strategy, as EEs are a new research field which needs an in-depth and inductive analysis. In total, 19 interviews were conducted with 8 entrepreneurs from 3 to 5* hotels; 1 general manager from an international hotel chain; 3 directors of local tourism associations; 2 heads of the destination management units; 1 head of a local DMO; 1 general manager of a wellness facility; 1 head of a regional development agency; 1 director of major cultural events and 1 architect, specialised in hotel construction. For sampling, the following criteria were considered: the geographical background (city vs. rural area) and the tourist intensity of the business location, the type of hotel, different levels of DMOs (local and regional), and inclusion of adjacent industries such as the cultural sector, the service sector and the creative industries. This approach of sampling was taken because due to the nature of tourism as a cross-sectoral industry, the tourism EE was expected to be heterogeneous, encompassing different actors - not only entrepreneurs, but also DMO managers and the cultural and creative industry. As argued by Saunders *et al.* (2018), there are different kinds of saturation. The present study reached thematic saturation, since it looked at all potential dimensions of EEs in tourism and involved a diverse field of perspectives. Hardly any new information could be gained from additional interviews.

On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes. They were integrally transcribed. The interview guideline covered three thematic blocks. The first block targeted the interviewees' notion of entrepreneurship, the second the framework conditions of entrepreneurship in tourism in general, and the final section

the drivers of entrepreneurship or systemic elements as conceptualised in figure 1. Questions were formulated very openly to elicit narrative answers.

The authors used WinRelan GABEK (Holistic Processing of Linguistic Complexity) based on the theory of linguistic "Gestalten" for data analysis following a distinct rule-based coding of interviews. In the first step, transcribed interviews were split into units of meaning and saved in digital index cards. Each card comprised sentences of a mental unit, containing three to nine keywords. Based on the codings, the key connections within the units of meaning were identified (Zelger, 2012). Hence, the complexity is reduced by drawing a netgraph of key terms that results from the texts. The result is a condensed perspective on a complex social situation based on an intersubjective traceability of results (Buber & Kraler, 2000). GABEK has been successfully used in the fields of regional and destination development (Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012) and hotel industry (Peters & Kallmuenzer, 2018).

4. Results: Characteristics of the Tourism Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (TEE) in South Tyrol

Data analysis provided a list of 2297 keywords, which were thematically clustered in a reduced shortlist of 605. Based on the analysis of the phenomenological relations between these keywords, a network graph was created representing the 3 levels of the EE introduced above (see figure 1). This network graph visualises how keywords are contextually related to each other, using a threshold of a minimum of six times that mental units were related to each other in the interviews. The lines are the connections between the keywords based on corresponding interview sentences. The thicker the line, the more often the two keywords were mentioned in combination with each other. The figure consists of three major parts (see Figure 2). On the left lower corner of the figure, resources appear that shape tourism activities, such as culture and landscape. These resources directly link to entrepreneurial activity. The same applies to the figure's upper right corner. Here, elements such as governance and networks appear. Both groups are attributed to the EE's "inside" or systemic elements (systemic conditions), because they link directly to entrepreneurial activity. In the lower right corner, elements such as mobility and access appear. They are framework conditions of the system and form the third group of elements in the graph. Numbers in the text below correspond to the frequencies with which the keywords are related to each other. Combined letters and figures in brackets relate to the source of information in the interviews. The three parts of the figure are now described in detail.

4.1 Framework Conditions of the TEE in South Tyrol

The framework conditions of the TEE comprise accessibility, mobility, security, attractiveness, politics, influence or influenceability (see Figure 2). Attractiveness is a core element, according to the interviewees, as it motivates guests to visit the destination: "*If South Tyrol would not be attractive as a touristic destination […] then our business would be anything but easy (A41)*". The same applies to the destination's accessibility, as it is necessary for the customer to reach the destination of South Tyrol. Close to this comes the issue of mobility. Interviewees consider this one of the most important elements of the framework, especially because the region suffers from traffic problems and related difficulties in mobility. Another basic framework condition is security. In this context, interviewees point at the guests' increased security requirements due to, for example, migration, terrorism or the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the region of South Tyrol is an important framework condition. In this context, interviewees emphasise the importance of the region's brand on the one hand, and the region's identity and the population's sense of unity on the other. Both factors, according to them, contribute to the region's capacity to innovate. Accordingly, the term South Tyrol connects with innovation. Close to South Tyrol as a region, interviewees mentioned the area's political set-up, and especially the autonomy of South Tyrol as an Italian province, as a relevant framework condition. The term "influence" hints at the fact that interviewees attribute framework conditions a considerable amount of influence on

entrepreneurial activity. The term "influenceability", in turn, emphasises that framework conditions can hardly be shaped by tourism.

4.2 Systemic Elements of the TEE in South Tyrol

Important systemic conditions of the TEE are landscape, culture, governance, networks and employees (see Figure 2). Respondents perceive the region's landscape as a unique resource: "*The landscape makes us very special, so that it clearly shapes us*" (G62). The perception of South Tyrol as a destination is thus significantly influenced by its landscape: "*I think the landscape is the main argument why guests come to South Tyrol*" (H16). In the phenomenological analysis, landscape is furthermore strongly connected to the region of South Tyrol (n=9). Interestingly, though, landscape has no relevant connection to framework conditions. Similarly, culture (n=4) is an element that is innately important for tourism (D09, D30, J17, K34): "*Culture as both, cultural landscape and history, plays a crucial role for tourism*" (I18). Respondents refer to culture as shared tradition, history and language. Landscape and culture, furthermore, form a unity:

> *But I believe that what makes entrepreneurial activity in tourism possible in the first place is our culture and the landscape we have*" (D09).

Landscape, as respondents put it, influences culture and culture influences landscape, leading to those cultured landscapes South Tyrol is known for. Both shape tourism in South Tyrol. Culture, like landscape, does not maintain direct links to the framework conditions.

Governance is another important element in the systemic conditions. When asked how network governance emerges, respondents attribute responsibilities to DMOs:

> *IDM has to be responsible for tourism marketing activities.... That means that the important impulses, the governance and the foresight, needs to be driven by IDM* (D21).

Furthermore, public administration and governments are held responsible for governing the system:

> *Yes, I would like to say, that all the political institutions that influence on companies are, in my view, responsible for creating a favourable framework for a company to be able to operate* (C18).

Tasks such as protecting South Tyrol's landscape as an important tourism resource fall within the scope of governance: "*The landscape is of course also the task of governance*" *(G62*). All in all, governance not only moderates framework conditions but also impacts positively on entrepreneurial activity (F17, G37, J14).

Furthermore, networks constitute a noteworthy element in systemic conditions. Respondents hint at the fact that a great number of partners participate in producing tourism products "*like the accommodation businesses (...), provincial government, the DMO (IDM) as well as the private actors (...) and the lift companies"* (K06). Interestingly, however, it is not only tourism businesses which support entrepreneurial activity. Instead, cross-industry contacts induce innovation. A special importance, in this context, have creative industries:

> *Now there is a strong input from culture, which is becoming stronger and stronger, so I do believe that stakeholders who are more distant from tourism always have a greater influence on what innovation looks like* (S08).

Additionally, networks enable tourism businesses to share knowledge (A45).

> *Networks have the great advantage that you exchange with several people from different levels and different areas. That brings quite a lot of knowledge to the table. From my point of view, knowledge is also a basis for entrepreneurial activity (*J14).

Interestingly, respondents highlight the important role of long-standing entrepreneurs. Respondents acknowledge them as mentors for young entrepreneurs:

> *But configuring young and old, experienced and innovative, that's what it's all about in the end... And it's not so much about doing that through the companies, but configuring the companies in such a way that you bring young and experienced people together (Q25).*

Asked about how networks emerge, interviewees see networks as promoted by governance (n=7) and established and maintained by DMOs (A25):

> *IDM was conceived as a network and control element that makes it possible for all actors in tourism to act accordingly* (D22).

Furthermore, employees are seen as an important "production factor" in the creation of the service-driven tourism product (A14, B04, C31, E04, K22):

> *Entrepreneurial activity is not only driven by the entrepreneur but also by the employees. Employees will become a very distinct factor within the next years (B03).*

4.3 Outputs of the TEE in South Tyrol

The main issue on the output level is entrepreneurial activity (EA). In Figure 2, EA is highly linked to systemic conditions with important connections to networks, governance, resources, enterprises and employees. An interesting aspect is that the interviews mention "future" in relation to entrepreneurial activity. In the interviews, it becomes clear that the core of entrepreneurial activity in tourism is taking on responsibility for future generations by creating innovative products, goals and strategies in order to maintain the (mostly family-owned) enterprises.

Accordingly, respondents describe types of sustainable entrepreneurship as the system's output. They highlight the impacts of tourism, which "*directly and indirectly affects almost all areas in our country*" (A06). Simultaneously, being aware of tourism's impacts, they feel concerned about preserving local resources (G62). At the same time, the interviews show that entrepreneurial activity in tourism is innovative:

> *...but to continue work as successfully as we already do, entrepreneurs are needed, and innovative concepts* (K02).

Lastly, a third type of entrepreneurship emerges from the interviews. This is collaborative entrepreneurship, or, as one respondent puts it:

> *So these small businesses all work together. And if something goes wrong, it goes wrong for everyone. If something goes well, then it's good for everyone* (G10).

4.4 Overall Characteristics of the TEE in South Tyrol

Figure 2 represents the full graph of the TEE in South Tyrol. This means that all results are displayed from all three layers, that is framework conditions, systemic conditions and output of the TEE. The results show a high degree of connectedness between the systemic conditions and the entrepreneurial activity. Compared to this, connections between framework and systemic elements, framework and entrepreneurial activity appear a little weaker. On the systemic level, the term tourism seems the central one. It connects framework, systemic conditions and output and interlinks to almost all other systemic elements. Another important element is governance. Like the term "tourism", it connects to some aspects of the framework conditions and brokers their relation to the outcome of entrepreneurial activity. Lastly, resources such as landscape take on an important role.

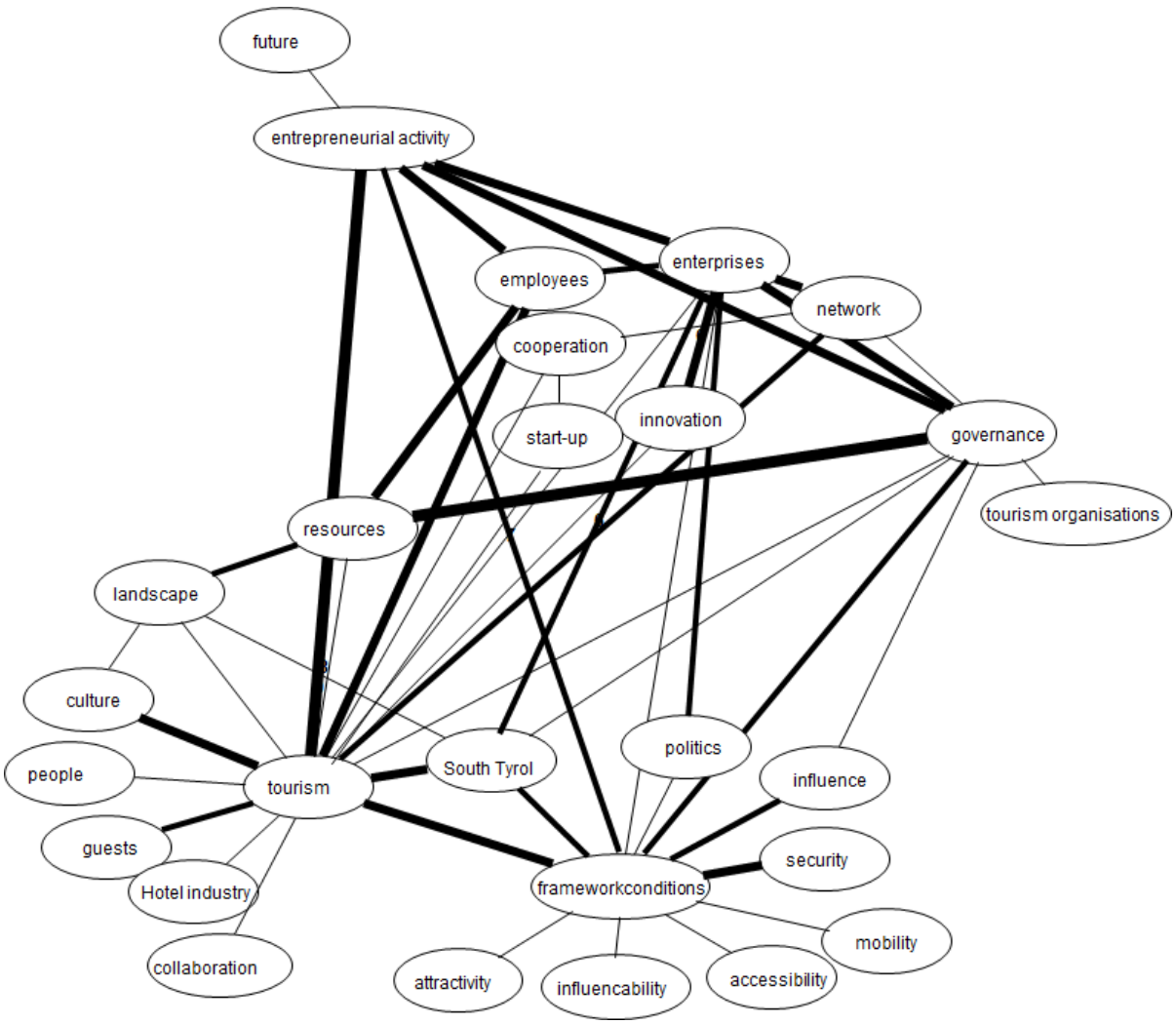

Figure 2. *Results of GABEK analysis on characteristics of an EE in tourism based on interviews in South Tyrol*

5. Discussion

From theory, it has been deduced that there is mutual interaction between entrepreneurship and EEs: EEs promote entrepreneurship as combinations of social, political, economic and cultural elements. On the other hand, entrepreneurs contribute to shaping EEs. The focus is on innovative businesses, if not on high-growth start-ups. Entrepreneurial individuals are key players in EEs. Special importance is given to successful entrepreneurs who, with their experience and knowledge, shape EEs and encourage new start-ups. Networks have been identified as a key mechanism of interaction. According to the model deduced from Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021), three levels of TEE were looked at in this paper; that is framework conditions, systematic conditions and outputs. Furthermore, the characteristics of EEs have been looked at from a systemic perspective in order to gain insights into the specificity of the evaluated EE in tourism. The two research questions were: To what extent does the evaluated EE in tourism correspond to the model of EEs deduced by Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021)? Do the systemic qualities of the EE in South Tyrol justify talking about a tourism-specific EE? These two questions are now discussed.

5.1 Similarities and Dissimilarities between Model and TEE

The first research question on the elements of the TEE in South Tyrol can be answered by reporting similarities, but also differences between the evaluated EE in tourism and the model by Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021). Starting with similarities, results show that for the largest part, the elements of the model are verified for tourism. However, some elements differ in their meanings or change their position in terms of the layers they are attributed to. Some others are missing and thus could not be verified as relevant in tourism.

At the level of framework conditions, all three elements of the model are confirmed. Interviewees mention formal institutions (politics) and culture, as well as physical infrastructure (accessibility and mobility). However, the contents of the elements differ in relation to the model. As regards the formal institutions, respondents emphasise the legal autonomy of the province of Bolzano as an important feature. In fact, the special statute of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano provides a large autonomy in the field of tourism: The province is not only responsible for regional planning, but also provides financing. Autonomy allows tourism to act according to competitive requirements. Next, interviewees mention the element of physical infrastructure by referring to the destination's accessibility and the mobility of guests. Interestingly, while in tourism mobility is an integral part of the customer journey, respondents see mobility as the frame of their ecosystem. This is because the main source markets are outside the country (Germany, Switzerland) and therefore parts of the touristic mobility and accessibility relate to territories which cannot be influenced by tourism actors in South Tyrol.

Next, the model attributes the element of "culture" to the framework conditions. In the interviews, respondents also mention culture. However, they attribute this element not to framework, but to the systemic conditions due its direct influence on tourism activity. They relate the term "culture" to terms such as tradition, history, and language. If all three are taken together, the term "culture" comes close to concepts such as "sense of belonging" or regional identity. Indeed, it may be argued that the social cohesion in a territory may serve as a driver for cooperation and networking. Shared language, norms and values might thus form a normative basis for successful cooperation, which in turn is a pre-condition for tourism, which profits from inputs from a great number of different stakeholders.

Looking at the level of systemic conditions, some of the model's elements are missing in the interviews. Interviewees mention networks and knowledge, demand (guests), talent (employees) and leadership as part of governance. However, they do not mention the elements of finance and intermediaries. Of the

elements mentioned, networks and governance are the most important ones. As for networks, interviews indicate that networks not only provide for coordination in tourism production but also enhance communication and learning. The governance of these networks is attributed to DMOs. According to the interviews, DMOs need to take on the task of controlling networking and joint learning. This means, for example, confining risks of out-learning as a necessary pre-condition of networking and knowledge sharing. Secondly, DMOs are to develop visions and marketing for the destination. They are thus expected to practice leadership and to take on strategic tasks. In this, tourism differs visibly from the model by Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021). Whereas leadership and guidance is attributed to experienced entrepreneurs there, in tourism, these tasks are taken on by DMOs – which, for the most part, are publicly financed.

Furthermore, the element "landscape" plays a special role. In the model of Stam, it does not appear on its own but is subsumed into the element of physical infrastructure. Contrary to this, in the interviews landscape forms a key factor for tourism activity. Landscape is conceived as a valuable tourism resource. Its protection is given high priority. Interestingly, landscape disposes of direct links to the element of "culture". It is the landscape as formed by traditional cultivation over centuries that is so attractive for visitors. Preservation of local knowledge on landscape, regional techniques and skills are therefore of special importance.

Other elements on the systemic level are missing in the interviews: The element "finance" is mostly neglected by the interviewees, as well as "intermediaries". It seems that the acquisition of financial capital is not of paramount importance or even problematic to entrepreneurs in South Tyrol. However, some interviewees see difficulties in running indebted businesses. As for intermediaries, the respondents see them as supporting the endeavours and tasks of regional DMOs. Comparing this to literature, it becomes clear that business associations like the hotel association do play an important role in South Tyrol: Kofler and Marcher (2018) found that the most central actors in South Tyrol's innovation network were business associations and location managements, which act as knowledge brokers. Table 1 summarises these findings.

5.2. Sector-Specificity of the TEE in South Tyrol

According to literature, systems emerge by differentiating themselves from their environment. This differentiation emerges from operations. Secondly, by autopoetically reproducing these operations, boundaries emerge which discriminate system and environment from each other. Third, by conducting their operations, systems target specific purposes. In the following, results from the interviews are evaluated with regard to the question as to whether operations, boundaries and purpose are specific to the extent that talking of a tourism-specific EE might be justified.

5.2.1. Shifts across Boundaries

As deduced from literature, those elements that directly support business formation form the system's core. These elements are, for example, networks of entrepreneurs, knowledge, but also leadership. According to the introduced model by Stam (2015) and Stam and van de Ven (2021), seven elements belong to the system's "inside". These are networks, demand, intermediaries, talent, knowledge, leadership and finance. The "outside", or the framework, is instead characterised by elements that support entrepreneurship indirectly. Here, according to the model, elements such as the entrepreneurial culture play a role, as well as institutions and physical infrastructure (see figure 1). The question is whether the evaluated TEE lives up to the model's description of "inside" and "outside". If so, the TEE would have exactly the same boundaries as generic, non-specific EEs would have. Sector specificity would not apply.

Table 1. *Similarities and Dissimilarities of the Evaluated EE in Tourism compared to the Model*

		Model of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems	**Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Tourism**
Framework Conditions	*Similarities*	Formal institutions: The rules of the game in society, in particular the quality of government, corruption, rule of law, government effectiveness and voice & accountability.	Formal Institutions: quality of political and administrative setting, degree of regional autonomy with regard to planning and financial means.
		Physical Infrastructure: Position of a region, accessibility via road, accessibility via railroad, accessibility via airports	Physical Infrastructure: shaped outside own territory, accessibility for source markets important
	Dissimilarities	Culture: entrepreneurial culture, the degree to which entrepreneurship is valued	Culture: Regional Tradition and Lifestyle
		Demand: Potential market demand, purchasing power per capita, regional product, total human population	Landscape: Important production factor, cultured landscapes Demand: factor outside own territory, tourism profits from international source markets
Systemic Elements	*Similarities*	Networks: Connectedness of businesses for new value creation, Percentage of firms in the business population that collaborate for innovation	Networks: networks as precondition for service production and knowledge sharing
		Leadership: Leadership that provides guidance for and direction of collective action	Leadership: DMOs provide guidance and develop shared vision
		Talent: Prevalence of individuals with high levels of human capital	Talent: Employees as key resource, qualified staff as bottleneck
	Dissimilarities	Networks: Governance mechanisms are not made explicit; cooperation of network partners as main mode of interaction.	Networks: coordination and governance by DMOs of pivotal importance Governance as important function of DMOs
		Leadership: Importance of experienced entrepreneurs	Leadership: Importance of public hands
		Knowledge: Investments in new knowledge, investments in R&D	Knowledge: Knowledge sharing as byproduct of networking
		Intermediaries & Support Services: The supply and accessibility of intermediate business services, Percentage of business service firms in the business population	Intermediaries: DMOs as key players, flanking role of industry associations
		Finance: The supply and accessibility of finance for new and small firms	Finance: hardly mentioned
Outputs	*Dissimilarities*	High-growth entrepreneurship, productive entrepreneurship, ambitious entrepreneurship	Innovative and sustainable entrepreneurship, cooperative entrepreneurship

Note: Model description according to Stam (2017)

Results show some differences in how boundaries in the TEE emerge. In literature on EEs, "physical infrastructure" is mostly attributed to the system's framework conditions. In this study, respondents do not attribute landscape to framework conditions, but to systemic elements, which directly influence entrepreneurial activity. The same applies to the element "culture". In EE literature, the element is

attributed to framework conditions. In the interviews, "culture" constitutes an important systemic element, which directly triggers entrepreneurial activity. However, whereas in EE literature "culture" is related to entrepreneurial culture, respondents refer to it as shared tradition, history and language. Slight shifts across the model's original boundaries are therefore attested. However, they are rather small.

5.2.2. Governance and Networks as Central Parts of TEEs' Operations

In EE literature, networks and leadership constitute main system operations. The question is whether the same applies for the TEE. Results show that this is the case for networks, to a lesser extent for leadership. According to respondents, "governance" constitutes the most important process for ensuring the system's functions. This is evident in the phenomenological analysis. The term "governance" not only links with almost all systemic elements such as culture or landscape, but also has significant impacts on the system's output, i.e. entrepreneurial activity. Governance, however, includes more than the "leadership" as mentioned in the model. In particular, governance means establishing rules and norms for cooperation in networks. In this, the operations in the TEE take on somewhat different features than those described in the model.

Networks are the second factor respondents acknowledge as shaping the system's operations. Networks are significant for several reasons. First, because of the composite nature of tourism products: Many stakeholders contribute to tourism products and therefore need networks as a tool for communication and cooperation. Furthermore, as seen in the results section, networks enable joint learning and knowledge generation – which in turn enhance the businesses' ability to innovate and stay competitive. Here, model and results from the study match each other. Summarising this, the investigated TEE diverges from the model in the importance of governance as main operation. It therefore could be assumed that the TEE's operations take on different qualities than EEs in other industry sectors.

5.2.3 Types of Entrepreneurship as TEEs' Outputs

Different systems produce different outputs. If the investigated TEE was sector-specific, it should yield specific outputs. Indeed, contrary to EE literature, interviewees do not refer to high-growth entrepreneurship as the system's output. Instead, respondents describe sustainable entrepreneurship as an output of the TEE. They emphasise tourism's responsibility for managing impacts on society and environment. Similar to findings in Bichler *et al.* (2020), Peters *et al.* (2019) and Hoppstadius and Möller (2018), they highlight the importance of regional embeddedness of tourism entrepreneurs. Additionally, respondents mention two other types of entrepreneurship: innovative entrepreneurship and collaborative entrepreneurship. Also here, as in its operations, the TEE therefore diverges from the model. Talking of a sector-specific output might be justified.

6. Managerial Implications

Against this backdrop, implications for fostering EEs in tourism may be deduced. Results show that DMOs play an important role in governing networks in tourism EEs. DMOs thus contribute to business development and entrepreneurial activity in tourism. They are more than marketing organisations. This could be acknowledged more intensively and lead to a more pronounced political support of DMOs. Secondly, products in tourism come about network-based. Networks of tourism businesses are involved in the generation of tourism products. The same applies to innovation. Here also, networks of businesses drive innovation, rather than single actors alone. As a consequence, when fostering EEs in tourism, business networks should be placed centre-stage. Third, as seen in this study, tourism entrepreneurship is closely interlinked with local culture and landscape. This calls for a more intense cooperation between tourism and other fields of action such as regional development or nature

protection. Indeed, these actors need to be considered as integral parts of the system's inside, or the regional tourism network. Lastly, it has been shown that the EE in tourism exhibits great similarities to the underlying model. Furthermore, tourism often not only comprises tourism actors but profits from cross-sectoral inputs, especially from the creative class, museums, architecture or others. Therefore, postulating a sector-specific approach for fostering EEs needs cautious consideration. It could be that supporting a general, cross-sector ecosystem might be more appropriate. However, further insights into the characteristics of EEs in tourism are necessary, since this study relates to findings from one region only.

7. Conclusion

EEs are considered as promoting entrepreneurial activity. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and its partly devastating effects on tourism, fostering EEs in tourism could support regional resilience strategies. However, up to now, hardly any knowledge has been accumulated on how EEs in tourism look like. This paper addressed the questions as to what features characterise an EE in tourism and whether the results justify identifying a tourism-specific EE. To answer these questions, an introduced model was examined and a systems approach was applied, looking at the EE's boundaries, operations and purposes. The study thus contributes to EE literature by linking it more strongly to core concepts of systems theory. The research questions were answered by evaluating 19 interviews using a qualitative approach. The TEE researched broadly corresponds in its characteristics to findings from general EE literature. However, there are also differences in some features. The system's purpose is not high-growth entrepreneurship, but sustainable and collaborative entrepreneurship. Networks of businesses play an important role. Second, unlike what is stated in EE literature, governance is executed by public bodies, in particular DMOs. These organisations therefore need to be acknowledged as crucial for business development. The elements of culture and landscape do not constitute framework, but systemic elements in tourism, serving as resources for entrepreneurial activity. Tourism actors therefore need to network more intensively with regional development agencies and nature protection. Against this background, it was not possible to clearly determine whether the results justify identifying and supporting the development of sector-specific EEs in tourism.

8. Limitations

EEs are unique and idiosyncratic, regardless of whether they relate to tourism or other industries. Like EE, TEE have to be considered as highly path-dependent and shaped by historical and institutional developments. Furthermore, elements of TEE may change in significance throughout the TEE's development stages. Therefore, the results of this study may be generalised to a limited extent only. Instead, a rough picture is drawn here of how a tourism-specific EE looks and, based on that, which features might be typical in the context of this industry. Against this, more case studies are needed in different regions in order to obtain a picture that is more generalisable.

Furthermore, in research on EEs, territorial borders of the geographical research area are usually delineated top-down, that is administratively (Isenberg, 2010; Stam & van de Ven, 2021; Kline *et al.*, 2014). This study follows this approach as it sets South Tyrol, as an administrative region, as the research area. However, there are other ways of defining boundaries. According to systems theory, boundaries emerge where a system's operations differ from the environment. The present study identified networks as an important system operation and thus a potential criterion for delineating boundaries. This corresponds to Colombo *et al.* (2017), who see the EEs' boundaries where businesses no longer invest in mutual relationships. However, deeper insights into how networks emerge and work in EEs are needed.

References

Acs, Z. J., Stam, E., Audretsch, D. B. & O'Connor, A. (2017). The lineages of the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach. *Small Business Economics*, 49, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9864-8

Altmann, P. (2017). Social Sciences between the Systems: The Ecuadorian University between Science, Education, Politics and Economy. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, *29* (1), 48–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/0260107916674075

ASTAT (2020). Klein- und Mittelbetriebe [statistical report on small and medium-sized tourism businesses], Retrieved from https://astat.provinz.bz.it/de/aktuelles-publikationen-info.asp?news_action=4&news_article_id=642176

ASTAT (2019). Klein- und Mittelbetriebe – 2016 [statistical report on small and medium-sized tourism businesses], online at https://astat.provinz.bz.it/de/aktuelles-publikationen-info.asp?news_action=4& news_article_id=632742

Alvedalen, J. & Boschma, R. (2017). A critical review of entrepreneurial ecosystems research: towards a future research agenda. *European Planning Studies*, 25 (6), 887-903. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2017.1299694

Autio, E. & Levie, J. (2017). Management of entrepreneurial ecosystems. In Ahmetoglu, G. Chamorro-Premuzic, T. Klinger, B. and Karcisky, T. (Eds.). *The Wiley Handbook of Entrepreneurship*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 423–449.

Bachinger, M., Kofler, I. & Pechlaner, H. (2020). Sustainable instead of high-growth? Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 238-242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.07.001

Baggio, R., & Sainaghi, R. (2011). Complex and chaotic tourism systems: Towards a quantitative approach. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 23(6), 840-861. https://doi.org/10.1108/09596111111153501

Bassano, C., Pietronudo, M.C. & Piciocchi, P. (2018). The Use of Smart Tourism Systems to Improve the Destination's Appeal: A Case Study from Caserta in Italy. In Camilleri, M.A. (Ed.) *Tourism Planning and Destination Marketing* (pp. 239-259), Emerald Publishing Limited, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78756-291-220181012

Bausch, K. C. (2015). Luhmann's Social Systems: Meaning, Autopoiesis, and lnterpenetration. *International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 14, 390–395.

Bichler, B. F., Kallmuenzer, A. & Peters, M. (2020). Entrepreneurial ecosystems in hospitality: The relevance of entrepreneurs' quality of life. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44,152-161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.06.009

Björk, P. (2014). The DNA of Tourism Service Innovation: A Quadruple Helix Approach. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 5(1), 181–202. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-014-0183-x

Boes, K., Buhalis, D. & Inversini, A. (2016). Smart tourism destinations: ecosystems for tourism destination competitiveness. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 2 (2), 108-125. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-12-2015-0032

Brown, R. & Mason, C. (2017). Looking inside the spiky bits: a critical review and conceptualisation of entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Small Business Economics*, *49*(1), 11–30. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9865-7

Borlido, T. & L. Coromina (2018). Social capital as cause and consequence of rural touristic development: The case of Lindoso (Portugal). *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 19, 71-85. https://ejtr.vumk.eu/index.php/about/article/view/326/329

Buber, R. & Kraler, C. (2000). How GABEK and WinRelan Support Qualitative Research. InBuber, R. & Zelger, J. (Eds.). *GABEK II. On Qualitative Research*. Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 111–137.

Cavallo, A., Ghezzi, A. & Balocco, R. (2018). Entrepreneurial ecosystem research: present debates and future directions. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, *15*, 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-018-0526-3

Cunha, C., Kastenholz, E. & Carneiro, M. J. (2020). Entrepreneurs in rural tourism: Do lifestyle motivations contribute to management practices that enhance sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems? *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 215-226. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.06.007

Colombo, M.G. Dagnino, G.B., Lehmann, E.E. & Salmador, M. (2017). The governance of entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Small Bus Econ,* 52,419–428. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9952-9

Eichelberger, S., Peters, M., Pikkemaat, B. & Chan, C. S. (2020). Entrepreneurial ecosystems in smart cities for tourism development: From stakeholder perceptions to regional tourism policy implications. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 319-329. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.06.011

Errichiello, L. & Micera, R. (2021). A process-based perspective of smart tourism destination governance. *European Journal of Tourism Research,* 29, 2909. https://ejtr.vumk.eu/index.php/about/article/view/2436/498

Flores, A., Pereira, E. & Graça, H. (2017). Entrepreneurial ecosystems: Knowledge transfer to and within Tourism. *Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice*, *8*, 97–111. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2042-144320170000008007

Florida, R. (2019). The Rise of the Creative Class. Hachette Book Group, New York.

Glückler, J., Lazega, E. & Hammer, I. (2017). Exploring the Interaction of Space and Networks in the Creation of Knowledge: An Introduction. In Glückler, J., Lazega, E. & Hammer, I. (Eds.). *Knowledge and Networks. Knowledge and Space*. Springer: Cham, 1-21.

Gomes da Costa, T., Teixeira, N. M. & Lisboa, I. (2019). Perceptions of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Tourism Sector. In Gomes da Costa, T., Lisboa, I., & N. Teixeira (Eds.). *Handbook of Research on Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Internationalization*. IGI: Global, Hershey, 157-177.

Hoppstadius, F. & C. Möller (2018). 'You have to try being a role model' – Learning for sustainability among tourism entrepreneurs in a Swedish biosphere reserve. *European Journal of Tourism Research,* 20, 28-45. https://ejtr.vumk.eu/index.php/about/article/view/338/342

Isenberg, D. J. (2010). The big idea: How to start an entrepreneurial revolution. *Harvard Business Review, June 2010*. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2010/06/the-big-idea-how-to-start-an-entrepreneurial-revolution

Kline, C., Hao, H., Alderman, D., Kleckley, J. W. & Gray, S. (2014). A Spatial Analysis of Tourism, Entrepreneurship and the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in North Carolina, USA. *Tourism Planning and Development*, *11*(3), 305–316. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2014.890127

Kofler, I. & Marcher, A. (2018). Inter-organizational networks of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the field of innovation: a case study of South Tyrol. *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, *30*(1), 9–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.2017.1401202

Kofler, I., Marcher, A., Volgger, M., & Pechlaner, H. (2018). The special characteristics of tourism innovation networks: The case of the Regional Innovation System in South Tyrol. Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 37, 68-75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.09.004

Malecki, E. J. (2018). Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Geography Compass*, *12*(3), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12359

Mihalič, T. & Buhalis, D. (2013). ICT as a new competitive advantage factor – case of small transitional hotel sector. *Economic and Business Review*, 15 (1), 33-56.

Milwood, P. A. & Maxwell, A. (2020). A boundary objects view of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 243-252. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.06.008

Neumeyer, X. & Corbett, A. C. (2017). Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Weak Metaphor or Genuine Concept? A*dvances in the Study of Entrepeneurship, Innovation and Economic Grow*th, 27, 35–45. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1048-473620170000027005

Neumeyer, X. & Santos, S. C. (2018). Sustainable business models, venture typologies, and entrepreneurial ecosystems: A social network perspective. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 172, 4565-4579. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.08.216

Nicotra, M., Romano, M., Del Giudice, M. & Schillaci, C. E. (2018). The causal relation between entrepreneurial ecosystem and productive entrepreneurship: a measurement framework. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, 43,640-673. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-017-9628-2

Novelli, M., Schmitz, B. and Spencer, T. (2006). Networks, clusters and innovation in tourism: A UK experience. *Tourism Management*, 27(6), pp. 1141–1152. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2005.11.011.

Pechlaner, H. & Volgger, M. (2012). How to promote cooperation in the hospitality industry: Generating practitioner-relevant knowledge using the GABEK qualitative research strategy. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *24*(6),925–945.

Peters, M. & Kallmuenzer, A. (2018). Entrepreneurial orientation in family firms: The case of the hospitality industry. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(1), 21-40.

Peters, M., Kallmuenzer, A. & Buhalis, D. (2019). Hospitality entrepreneurs managing quality of life and business growth. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22 (16), 2014-2033. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2018.1437122

Prats, L., Guia, J., & Molina, F. X. (2008). How tourism destinations evolve: The Notion of Tourism Local Innovation System. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 8(3), 178–191. https://doi.org/10.1057/thr.2008.24

Prebensen, N. K., Vittersø, J. and Dahl, T. I. (2013). Value Co-Creation Significance of Tourist Resources. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 42, pp. 240–261. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ANNALS.2013.01.012

Romero-García, L.E., Aguilar-Gallegos, N., Morales-Matamoros, O., Badillo-Piña, I. & Tejeida-Padilla, R. (2019). Urban tourism: a systems approach – state of the art. *Tourism Review*, 74(3), 679-693. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-06-2018-0085

Scaringella, L. & Radziwon, A. (2018). Innovation, entrepreneurial, knowledge, and business ecosystems: Old wine in new bottles? *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 136, 59-87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2017.09.023

Scott, N., Baggio, R. & Cooper, C. (2011). Network Analysis Methods for Modeling Tourism Inter-Organizational Systems, Woodside, A.G. (Ed.), *Tourism Sensemaking: Strategies to Give Meaning to Experience* (pp. 177-221). Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, https://doi.org/10.1108/S1871-3173(2011)0000005011

Saunders, B. Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bertlam, B. Burroghs, H. & Jinks, Clare (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity* 52(4), 1893-1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Spigel, B. (2017). The Relational Organization of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, 41(1), 49–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12167

Spigel, B. & Harrison, R. (2018). Toward a process theory of entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 12 (1),151-168. https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1268

Stam, E. (2015). Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Regional Policy: A Sympathetic Critique. *European Planning Studies*, 23(9),1759–1769. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2015.1061484

Stam, E. (2017). Measuring Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, U.S.E. Discussion Paper Series Nr: 17-11, Utrecht University, Retrieved from: https://www.uu.nl/sites/default/files/rebo_use_dp_2017_1711.pdf

Stam, E. & van de Ven, A. (2021). Entrepreneurial ecosystem elements. *Small Business Economics5, 6, 809–832.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00270-6

van der Zee, E. & Vanneste, D. (2015). Tourism networks unraveled; a review of the literature on networks in tourism management studies. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 15, 46-56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2015.03.006

Vargo, S. L. & Lusch, R. F. (2006). Service-Dominant Logic: What It Is, What It Is Not, What It Might Be. In Lusch, R. F. & Vargo, S. L. (eds) T*he Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing: Dialog, Debate, and Directions*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 43–56.

Varvaressos, S. (2018). Framework for Tourism Industries: Tourism System and Tourism Value Chain, Sotiriadis, M. (Ed.) *The Emerald Handbook of Entrepreneurship in Tourism, Travel and Hospitality* (pp. 19-31). Emerald Publishing Limited, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78743-529- 220181002

Weidenfeld, A. (2013). Tourism and cross border regional innovation systems. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 42, pp. 191–213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.01.003

Zelger, J. (2012). GABEK as a method to compare systems of opinions, assessments, and attitudes of social groups. In Schober, P., Zelger, J. & Raich, M. (Eds.). *GABEK V. Values in organizations and society*. Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, pp. 27–80.

Received: 26/07/2021
Accepted: 10/11/2021
Coordinating editor: Stanislav Ivanov