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Enhancing inclusive entrepreneurial activity through community engagement led by higher education institutions

Inclusive
entrepreneurial
activity

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Abstract

Purpose – While supporting entrepreneurship through government intervention has become a global phenomenon, the OECD (2021) has identified that several communities (including women, youth, seniors, unemployed and immigrants) remain under-represented in terms of entrepreneurial activity. Inclusive entrepreneurship policies seek to enhance economic and social inclusion and emphasise the significant contribution that people from within these communities could make to local and regional development if appropriate support was offered. The purpose of this study is to examine how higher education institutions (HEIs) can co-create inclusive entrepreneurial training initiatives with local communities that support economic and social inclusion.

Design/methodology/approach – This in-depth qualitative study draws on the experiences of multiple stakeholders to highlight how an HEI can enhance entrepreneurial activity within under-represented and disadvantaged communities through its community engagement initiatives. The research was conducted through a revelatory case study of an Irish HEI that is newly constituted and is developing an inner-city campus with a focus on community benefit. Rich qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation of an HEI community engagement initiative with disadvantaged communities. Thematic analysis methods were used in the processes of generating codes, categories and themes leading to the findings of this study.

Findings – The study identified that broadening the interpretation of entrepreneurial activity to value creation and developing enterprising behaviour has significant relevance for disadvantaged communities. These communities may not have the capacity to start a business yet might benefit from the personal development aspects of entrepreneurial education. Moreover, findings indicate how HEIs are uniquely positioned to develop inclusive entrepreneurial education initiatives to redress social inequalities in their regions.

Originality/value – As an original contribution to knowledge, this paper extends traditional education frameworks to identify individual, collective and system-level considerations in the design and development of inclusive entrepreneurial education initiatives. This study contributes an evidence-based framework to guide HEIs and their regional partners in the future development of inclusive, tailored support through entrepreneurial education.

Keywords Social inclusion, Entrepreneurial education, Inclusive entrepreneurship, Disadvantaged communities, Higher education community engagement

Paper type Research paper



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Introduction

In recognising the importance of entrepreneurship for economic and societal development, governments and policymakers have paid increasing attention to fostering entrepreneurial activity (GEM, 2023). Recently, the concept of an “entrepreneurial ecosystem” has been advanced in the academic literature and generally refers to the dynamic and mutually reinforcing environment between a community of interdependent actors that supports entrepreneurial activity (Isenberg, 2011; Spiegel, 2017). Whilst public policy differs between regions and each national or regional entrepreneurial ecosystem is unique, it is broadly agreed that there are some common pillars within such entrepreneurial ecosystems which include: a conducive culture, finance availability, quality human capital, appropriate market conditions and a wide range of supports. Universities are one of the key stakeholders within entrepreneurial ecosystems, and there has been explosive growth in entrepreneurship education and training across the global higher education landscape (Pittaway, 2021). Traditionally, entrepreneurship education had a strong business or new venture creation orientation, fostering the skills needed to develop entrepreneurial start-ups in a commercially oriented context (Neck and Corbett, 2018). Contemporary entrepreneurship education has become increasingly attentive to engendering a broader set of entrepreneurial competencies within individuals (Zaring *et al.*, 2021; Antonelli *et al.*, 2023), and so the term “entrepreneurial education” is used to capture the wider perspective (Lackéus, 2015). This wider approach to entrepreneurial education (EE) necessitates a shift in focus from purely venture creation to value creation and from becoming entrepreneurs to becoming entrepreneurial through the development of competencies and skills (Baggen *et al.*, 2022). By focusing on developing transferable competencies such as self-reliance, creativity, initiative-taking and collaboration, such active learning approaches encourage individuals to behave in an enterprising fashion as a consumer, citizen, employee or self-employed person in society (De Wet and Tselepis, 2020; Cooney and Brophy, 2023). This broadens the relevance of entrepreneurial activity to a wider variety of people in many different contexts (Blenker *et al.*, 2012). Crucially, this broader perspective is inclusive, and it embraces heterogeneity and differences (Welter *et al.*, 2017).

Recent years have also borne witness to a closer alignment between higher education and society, with many higher education institutions (HEIs) embracing their “third mission” of community engagement (Benneworth *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, the broader societal contribution of higher education is an increasingly prominent topic in the policies and programmes of universities, national governments and transnational institutions (Farnell, 2020). Higher education community engagement can be seen as one of the main processes through which universities implement social responsibility (Larrán Jorge and Andrades Peña, 2017) by addressing economic, social and environmental issues for the benefit of communities, regions and societies (Klofsten *et al.*, 2019). Higher education community engagement is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept that may be applied to a vast range of activities and initiatives, but a particularly interesting perspective is to be found in the emerging research nexus between higher education community engagement and entrepreneurial activity (Dodd *et al.*, 2022).

There is now greater recognition of the need for tailored support for under-represented and disadvantaged communities (e.g. immigrants, people with disabilities, marginalised youth) in terms of entrepreneurial activity, a viewpoint which has been promoted most evidently by a series of biennial reports from the OECD on “Missing Entrepreneurs” (e.g. OECD, 2023). In recent times, some HEIs have been addressing this need through the development of tailored initiatives that support entrepreneurial activity in disadvantaged communities (Wang, 2021). However, such approaches predominantly focus on a narrow

interpretation of entrepreneurial activity as start-up or new venture creation, which may not be suitable for all disadvantaged communities. Arguably, broadening the interpretation of entrepreneurial activity to value creation and developing enterprising behaviour has more relevance for communities that may not have the capacity to start a business, yet might benefit from the personal development aspects of EE.

To date, the academic literature provides little evidence regarding how HEIs might provide broader more inclusive entrepreneurial support in disadvantaged communities and this article seeks to address this research gap. Firstly, to establish the theoretical foundation, the article is positioned across three distinct discourses (literatures):

- (1) higher education community engagement;
- (2) entrepreneurial education; and
- (3) disadvantaged communities and entrepreneurial activity.

Through a process of “synthesised coherence” (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997), relevant constructs from several theories are integrated into the development of an eclectic framework (Davidsson, 2016) to investigate the key considerations for HEIs in this area. Subsequently, the framework is empirically explored through a revelatory case study of an HEI that has been newly constituted and is currently developing a new inner-city campus which has a focus on community benefit. Finally, the article presents an evidence-based framework (formed through multi-stakeholder insights) which identifies the critical factors that influence the development of inclusive, tailored EE initiatives. The framework will act as a practical guide to support HEIs in the future development of such initiatives.

Theoretical foundation

The theoretical foundation for this article is positioned at the intersection of three topics of literature (discourses). The insights garnered from this confluence of disparate topics enabled the development of an original framework that offers HEIs the opportunity to create more inclusive entrepreneurial initiatives for disadvantaged communities that enhance personal development and social cohesion.

Higher education community engagement

The engagement of HEIs with external communities to address societal challenges has gained increased prominence in recent times (Farnell, 2020). Higher education community engagement is often referred to as the “third mission” of an HEI which describes a wide range of activities (Rubens *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the literature offers various classifications, typologies, models and component frameworks to support the assessment of higher education community engagement (Fink, 2018). For example, the Holland Framework (Holland, 2001), the Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Elective Classification, n.d) and the TEFCE Toolbox (Farnell *et al.*, 2020) have been developed as frameworks for institutional self-reflection for community engagement in higher education (O'Brien *et al.*, 2021). Further insight into some of these HEI community engagement frameworks is provided in Table 1.

Whilst community engagement is understood as the collaboration between HEIs and their various communities, the study of community engagement between HEIs and disadvantaged and socially excluded communities is infrequently explored (European Commission, 2022). However, a definition of higher education community engagement emerged which acknowledged the challenges that some societal groups may experience

Table 1.
Exemplar university
engagement
frameworks

Framework	Synopsis	Reference
Holland Framework	Early institutional planning tool for community engagement, influential in subsequent development of international tools. Identifies foundational elements of community engagement including mission, faculty involvement, student engagement, institutional infrastructure and mutually beneficial partnerships. Acknowledges several stakeholders: university management, faculty, students and community partners	Holland (2001)
Carnegie Elective Classification of Community Engagement	An elective category within the Carnegie Classification system (USA). The engaged university category is an assessment tool judged according to the degree of collaboration between HEIs and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. Includes comprehensive indicator sets for institutional identity and culture, institutional commitment to community engagement, curricular engagement and outreach and partnership. Both curricular engagement and outreach and partnerships have placed importance on the engagement of academic staff	Carnegie Elective Classifications (2024)
Hazelkorn Framework	A framework that categorises different models of engagement based on distinct societal objectives – social justice, economic development or public good. Acknowledges that different societal objectives will result in different communities being identified as university’s primary partners. Leading to different responses and policies	Hazelkorn (2016)
TEFCE Framework	A European qualitative framework organised around seven recognised thematic dimensions of community engagement (Teaching and Learning, Research, Service and Knowledge Exchange, Students, University-level Engagement Activities, Institutional Policies and Supportive Peers). Guides users through a process to identify community engagement practices at their institution and then encourages participative discussions with multiple stakeholders to guide university strategy. Acknowledges the context-specific nature of community engagement	Farnell <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Source: Authors’ own work		

when engaging with higher education. [Benneworth *et al.* \(2018, p.17\)](#) defined higher education community engagement as:

A process whereby HEIs engage with community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial, even if each side benefits in a different way.

Within this definition, Benneworth *et al.* acknowledged that there are a set of societal groups for whom engagement with HEIs may be challenging. More generally, the types of communities which do not habitually engage with universities are those that are typically socially weaker, may be socially excluded, and do not have the resources to readily and

easily engage with universities. This definition specifically describes engagement as engagement with community stakeholders, and implicitly acknowledges the complexities of this type of engagement. Previously, [Shaheen \(2016\)](#) identified the use of EE in community settings as one form of support for disadvantaged communities that could lead to individual and regional development. More recently, [Wang \(2021\)](#) called for further critical reflection on higher education's role in regional and community development through EE and consideration of more inclusive and equitable practices, an appeal that is addressed in this article.

Entrepreneurial education

According to [Jones and Iredale \(2010\)](#), enterprise education should not be confused or mistaken for entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education has a narrow focus on the processes and practicalities of how to start a business and it is often taught via the development of a business plan. In contrast, enterprise education takes a broader approach in developing the “capabilities” and “potential” of individuals to adapt to changing circumstances and the associated “behaviours” and “skills” needed to function effectively as a consumer, citizen, employee or self-employed person in society. Enterprise education is largely promoted through an enterprising perspective ([Jones and Iredale, 2010](#)) and aims to develop students' entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes ([Gibb, 2002](#)), regardless of their future occupation ([Jones and Iredale, 2014](#)). To integrate the different approaches, [Erkkilä \(2000\)](#) proposed the unifying term “entrepreneurial education” as encompassing both entrepreneurship and enterprise education. Researchers such as [Lackéus \(2015\)](#) have argued for a progression model for EE and activity that begins with developing enterprising behaviour, followed by a subsequent focus on the creation of more specific entrepreneurial capabilities. Understanding how learning entrepreneurial activity can occur has been studied by many researchers (e.g. [Lackéus, 2020](#); [Williams Middleton et al., 2020](#); [Bridge, 2023](#); [Lynch and Corbett, 2023](#)), but how it transpires amongst disadvantaged communities has been scarcely researched ([Cooney, 2021](#)).

Disadvantaged communities and entrepreneurial activity

A series of OECD reports on “Missing Entrepreneurs” (e.g. [OECD, 2023](#)) has sought to identify the key challenges faced by potential and nascent entrepreneurs from under-represented communities. In these reports, the “missing entrepreneurs” have been identified as belonging to the following communities: women, youth, seniors, unemployed, immigrants and people with disabilities. [Galloway and Cooney \(2012\)](#) highlighted the adversities facing “silent minorities” and identified gay, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and ex-offender communities as also being disadvantaged in terms of entrepreneurial activity. Although disadvantaged communities have been identified as a major source of untapped entrepreneurial potential, recent studies by researchers such as [Brush et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Cowell et al. \(2018\)](#) have identified that disadvantaged communities are significantly under-represented in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Furthermore, these disadvantaged communities each have additional and distinctive challenges in developing their entrepreneurship activities that have yet to be fundamentally addressed through existing entrepreneurial ecosystems ([Cooney and Licciardi, 2019](#)).

Some broad conclusions have been generated across the literature concerning the challenges that disadvantaged communities face when engaging in entrepreneurial activity, and these include a lack of necessary skills and training, a lack of appropriate access to finance, an absence of mentoring and advice and a lack of role models ([O'Brien and Cooney, 2021](#)). Structural issues such as systemic racism or excessive economic and social inequality

may also be experienced (Piketty, 2020; Prieto *et al.*, 2021). Deficits in the level and type of social capital and social networks in disadvantaged communities may also be a contributing factor (Williams *et al.*, 2017). The OECD “Missing Entrepreneurs Report” (2023) identified the following common problems faced by disadvantaged groups when engaging in entrepreneurial activity:

- access to financial markets;
- acquiring entrepreneurship skills;
- access to entrepreneurial networks; and
- access to an entrepreneurial culture.

Furthermore, Finlayson and Roy (2019) argued that support for entrepreneurial activity that originates outside disadvantaged communities and is facilitated by external actors is potentially disempowering, and instead, these supports should be community-led or co-created.

It is now widely acknowledged that disadvantaged communities require customised support in developing their entrepreneurial activity (e.g. Dodd *et al.*, 2022). The contemporary literature has extended this as a crucial construct for consideration in the learning of entrepreneurship in disadvantaged communities (O'Brien and Cooney, 2021). Emerging practice in the study of disadvantaged communities and entrepreneurial activity identified that capacity building was a key element of support (Bruce and Sørensen, 2023). Capacity building values knowledge production in the community and moves away from deficit-based models of engagement (Rawsthorne and de Pree, 2019), while Berglund and Johansson (2007) adopted a Freirean humanistic perspective (Freire, 1972) in the development of inclusive EE in marginalised communities to foster entrepreneurial potential. Overall, the inclusive nature of entrepreneurial activity recognises that entrepreneurial capacity and potential reside more broadly in society, but supporting it needs to be multifaceted and inclusive of community leadership. The literature has also highlighted that there is a dearth of knowledge in understanding the interaction between HEIs, disadvantaged communities and the learning of entrepreneurial activity.

To address the research gap at the intersection of the three topics of literature reviewed, this study integrated theoretical insights from across the three fields (Ravitch and Riggan, 2017). In this way, the study adopted an interdisciplinary perspective to understand a complex social phenomenon (Haigh *et al.*, 2019) which led to the identification of the study's research question: *How can higher education institutions utilise community engagement to support the learning of entrepreneurial activity in disadvantaged communities?* An empirical study was designed to gain insights into the critical success factors in the development of inclusive EE initiatives that would lead to the answering of this question.

Methodology

Research design

Given the eclectic theoretical foundation and interdisciplinary nature of this study, a critical realist perspective (Sayer, 2010) was adopted which sought to identify the “causal mechanisms” or “causal pathways” by which inclusive EE initiatives may be achieved (Ylikoski, 2018, p. 3). Developing a deep understanding of causal mechanisms may be facilitated through qualitative research methods (Derbyshire and Machin, 2021; Bonell *et al.*, 2022). According to McDonald *et al.* (2015), qualitative methods can provide a deep understanding of the norms, practises and contexts of entrepreneurship. Moreover, case study as a qualitatively orientated research approach has a long history in higher education

studies (Harland, 2014; Bettinson *et al.*, 2023; Kinuthia, 2023). The case study method has been deemed especially appropriate when exploring emerging topics, particularly in instances where existing theory seems inadequate. Thus, in this study, the choice of a qualitative case study was deemed apposite for exploring the research question through primary inquiry. The research followed a revelatory case study (Yin, 2014) of an Irish HEI with a long history of engagement with its local community to understand the critical factors that influence the development of inclusive, tailored EE initiatives. This approach is deemed effective in situations where the state of the art is emergent rather than established (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011).

The Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) and its local communities

Technological University Dublin is Ireland's first technological university and was formally established in 2019 following the merger of three existing institutes of higher education with a history stretching back over 130 years. One of the largest universities in Ireland, it has over 28,500 students and offers pathways to graduation from apprenticeship through to doctoral level across a wide variety of disciplines. The three amalgamating institutions had a strong record of engagement and partnership with their many constituencies in the community across the greater Dublin region and the newly constituted university has amplified this tradition. Technological University Dublin has an entrepreneurial and engaged ethos, and one of the primary goals of its wider engagement mission is to provide accessible opportunities to those who are economically or socially disadvantaged.

TU Dublin is developing a greenfield 73-acre unified campus located at Grangegorman in Dublin's north west inner city. The new development has been ground-breaking in Ireland in its innovative approach of putting community benefit at the heart of the infrastructural development. The Grangegorman neighbourhood is vibrant and diverse with strong communities and active citizens. Despite small pockets of affluence, many parts of the neighbourhood experience socio-economic disadvantage. A series of reports (Central Statistics Office, 2016; Haase and Pratscheke, 2017; GDA, 2020) identified that the Grangegorman area has higher than national average figures for ethnic diversity, unemployment and lone parent as a family type, plus all the schools (except one) in the area are designated as "disadvantaged". A recent study by O'Brien *et al.* (2020) noted that the new campus at Grangegorman offers significant potential to change the fortunes of the area through enhanced community engagement between Technological University Dublin and the local population.

TU Dublin has a 30-year history in EE including pedagogical innovations in the classroom environment, technology transfer and incubation facilities. While EE initiatives originated within the faculty of business, EE modules and courses are now offered across each of the university's five faculties. In addition, TU Dublin's Growth Hub initiative focuses on supporting extracurricular activities that encourage the development of entrepreneurial skills and competencies. More recently, TU Dublin has developed EE initiatives for disadvantaged communities both online and in person on a one-by-one basis without theoretical knowledge and insight. This study sought to develop a framework to guide this process.

The establishment of Ireland's first technological university combined with the development of a new HEI campus in an inner-city community provided a unique opportunity for this study. Driven by international, European Union, national and regional policy, TU Dublin is seeking to become an anchor institution in fostering economic well-being and social cohesion in the neighbourhood. The case study of TU Dublin, with contributions from regional stakeholders (including local communities), provided a rich and

fertile ground for exploring the critical factors that influence the development of inclusive, tailored EE initiatives.

Data collection

A key strength of the case study approach is the flexibility and adaptability that allows single or multiple methods of data collection to be used to investigate a research problem (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). Three data collection phases were used in this study by one of the authors, and these were participant observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Phase 1: Participant observation. Schon (1987) argued that valuable tacit knowledge can be gained through immersion in observational education practise. The first phase of data collection involved participant observation of an HEI community engagement initiative that was established by TU Dublin. Over several months the researcher was fully immersed in the Irish Pre-Texts initiative, a simple and flexible teaching/learning tool developed at Harvard University which focuses on literacy, innovation and citizenship. TU Dublin sought to work with local community groups and educators to address some of the stark socio-economic facts of disadvantage within the local community at Grangegorman. Participants included academics, teachers, artists, prison educators, youth workers and community activists and a community of creative educators was formed. Pre-texts were introduced in a variety of community settings including prison, literacy education, ethnic groups, youth, women's recovery and refugee programmes (O'Brien, 2021).

Participant observation informed the study in several ways. Firstly, the participant observation helped identify key stakeholders (Hall and Persson, 2018) both within the HEI and local community. Subsequent to the researcher's immersion in Pre-Texts, and based on the rapport and trust built in a naturalistic fashion (Milano *et al.*, 2019), three of the members of the community of creative educators agreed to be interviewed as stakeholders during Phase 2 of data collection. Through these three members, an additional four stakeholder participants were interviewed. In total, 7 of the 15 stakeholders interviewed resulted from the participant observation of Pre-texts. In addition, the researcher's analytical reflections (McNiff, 2016) during observation informed the theme sheet for interviews. Finally, the exploratory nature of the participant observation (Swedberg, 2020) enabled the researcher to assess the feasibility of the study and yielded insights that the research was seeking to address.

Phase 2: Stakeholder interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used in the second stage of data collection as this technique "is particularly good at enabling the researcher to learn, first-hand, about people's perspectives on the phenomenon under study" (Davies and Dwyer, 2007, p. 259). In addition to the snowball sampling, as described earlier, purposive sampling was extended to identify participants for this study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this case study, the purposive sample included 15 experts from several stakeholder areas (policymakers, enterprise support, government agencies, entrepreneurial educators within the HEI and within the community, community engagement practitioners, entrepreneurs, representatives and advocates of disadvantaged communities) deemed necessary to provide relevant stakeholder insight.

The background and experience of the interview participants are shared in Table 2. The interview process enabled the generation of rich descriptions which provided a deep understanding of the development of inclusive EE initiatives. Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 min (65 min on average) and all interviews were recorded. Drawing insight from multiple data sources to gain varying stakeholder perspectives on inclusive EE further facilitated study data triangulation (Natow, 2020).

Stakeholder ref.	Gender	Position	Area of expertise	Years in profession
SH-1	M	CEO, community area partnership	Micro enterprise support, Dublin region	30
SH-2	F	Deputy head, enterprise and economic development, local regional authority	Strategic economic and enterprise development, Dublin Region	25
SH-3	M	Senior manager, higher education authority	Engagement and inclusion within higher education	17
SH-4	F	Entrepreneur and entrepreneurial educator	Irish entrepreneur and prison entrepreneurial educator	23
SH-5	F	Social justice enterprise manager	Social enterprise and disadvantaged communities	24
SH-6	F	CEO, inner-city enterprise	Entrepreneurial training and support to disadvantaged communities	26
SH-7	F	Entrepreneurship lecturer (university)	Lecturer in entrepreneurship and regional development	22
SH-8	F	University engagement project lead	Leader of HEI community engagement initiative	20
SH-9	M	University engagement officer	Project management inter- university community engagement	9
SH-10	M	University senior management	Director of community engagement division	30
SH-11	M	Engagement outreach co- ordinator	Community engagement practitioner	28
SH-12	M	Traveller and Roma community educator	Traveller (ethnic minority) representative and educator	25
SH-13	F	Teacher/artist education service to prisons	Advocate and expertise in education for under-represented groups	22
SH-14	F	Senior policy adviser – national disability authority	Policy and advocacy for disabled community	10
SH-15	F	Social inclusion co- ordinator	Representative and support service for socio-economic disadvantaged groups	23

Table 2.
Stakeholders profile

Source: Authors' own work

Phase 3: Document analysis. Context is deemed a key consideration in both EE (Maritz and Brown, 2013) and higher education community engagement (Farnell, 2020). To gain an understanding of contextual issues in this study, a variety of documents were gathered from stakeholder participants. These included policy documents, annual reports, strategic plans and brochures. In addition, the researcher collected publicly available documentation in the form of websites and social media sites. Guided by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), document analysis in this study also served as a form of data triangulation.

Data analysis

The approach to data analysis was based on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The nature and flexibility of thematic analysis make it a suitable data

analytical strategy in case study research design (Peel, 2020). The analytical strategy involved discrete phases of analyses which were conducted across several stages as defined by Braun and Clarke (2013). These phases involved several cycles of coding, managing codes, categorisation and subsequent data reduction through consolidating codes into a more abstract theoretical framework (themes) (Bazeley, 2009). NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 12, 2019) qualitative data analysis software (QADAS) was used in the study to assist in the analysis process (see Figure 1).

Adopting a case-study research strategy facilitated the use of multiple data collection techniques to provide in-depth insight leading to study findings. Table 3 provides a summary of the study's data sources and research phases outlining how each source contributed to analysis and informed study findings. Gathering data in this way enabled real insight and experience to be gained from study participants to further understand this nascent research field. The use of multiple data collection techniques as opposed to a single data collection method such as semi-structured interviews was deemed critical for this study given the need to understand the phenomenon from the perspectives of those within the HEI, ecosystem and disadvantaged communities and importantly to provide context. Context is deemed a key consideration in both EE and HEI community engagement (Laing and Maddison, 2007, Maritz and Brown, 2013; Thomassen *et al.*, 2019).

Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skills and the data themselves (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Figure 2 represents a thematic map of the study. The process was an iterative and reflective process that developed over time and involved a constant moving back and forth between phrases.

Findings

The subsequent section presents the principal findings of the research, in which seven meaningful themes were generated from the data gathered and deemed critical factors for consideration in the development of inclusive EE initiatives. The themes are explored in detail in Table 4 and illustrated with fragments of the narrative or "power quotes" (Pratt, 2008). This is followed by a discussion of the themes interpreted from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Understanding

The study findings identified that disadvantaged communities may benefit from support in developing broader entrepreneurial competencies related to enterprising behaviour. However, initiatives must be guided by an understanding of the type of entrepreneurial activity being supported with clear program goals and objectives. It was identified that there is a paucity of initiatives to support the development of entrepreneurial potential in disadvantaged communities. Incrementally building confidence and learning to express entrepreneurial activity may act as a precursor to new venture creation (entrepreneurial behaviour) and social cohesion, but given the additional challenges that disadvantaged communities may experience, inclusive community EE initiatives require different approaches to EE within an HEI.

Teaching and learning

The teaching and learning theme reflected important education-related elements in the design of inclusive EE initiatives. There was an emphasis on pedagogy, location and the inclusion of a steering committee in program development. Disadvantaged communities may be considered as non-traditional learners and community-based

Figure 1.
Analytical hierarchy
to data analysis

education requires a flexible and responsive learning approach. An active, participative and experiential pedagogical/andragogical style with a student-centred focus was deemed appropriate. Initiatives should consider a co-located delivery and the inclusion of a steering committee involving appropriate stakeholders during the program design.

Table 3.
Data sources and
research phases

Data sources	Detail	Informed findings	Time span
1. Participant observation	Pre-Texts 3 phases of participant observation (observation notes and reflexive journaling)	1. Informed theme sheet for interviews and researcher discussion in interviews 2. Guided researcher on new learning theory for disadvantaged communities 3. Embedded researcher within the case site and associated networking provided access to highly experienced and relevant practitioners for interview	12 months
2. Interviews	15 expert interviews 4 knowledge areas (interview duration 40–90 min, average 65 min)	1. NVivo-assisted thematic analysis – case node created for each knowledge expert and interview commentary. 2. Annotations linked interview data to emerging themes 3. Data extracts coded allowing patterns of meaning to generate themes 4. Several cycles of coding assisted by Nvivo tool enabled transparent analytical process	4 months
3. Document analysis	Policy documents, legal acts, annual reports, system performance reviews, strategic plans	1. NVivo assisted content analysis leading to integration into relevant themes 2. Provided context in support of findings within thematic analysis	3 months

Source: Authors' own work

Partnership

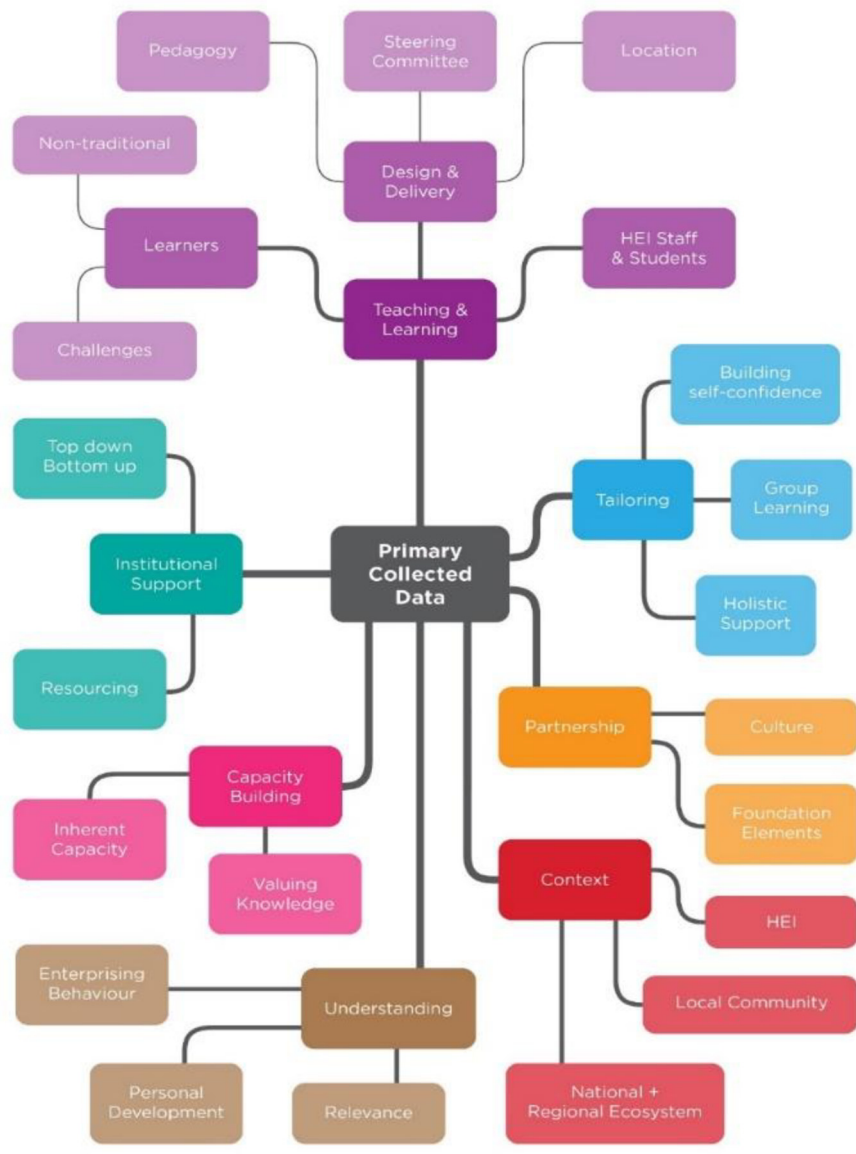
In its essence, the partnership theme encompassed the elements for consideration in the relationship between an HEI and a disadvantaged community through the process of community engagement. Community engagement partnerships must be premised on mutual benefit and reciprocity where both community and HEI objectives are met. This can be challenging and intercultural understanding between partners can assist relationship development.

Capacity building

The capacity-building theme explored the inherent entrepreneurial potential that resides within disadvantaged communities and identified how it might be supported. Building upon this capacity requires HEIs to value community experience and knowledge and academic knowledge equally. This may be achieved through co-creation approaches which move away from deficit-based models of engagement.

Tailoring

Beyond the education challenges discussed in the teaching and learning theme, the study identified additional and distinctive challenges experienced by disadvantaged communities in expressing entrepreneurial activity. Lack of self-confidence or self-esteem was deemed a significant challenge. HEIs have knowledge and information to support communities through inclusive EE, but it must be accessible and tailored.



Source: Author's own work

Figure 2.
Study thematic map

Institutional support

The institutional support theme encompassed the institutional mission and infrastructure within higher education that supports community engagement. Study findings indicated that inclusive EE initiatives require resourcing and management support to be grown and

Theme (related literature)	Findings	Representative study quote
<i>Understanding</i> Blenker <i>et al.</i> (2012); Shaheen (2016); Baggen <i>et al.</i> (2022)	• The broader concept of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity has relevance and value for disadvantaged communities • Expressing entrepreneurial activity may be a precursor to entrepreneurship in business/ economic context • Community education requires different approaches to entrepreneurial education within an HEI	<i>“To talk about this as entrepreneurship in a purely business sense, you are frightening people. . .it needs to welcome the way you are being creative, endorse your way of thinking is good and give space to reflect and discuss that is safe and secure.” (SH, #15)</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i> Holland (2001); McAteer and Wood (2018)	• Different education considerations required for community learners • Disadvantaged communities may be non-traditional learners • Initiatives require flexible, active, subjective and person-centred pedagogy • Appropriate staff and initiative location (co-located) should be considered • A steering committee to provide guidance and advice should be established	<i>“It is important that it wouldn’t be something that is just developed by academics, you would need input from representatives of disadvantaged communities and other stakeholders – some sort of steering committee.” (SH, #7)</i>
<i>Capacity building</i> Robinson and Hudson (2013); Rawsthorne and dePree (2019)	• Enterprising potential or creativity may be untapped through capacity-building approaches • HEIs must equally value community knowledge and academic knowledge • Initiatives that are co-created can build upon the inherent entrepreneurial potential in disadvantaged communities	<i>“There is something about your world view as a disabled person that can benefit others. I think being able to untap that creativity, that way of viewing or doing would give some people a huge sense of themselves. There is no end to the potential.” (SH, #14)</i>
<i>Tailoring</i> Cooney (2021); Wang (2021); OECD (2023)	• Disadvantaged communities require tailored support in developing their entrepreneurial potential • HEIs have knowledge and expertise to support but it must be accessible	<i>“Tailored initiatives are important - they recognise the multiple disadvantages that our community [ethnic minority] experiences such as lack of confidence, illiteracy, skills deficits.” (SH, #12)</i>

(continued)

Table 4.
Study findings

Theme (related literature)	Findings	Representative study quote
<i>Partnership</i> Holland (2001); Benneworth <i>et al.</i> (2018)	- Involving learners within HEI and community is a unique offering from an HEI - Partnership between a community and HEI is a foundational element - Community engagement partnerships are premised on mutual reciprocity - Intercultural considerations required by all stakeholders - Inclusive of community, industry, enterprise support and HEI partners	<i>"In terms of the university community engagement, it is important that mutually supportive objectives are being achieved."</i> (SH, #10)
<i>Institutional support</i> Holland (2001); Farnell (2020)	- Appropriate HEI resource and workload allocation models can support community engagement - Initiatives that fit within an HEI mission more likely to be supported - Institutional support required for initiatives to grow and be sustained	<i>"If the university is going to do it, they have to fund it and the resources need to be there, activities may grow from the bottom-up, but they require top-down support."</i> (SH, #7)
<i>Context</i> Maritz and Brown (2013); Benneworth <i>et al.</i> (2018)	- Community engagement is context specific linked to HEI mission, history, location, national and international policy - Community learners, educators, outcome and program objectives also require contextualisation consideration	<i>"This is a porous place, it belongs to the area. When you are on the "university" campus, it is not about creating an ivory tower. . . it is trying to create a sense of community."</i> (SH, #11)

Source: Authors' own work

Table 4.

sustained. This may be supported through faculty workload allocation models that prioritise community engagement. Community engagement initiatives that fit within an HEI's mission or objectives and address an unmet need have a higher propensity to be supported.

Context

The study identified the need for the consideration of context (from the perspectives of the HEI, the community and other stakeholders) in the design of inclusive EE initiatives. Community engagement is context-specific arising from HEI mission, history and location, in addition to national and international policy. Community learning from the perspective of learners, educators and program goals also requires consideration of context.

Resulting from the additional and distinctive barriers experienced by disadvantaged communities (e.g. lack of self-confidence), this study identified the relevance of the learning of entrepreneurial activity for disadvantaged communities. It was found that an anticipated outcome of inclusive EE initiative would be “personal development”. As suggested by SH #4: “this would enable somebody to become a more rounded individual for whatever their next pursuit might be”. As observed across this study and captured by SH #14, holistic personal development through entrepreneurial activity initiatives may serve as a “starting point. ...it may in the longer term encourage them [disadvantaged communities] to see that business is not for others but for them as well”. While in the long-term inclusive EE initiatives may build capacity for entrepreneurial behaviour or as a potential bridge to entrepreneurial activity, in the short-term building confidence through personal development was deemed relevant for individuals in their everyday lives, communities, sports teams or for labour market activation and employment and social cohesion. As noted by SH #8:

I think if people have the opportunity to build skills that build confidence, which is the biggest thing you probably lack, and build a sense of self sufficiency and a sense of capacity and agency. I think that's really important. And then obviously if you can bring in money, then that's even better. But I actually think all those other things are much more important. And then building on those you can, jump off somewhere else.

Discussion – An evidence-based framework

Much prior work on the learning of entrepreneurial activity has been focused as happening within HEI locations (Neergaard *et al.*, 2020), but this study explores how HEIs can extend EE to disadvantaged communities through community engagement. The evidence-based framework presented in Figure 3 was constructed through an iterative and recursive process moving forward and backward between theory, case study and empirical findings (Dubois and Gadde, 2014). Dubois and Gadde (2014) define this as “systematic combing” in case study design whereby “theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis evolve simultaneously” leading to integrated theory development and higher conceptual and contextual understanding. The development of the framework occurred through a comparison of the study findings with the extant literature, leading to the overarching contribution of this study.

The framework acknowledges that supporting the learning of entrepreneurial activity takes place within the broader context of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and HEI education policy which is illustrated in the outer two circles. The needs of disadvantaged communities in developing their entrepreneurial potential have yet to be fundamentally addressed through existing entrepreneurial ecosystems (O'Brien *et al.*, 2019, OECD, 2023), but this study identified that HEI-led inclusive EE initiatives can add to the continuum of existing supports within an entrepreneurial ecosystem. As noted by SH #3:

This [entrepreneurial activity initiative] could give people a sample, a taste, a confidence building piece which would be really helpful for underrepresented groups to feel that they belong and have every right to aspire to [...] it may lead to a fuller commitment to a mainstream program at a later stage.

Crammond (2019) identified the importance of stakeholder engagement in developing EE within HEIs. Extending EE to disadvantaged communities requires the inclusion of multiple stakeholders. Building upon the Quadruple Helix model (Carayannis and Campbell, 2009), the formation of a steering committee comprising of entrepreneurial educators (HEI), community educators, community representatives, enterprise support agencies, entrepreneurs and

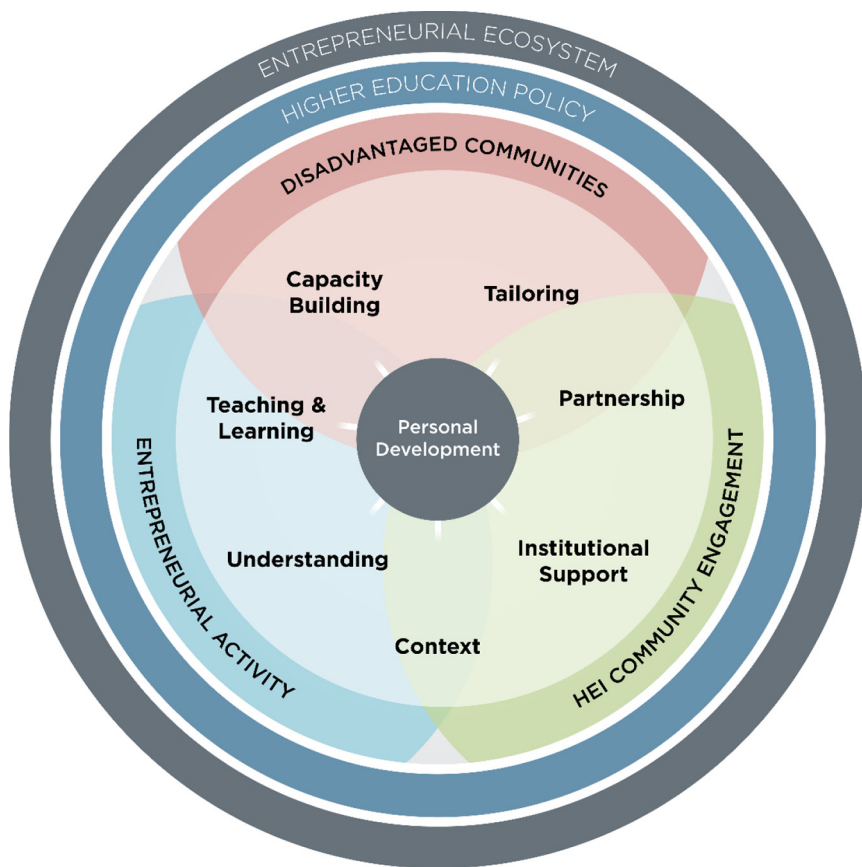


Figure 3.
Factors for
consideration in the
design of inclusive
tailored
entrepreneurial
education initiatives

Source: Authors' own work

community engagement practitioners may guide the design of community-based entrepreneurial activity programmes. Macro HEI policies may also influence the development of inclusive EE initiatives through consideration of the civic engagement of universities. In the context of this study, European and national higher education policies were broadly supportive of enhanced higher education engagement with disadvantaged communities (e.g. [European Commission, 2017](#)). Such policies identified the important role of HEIs in local and regional development, in addition to meeting some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

At the intersection of the three distinct discourses (which is illustrated in the central area of the diagram) are located the seven crucial success factors identified through the primary research that may influence the development of inclusive, tailored EE initiatives. These are understanding; teaching and learning; capacity building; tailoring; partnership; institutional support and context. They are titled “crucial success factors” as they are the key matters that an HEI, together with its community partners and stakeholders, would need to consider and decide upon.

This study extends the research on HEIs, entrepreneurship and underserved communities (Wang, 2021) by definitively identifying that EE has relevance and value for disadvantaged communities. Entrepreneurial education frameworks used within higher education (Maritz, 2017) remain relevant for disadvantaged communities (who experience barriers to acquiring and developing entrepreneurial skills). However, initiatives must be contextualised towards local community needs with a focus on personal development and growth through active, experiential pedagogy or andragogy (Jones *et al.*, 2014). Adding new knowledge to existing frameworks, this study identifies the importance of the inclusion of capacity building as a construct for consideration in inclusive EE. Moving beyond deficit models of education or community engagement (Rawsthorne and de Pree, 2019), inclusive EE initiatives should acknowledge the “huge potential and creativity that is present in disadvantaged communities” (SH #14). This may be facilitated through a co-creation approach whereby an HEI and community stakeholders would work together in a partnership spirit of mutual benefit and reciprocity (McAteer and Wood, 2018; Thomsen *et al.*, 2018). This study enhances this discourse by identifying the need for collaborative tailored provision supporting the learning of entrepreneurial activity in disadvantaged communities. As summarised by SH #10: “given its nature[. . .] a one size fits all won’t work. I think it must be tailored”.

Central to the framework is the principal outcome that is anticipated from any such community engagement initiative. Personal development refers to the classical ambition of universities to educate individuals. The focus on under-represented communities directs attention to groups of learners that hitherto have previously not received sufficient attention from universities. As highlighted by SH #14:

It may in the longer term encourage them to see that business is not for others but for them as well, but this would be a precursor to that [. . .] but no one has done that for them [disadvantaged community].

Conclusion

A growing chorus has argued for a broader understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity (e.g. Drakopoulou Dodd *et al.*, 2023) with meaning beyond a business or economic benefit. Wang (2021) suggested that such repositioning needs to be inclusive, particularly of those in the periphery of society. In discussing the purpose of higher education, acclaimed academic and President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins commented:

[...] universities are also part of our societies. What’s the point unless the accumulated knowledge, insight and vision are put at the service of the community? With privilege to pursue knowledge comes the civic responsibility to engage and put that knowledge to work in the service of humanity. (Higgins, 2012)

This perspective has global resonance as the debate around the purpose and role of higher education continues (Hazelkorn and Gibson, 2019). More recently, the European Commission (2022) has suggested that community engagement in higher education must promote diversity, equity and inclusion. This paper contributes to this debate by illustrating how HEIs, through collaborative partnership, can redress social inequalities in their region through community engagement. This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to the field of higher education by extending traditional education frameworks to identify individual, collective and system-level considerations in the design and development of inclusive EE initiatives. In answering the research question posed, an evidence-based

framework is presented which illustrates the recommendations to assist in program design, noting that good practise involves co-created education approaches that build capacity within disadvantaged communities. At a practical level, the framework can be considered as a broad set of guidelines that are open to interpretation by an HEI based on their mission, context, locality and region. At a broader societal level, this study identified that fostering the development of entrepreneurial activity within under-represented communities may also positively influence an HEIs engagement agenda, supporting regional development, local regeneration, widening access and social inclusion. While the study is limited by using a single in-depth case study, nonetheless, the primary focus of the qualitative approach was naturalistic generalisation and producing exemplary knowledge. Such knowledge does not see findings as generalizable to a population, but rather to a theory of the phenomenon being studied that may have wider applicability (Thomas, 2010). This study did not seek to conclude the research in this emergent area, but to contribute to knowledge that generates ideas for further investigation.

It has been argued that “to progress in terms of inclusiveness and diversity in higher education, it is necessary to do things differently” (European Commission, 2022, p. 15). This study has determined that the development of inclusive, tailored EE initiatives will enable HEIs to “reach beyond their walls and connect with communities in ways that are novel, challenging and impactful” (Goddard *et al.*, 2018, p. 5). At the beginning of the 21st century, the global and national landscape in which HEIs operate is changing dramatically. There is now an urgent need for HEIs to play a leading role in strengthening social inclusion in their region. The supportive role that HEIs can play in inclusive entrepreneurship identified in this paper offers a pathway for HEIs to progress this agenda.

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