

The incubation models and the deployment strategy: Cases of incubator and seedbed of companies

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Principal Topic

These two last decades, scientific research and more specifically research in the field of the entrepreneurship has been closely interested in the incubation phenomenon. At the beginning we attended the proliferation of descriptive approaches of the various models of the incubation phenomenon (Allen, 1985, Allen and David, 1985, Allen and Rahman, 1985), follow-up by evaluative approach of the incubation programme impacts on economic environment. And lately we attended the reproduction of the comparative approaches of the incubation programs both at the national level and at the international level between several countries.

The researchers sought to define "incubation" starting from description, from the analysis or from the understanding activities of the incubation structures, but they clearly did not define the structure studied. Starting from a literature review on incubation structures, Albert and Gaynor (2001) identified the various approaches research and various typologies of the incubation structures. Moreover the authors indeed showed that there's not a common universal definition of the terms "incubator" and "seedbed" with the various types of incubation structures.

Nevertheless with each terminology used we distinguish some specific actions of the actor's structure. Explicitly for each terminology we associate a specific logic of action which will be substantially different from the other corresponding to the other terminologies. These differences were almost omitted by the researchers who leaned their on the various facets study of the incubation structures.

However, some researchers tried to describe (Brooks, 1986, Cooper, Dunkelberg and Furuta, 1985, Allen and David, 1985, Allen and Rahman, 1985), to explain and to understand the incubation structures while trying to build the process of incubation by various methodological steps, without to clearly define the studied concept. However, it appears that a double theoretical consensus is advanced by the researchers of the field relating to the complexity of the process incubation and the variation of the process duration. Concerning the complexity of the process, it can be explained initially by the diversity of the actions which can be carried out during this process and which are depend on specificities of the customer requirements.

In the second place, this complexity can be explained by the difficulty in delimiting the sphere of activity of the structure studied. Actually there is a certain shift between what is done on the ground and what is advanced in the definition of the concept studied.

Concerning the variation of the duration of the process of incubation, it depends on the nature of the incubation services suggested for the carriers of projects and/or for the new entrepreneur. Indeed, incubation can be limited either to one period of accompaniment the potential entrepreneur during the creation process or over one period of follow-up of a company in launching phase, or it can be spread out over the two periods of accompaniment and follow-up. Subsequently, several logics of intervention different the one from the others can coexist on the ground and even in the same structure of incubation. The duration of incubation substantially varies from one case to another.

Methodology/Key Propositions

This theoretical approach of the process duration poses new problems. Indeed, there is not any theoretical framework which makes understand or to study the correlation which can exist between the intervention level of the incubation structure during the accompaniment process and the variables which can influence the deployment strategies of these structures on the ground. No study, to our knowledge, tried to explain why an actor will intervene on the whole of the incubation process and others on the contrary are focused on a single phase of the process.

However, following the fast development and the growth of diversities of business incubators some researchers chose to focus their research on the comprehension of the form, of the structure, the environment and the operation of only one category or type of incubator.

Indeed, as from the Nineties, various approaches evaluative (Allen and McCluskey, 1990, Sherman and Chappell 1998, European Commission, 2002, Lalkaka, 2001 and 2003) and comparative (Autio and Klofsten, 1998, Lalkaka, 2001 and 2003) of the incubation structures were answered. In parallel we attended some theorization attempts (Lewis, 2003, Scaramuzzi, 2002, Phan, Siegel and Wright, 2004) of the incubation structures performance. Nevertheless, these different analysing views (more or less quantitative) are not very interested in the explanatory variables of the intervention level of the structures in the incubation process. This report is important, considering the recent approaches whose appreciate the performance of the incubation structures turned to the analysis of their added values, without taking into account their experience, their competences, the influence play of the actors and partners, the sector maturity of the entrepreneurship support, i.e. the whole of the variables which can influence their organization modes and their deployment strategies and their development strategies.

Results and Implications

The object of this paper is to propose a theoretical framework, basing on the scientific thought in the field of the entrepreneurship. This framework allows us understand the logic of action of the project incubation structures (incubators) and the companies incubation structures (seedbeds), as well as identify the principal variables which can influence their deployment strategy. In this concern, we are interested in the case of the Tunisian seedbeds of companies, while trying to identify their incubation model(s) and explanatory variables of their strategy of deployment.

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