IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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INTERACTIVE PAPER

IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

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Principal Topic

The past decade or so has seen a considerable growth in the use of institutionalist approaches in the field of entrepreneurial studies (Minniti and Levesque, 2008). This led to the emergence of a growing number of studies examining the influence of institutions on entrepreneurship. However, to date, there has been precious little research into whether and how entrepreneurship can influence institutions (Philips and Tracey, 2007). This gap in knowledge can be understood in the context of widely held assumptions (at least until recently) about institutional stability and continuity.

Immigrants are well placed to change institutions by virtue of their pivotal social position that cuts across countries of destination and origin (Porters, 2008). Within this context, this paper sets out to explore the role of immigrant entrepreneurs in the process of institutional change. In doing so, the paper utilises insights from the small number of studies exploring the role of agency (defined broadly rather than entrepreneurship in particular) in influencing institutions. The majority of these studies emanate from sociology, and centre on the concept of Institutional Entrepreneurship (Battilana, 2006).

Method

The paper deciphers two cases of immigrant entrepreneurship in the same industrial setting in Greater Manchester, UK. These are: a Jewish entrepreneur (originating from Eastern Europe) in mid-19th century, and a Polish entrepreneur in the post-war era. Historical records, and published resources were used in order to reconstruct the role of the former case, alongside interview data obtained from community historians. Data for the second case were derived from published sources and ten interviews with the entrepreneur and key informants.

Results and Implications

It is shown in the paper that immigrant entrepreneurs can shape not only (immigrant) enclave but also central institutions in destination countries. However, there is diversity in the processes at work, influenced by the availability of other immigrant resources and the cultural distance between society of origin and destination.

The contribution of the paper is three-fold. Firstly, it re-dresses the balance of research on the interface between institutions and entrepreneurship. Secondly, it revisits the role of immigrant entrepreneurs, as embedded but active agents. Thirdly, it combines insights gained from three distinct bodies of knowledge: entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, and immigration studies.

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