

# Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20124]

---

## Proposed title of the session

Starting Your Own Business: Self-employment, Agglomeration, and Sources of Innovation from a Comparative Perspective

## Abstract

From Schumpeter onward, economists as well as economic historians have attached great importance to entrepreneurial activities, such as starting new businesses, which embody innovation in products, processes, or organizations. Such activities bring in new goods and services, thus meeting potential consumer needs and creating additional labor demand. In other words, entrepreneurs are expected to play a critical role in stimulating the macro economy and leading economic development. Various factors that support localized entrepreneurial activity, such as regional economic clusters, have thus attracted academic as well as political attention.

On the other hand, self-employment has conventionally been seen as an activity stemming from a shortage of paid jobs and deficiency of formal social security. Sole proprietorship is thus regarded as a complement to social security, especially when historians study the “over supply” of small-medium proprietors and “excess competition” among such proprietors in industrial agglomerations, ethnic groups, or informal communities such as slums. From this viewpoint, having one’s own business is a socially undesirable condition, and thus remains an obstacle to technological progress and innovation.

Are these two views different from each other because they are looking at completely different activities – or do they share something fundamentally common? To scrutinize this question, this panel session focuses on start-ups in different historical situations. Starting a new business is one radical form of entrepreneurial activity, as well as a major decision to commence an independent business rather than seek employment. Therefore, an attempt to pin down how specific environmental factors supported start-ups and what they offered to the economy and society can bring us close to the interactions between those two activities.

This question is also worth contemplating in order to understand the historical meanings of agglomeration. Here, agglomeration is not limited to geographic groupings; rather, it is used to describe concentrations of similar activity in specific social groups, particular social and economic situations, or historical periods. There have been some specific environments where a substantial number of ordinary people chose to set up their own businesses without any strenuous governmental effort such as entrepreneurship education or industrial policy, or even under negative political estimation of SMEs. Instead of picking up a few renowned entrepreneurs who have made historical achievements, the session will try to examine start-ups launched by the ordinary mass of people, figuring out why they chose and were actually able to start their own businesses.

Keeping this in view, the session will explore topics such as industrial districts, networks, ethnic minorities, and specific social groups such as repatriates, taking cases from Asia, Europe, and the United States. The discussion will range around social capital, labor markets, and social policies. We will also have comments from perspectives of business history and development economics in order to connect history and the present day, and to ground the discussion in the broader context of social science. This international and inter-situational comparison will ultimately offer a historically concrete picture of entrepreneurship and its environmental conditions.

---

## I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Dr. Asuka Imaizumi (Saitama University [Japan])

---

## II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
  2. Dr. Jaehyang Han (Hokkaido University [Japan])
- 

## III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Jaehyang Han (Hokkaido University [Japan])
3. Momoko Kawakami (Institute of Developing Economies [Japan])
4. Sumiyo Nishizaki (London School of Economics and Political Science [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
5. Jean-Marc Olivier (Université de Toulouse [France])
6. Georgina Mercedes Gomez (Erasmus University Rotterdam [Netherlands])
7. Yoshitaka Suzuki (Hitotsubashi University [Japan])