

*Review paper*

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

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## **Abstract**

*Small and medium-sized enterprises represent the backbone of the economy, including the construction sector. To sustain and stimulate the growth of the construction industry, it is essential to encourage entrepreneurship and the establishment of new companies. One effective approach is to provide students of technical sciences, particularly civil engineering and architecture, with education on economic principles and entrepreneurship. This can better prepare them for the labour market, especially those who may not secure employment immediately after graduation or who aspire to start their own businesses.*

*The construction sector has a multidimensional impact on the national economy. It is deeply interconnected with various other sectors and industries, both upstream and downstream, and significantly influences the labour market, financial system, and industrial development. Given this strategic importance, countries must implement measures to support and expand this sector.*

*This paper highlights the relevance of entrepreneurship education for students in technical fields and advocates for integrating basic economic and entrepreneurial concepts into their curricula. Drawing on international experiences and case studies, it proposes directions for further research in Serbia and the broader region. In addition, it offers conclusions and recommendations based on available data and research, with an emphasis on applicability within the Serbian context.*

**Key words:** *entrepreneurship, education, construction, Republic of Serbia*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The construction sector represents one of the most significant drivers of economic development due to its extensive impact on other sectors, including manufacturing, transport, energy, and finance [1]. It contributes to infrastructure development, regional connectivity, urban growth, and overall national productivity. Within this sector, small and medium-sized enterprises play a particularly important role, as they stimulate innovation, create jobs, and contribute to GDP growth [2]. Given the sector's project-based nature and high volatility, adaptability and entrepreneurial capacity are crucial for long-term competitiveness and resilience.

In this context, entrepreneurship emerges not only as a mechanism for creating new businesses but also as a set of competencies that can enhance performance in both private and public organizations. Entrepreneurship is increasingly regarded as a transversal skill, valuable not only for business founders but also for employees, managers, and professionals across various fields. However, many engineering and architecture graduates enter the labour market with limited understanding of basic economic principles and entrepreneurial processes, often learning them only after founding their own firms. This highlights a structural gap in higher education, where technical knowledge is emphasized, while entrepreneurial literacy remains underdeveloped.

Entrepreneurship education (EE), if it was integrated well into civil engineering and architecture curricula, could bridge this gap. It would enhance students' capacity to identify opportunities, solve problems innovatively, and create value within complex project environments [3]. Furthermore, entrepreneurship is increasingly understood in a broader sense, not only as business creation but also as a mindset, involving initiative, creativity, and responsibility across various professional contexts [4]. This broader conception of entrepreneurship is particularly relevant in the context of construction, where multidisciplinary collaboration, regulatory complexity, and market dynamics require proactive thinking and adaptive leadership.

Empirical research supports the idea that embedding entrepreneurship education into technical disciplines can significantly increase students' confidence, employability, and willingness to engage in innovative ventures [5]. Moreover, the construction industry, as a labour-intensive and capital-demanding field, benefits from professionals who can combine technical expertise with entrepreneurial thinking, whether by founding firms, leading projects, or improving organizational processes within existing firms or projects.

This paper aims to explore the relevance of entrepreneurship education in construction-related disciplines, with a particular focus on students of civil engineering and architecture. Through an analysis of international practices and current challenges in the Western Balkans region, the study proposes practical recommendations for integrating EE into technical programs in Serbia. Some, out of many other benefits, are to enhance graduate employability, promote sustainable enterprise creation, and support the long-term development of the construction sector.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative and exploratory research approach to assess the relevance and potential of entrepreneurship education in the construction sector, particularly among students of civil engineering and architecture. The methodology is grounded in an extensive literature review, comparative analysis of international practices, and a contextual analysis of the Serbian higher education system. The primary data sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents from the European Commission, World Bank reports, and national education strategies. Special emphasis was placed on the integration of entrepreneurship education into engineering curricula in selected EU countries, serving as models of good practice.

The analysis is driven by several interrelated research questions: it seeks to understand the role of entrepreneurship education in enhancing the employability and innovation capacity of graduates in construction-related fields; to identify the pedagogical models and teaching methods that are most effective for embedding entrepreneurship within technical disciplines; and to explore how Serbia's educational policies and curricula can be aligned with successful international frameworks in order to improve outcomes for future professionals in the sector.

This study does not involve original empirical research such as surveys or interviews but is based on secondary sources and conceptual synthesis. The findings are discussed in the context of existing educational and institutional frameworks, with the aim of providing actionable recommendations for curriculum development and policy enhancement. Also it is intended to conduct a field research in the near future.

## 3. FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE AND GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

In recent decades, entrepreneurship education has gained global significance as a vital tool for fostering innovation, employability, and economic resilience. Across different countries and regions, educational institutions have implemented a variety of models, pedagogical approaches, and policy frameworks to include entrepreneurial competencies at all educational levels, from primary schools to universities and vocational training systems.

The European Commission has been one of the pioneers in promoting entrepreneurship education through strategic frameworks and funding programs. According to the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan [6], entrepreneurial education and training are essential for equipping people with the skills needed to turn ideas into action. In alignment with this policy, numerous European projects and networks, such as *EntreComp* and *HEInnovate*, have been developed to support entrepreneurship competence development and institutional transformation in higher education [7].

In the United States, the National Science Foundation (NSF) and its Innovation Corps (I-Corps) initiative represent a structured approach to integrating entrepreneurship into research and STEM education. STEM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, and it represents a holistic approach to learning that integrates these disciplines to prepare students for future careers and problem-solving in real-world scenarios. It moves beyond traditional subject-based learning and encourages students to apply knowledge creatively and critically [8]. The I-Corps program trains academic researchers in customer discovery, business modelling, and value proposition design, with the goal of facilitating technology transfer and startup creation.

Similarly, in Nordic countries like Finland, EE is strongly integrated into curricula through interdisciplinary project-based learning and partnerships with industry. Studies highlight how Finnish universities incorporate entrepreneurial thinking into engineering programs, emphasizing creativity, teamwork, and societal impact [9].

In Germany, the EXIST program supports university-based startups through mentoring, funding, and infrastructure, encouraging a startup culture within academic institutions for more than 25 years [10]. Similarly, the United Kingdom emphasizes enterprise education through national strategies and university-led programs such as Enterprise Educators UK and the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education [11].

The following Table 1. Summarizes a comparative overview of selected programs and approaches from several countries that represent innovative and transferable practices in entrepreneurship education.

*Table 1. Examples of Good Practices in Entrepreneurship Education*

Country	Program / Initiative	Program / Initiative
Finland	Project-based EE in engineering	Integrated into curricula; emphasis on teamwork and societal innovation [9]
USA	NSF Innovation Corps (I-Corps)	Lean Startup methodology; supports commercialization of academic research [8]
EU (general)	EntreComp / HEInnovate	Competence frameworks and institutional self-assessment tools [7]
Germany	EXIST	University startup funding and support infrastructure [10]
UK	Enterprise Educators UK	Nationwide network for promoting enterprise education [11]
EU	VET and entrepreneurial schools	Focus on vocational training and practical skills in entrepreneurship [12]

Each of these programs reflects a unique national context and addresses specific educational, economic, and institutional needs. For example, EntreComp offers a flexible framework of entrepreneurial competencies that can be adapted across formal and non-formal learning environments, encouraging the development of personal, social, and business-oriented entrepreneurship [7]. The NSF I-Corps program, on the other hand, focuses on accelerating innovation in scientific research, providing researchers with tools to assess market viability and create impact beyond academia [8]. The Finnish model emphasizes a human-centric and sustainability-oriented approach to entrepreneurship, often linking it to challenges such as climate change or digital transformation [9]. In contrast, Germany's EXIST program is closely aligned with the country's strategic focus on applied sciences and industrial competitiveness, offering strong institutional support to spin-offs in technology and engineering fields [10]. Furthermore, in vocational and technical education (VET), the European Commission has emphasized the integration of entrepreneurial skills through national strategies and EU-funded initiatives [12]. These include teacher training, modular curricula, and transnational cooperation among schools and enterprises.

The review of international practice suggests that effective entrepreneurship education requires systemic integration across policy, curriculum, teacher development, and institutional leadership. Programs that succeed in this regard are those that align educational

goals with broader societal and economic objectives, fostering not only startup creation but also intrapreneurship, innovation in public services, and civic engagement [13].

Furthermore, a key challenge in entrepreneurship education remains the pedagogical approach itself. It is not enough to merely teach about entrepreneurship, about the history, notable figures, or theoretical frameworks. Instead, students should learn through entrepreneurship by engaging in practical activities that simulate or directly involve real business environments. This may include working on real company projects, developing startup ideas, or managing virtual businesses. These approaches foster deeper understanding and can lead to viable entrepreneurial ventures emerging from the classroom experience. However, theory cannot be completely excluded. A solid theoretical foundation enables students to sustain and scale their entrepreneurial projects. As in agile business environments, successful entrepreneurial education should involve continuous testing, feedback, and iteration. Therefore, striking a balance between practical experience and theoretical knowledge is essential, along with mechanisms to assess and adapt the educational approach accordingly. If educators teach students how to be entrepreneurial, they should also implement and practice entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour themselves.

When discussing the terminology, it is important to note that different educational systems apply different concepts. In the United Kingdom, the term enterprise education is commonly used, encompassing personal development, mindset building, and skill acquisition. Entrepreneurship education, in contrast, focuses more narrowly on starting and managing ventures [9], [11]. In the United States, the term entrepreneurship education dominates [16]. Some scholars suggest combining the terms as enterprise and entrepreneurship education, though this may be somewhat impractical [13]. To resolve terminological confusion, Erkkilä proposes the unified term entrepreneurial education, which integrates both perspectives into a comprehensive framework [14]. This distinction is illustrated in the following figure, which shows how the interpretation of entrepreneurial education evolves over time, reflecting pedagogical shifts and a persistent concern about the lack of practical orientation in higher education systems.

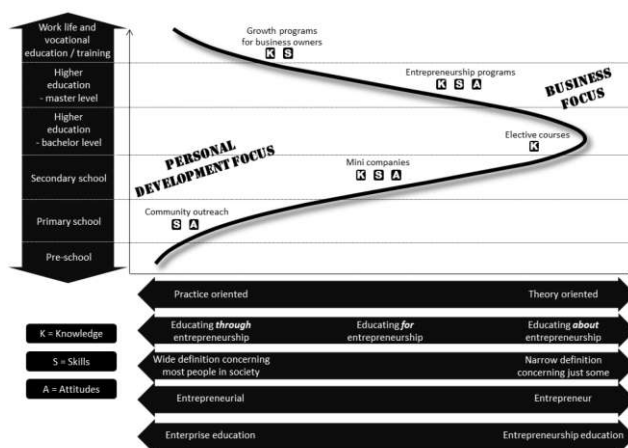


Figure 1. Terms in entrepreneurial education. Source: [13].

The figure illustrates the evolution of terminology and approach, highlighting the growing emphasis on practice-oriented learning in recent years. The visual progression from personal

development to business focus also underscores the increasing alignment of entrepreneurship education with labour market demands and innovation-driven economies. This evolution across educational levels highlights the importance of adaptability and contextualization in both policy and practice. With these global trends in mind, the next section turns to the national context, exploring how entrepreneurship education is approached within the Serbian construction sector and what challenges remain in aligning it with contemporary educational and economic priorities.

#### **4. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE SERBIAN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR**

In parts of Northern and Eastern Europe, particularly in Sweden and the Balkans, the term *entrepreneurial learning* is often used as a substitute for *enterprise education*. However, this can create confusion, as the same term is also associated with research on how entrepreneurs learn outside formal education settings. In Finland, a different set of terms is applied: *internal* and *external* entrepreneurship education. Internal entrepreneurship education typically refers to enterprise education, while external entrepreneurship education corresponds to the more business-oriented understanding of entrepreneurship education. The terminology becomes even more complex when *internal entrepreneurship* is occasionally used to describe intrapreneurship, that refers to entrepreneurial behaviour within established organizations [13].

The importance of entrepreneurship education in the construction sector has gained increasing attention in Serbia over the past decade, particularly considering the country's efforts to align its policies and practices with European standards. Although systemic implementation of entrepreneurship in education is still developing, several initiatives have emerged to promote innovation, business skills, and entrepreneurial thinking, especially in technical and engineering disciplines. Entrepreneurship education in Serbia has been included in national strategies, such as the Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia 2020, which recognizes entrepreneurial competencies as essential for improving employability and competitiveness [15]. Moreover, the Strategy for the Development of Startups in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2025 emphasizes education as a key pillar for fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems [16]. However, implementation in the field of construction remains uneven, and formal integration into curricula at technical faculties is still limited. What is a good practice that there is a continuation in this policy. In the following version of this document some new aspects and key progress indicators that have been added to track the entrepreneurial development. Efforts will be made to increase the inclusion of entrepreneurship-related content in higher education study programs. This aligns with the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2020–2027) [17], which aims to boost economic growth and competitiveness by linking research, industry, and innovation. Priority investment areas identified include ICT, food for the future, advanced manufacturing, and creative industries. Among the defined goals is education focused on innovation and entrepreneurship. To support this, a Fund for the Promotion of High-Tech Entrepreneurship will be established, financing initiatives such as incubators, spin-offs, technology transfer and IP centres. The percentage of study programs that include entrepreneurship modules will serve as a key performance indicator, alongside regular monitoring and evaluation of the Fund's impact [18].

In the construction sector specifically, some universities have initiated elective courses related to project management, innovation in construction, or basics of entrepreneurship. For example, the Faculty of Civil Engineering in Belgrade offers an elective course titled "Innovation and Entrepreneurship", aiming to develop business judgement among engineering students [19]. Also Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, University of Niš, developed a special study programme which includes subjects related to entrepreneurship, economics and internet business. However, these efforts are still largely fragmented and depend on individual institutional initiative rather than national coordination. Other obstacles that persist include a lack of trained teaching staff for entrepreneurship, insufficient cooperation among industry and university, as well as limited access to seed funding or incubator support for student start-ups in construction. Furthermore, many students in technical faculties still perceive entrepreneurship as distant from their core professional competencies.

To strengthen entrepreneurship education in the Serbian construction sector, systemic reforms are needed. These include curriculum integration, capacity building for academic staff, increased collaboration with construction companies and startups, and the development of interdisciplinary learning environments. Aligning these efforts with EU frameworks such as EntreComp could provide a structured path for the development of entrepreneurial competencies among future construction professionals [7]. Despite systemic challenges, several notable initiatives in Serbia demonstrate the potential for developing entrepreneurship education in the construction sector. These initiatives often emerge through collaboration between academic institutions, public sector bodies, and international projects. Also, some universities and faculties have implemented new study programs which incorporate entrepreneurial and economic subjects. The following table 2 presents some selected programs and projects that have contributed to promoting entrepreneurial competencies and innovation in the construction and in general domain.

*Table 2. Examples of Entrepreneurship Education Initiatives in Serbia*

Program / Initiative	Institution / Organization	Description
Innovation and Entrepreneurship	University of Belgrade – Faculty of Civil Engineering	An elective course aimed at introducing students to entrepreneurship in the construction sector [19]
Project management in construction	Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture University of Niš	Study programme with subjects relating entrepreneurship, economics and internet business [20]
(Niš) Startup School; The (Niš) Innovation School	Science and Technology park Niš	Start-up schools for entrepreneurship [21]
ParkUp, SoftLanding...	Science and Technology park Belgrade	Start-up schools and camps for entrepreneurship [22]
"3alet" (jump-off)	Science and Technology park Novi Sad	Start-up education for entrepreneurship [23]
Campino	Science and Technology park Čačak	Summer camp for entrepreneurship [24]

Now as many initiatives are made through science and technology park as a certain catalyst of entrepreneurship, a separate section will be dedicated to them. They do foster general entrepreneurship without a special focus on construction sector, but that definitely does not exclude that very important sector of every national economy from taking part in their programmes.

## **5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARKS AS DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SERBIA**

Science and technology parks (STPs) represent key institutional mechanisms for stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation across various sectors in Serbia, including the traditionally less innovative construction industry. As infrastructural and organizational platforms, STPs provide targeted support for the development of start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises, and research-based ventures by offering access to modern workspaces, mentoring, seed funding, and opportunities for networking and cooperation with academic institutions and private sector stakeholders. In Serbia, several STPs operate under the support of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation, and international development partners. Notable examples include the Science Technology Parks in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Čačak, which collectively form a network designed to promote innovation-based entrepreneurship and commercialize research outputs. These parks serve as catalysts for entrepreneurial ecosystem development by implementing programs such as BoostMeUp, Raising Starts, and IP Consult, which provide structured support to early-stage ventures through mentoring, training, and access to investors [21,22,23,24].

While the construction sector has not historically been a focus of high-tech innovation, science and technology parks provide an opportunity to change this dynamic. By fostering start-ups that offer solutions in fields such as green construction, energy-efficient materials, building information modelling, and construction automation, STPs can help modernize and increase competitiveness in the sector. The integration of entrepreneurial and technological competencies supported by STPs also contributes to addressing key priorities identified in national policy frameworks, including those related to smart specialization and digital transformation. Moreover, STPs play a critical role in building entrepreneurial communities by facilitating interdisciplinary cooperation among researchers, engineers, students, and business practitioners. This ecosystemic approach is particularly valuable in the construction industry, where innovation requires the convergence of technical, environmental, and business knowledge. By linking faculties of architecture and civil engineering with start-up initiatives and private sector actors, STPs contribute to the development of practical and scalable solutions for sector-specific challenges [25]. Overall, science and technology parks in Serbia have demonstrated a strong potential to act as accelerators of entrepreneurial activity, including in the construction sector. Their continued development and deeper integration into sectoral policies and academic-industry cooperation models represent a strategic opportunity to foster sustainable and innovation-driven growth.



## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study underline the growing importance of entrepreneurship education in shaping the future of the construction sector, particularly in transitional economies like Serbia. As the sector faces increasing demands for innovation, adaptability, and sustainability, integrating entrepreneurial competencies into engineering and architecture curricula becomes a strategic imperative. International experience demonstrates that when embedded systematically and contextually, entrepreneurship education can significantly improve student readiness for the labour market, stimulate startup activity, and enhance organizational performance across both public and private domains.

In Serbia, current educational policies and strategies recognize the relevance of entrepreneurial competencies, yet implementation within technical faculties remains fragmented and inconsistent. The construction sector, as a labour-intensive and innovation-dependent field, stands to benefit greatly from a structured and practice-oriented approach to entrepreneurship education. However, this requires a shift from isolated course offerings to integrated pedagogical frameworks, including project-based learning, collaboration with industry, and real-world application of entrepreneurial methods.

In this regard, Science and Technology Parks emerge as important enablers of innovation and entrepreneurship among students and young professionals. By offering incubation services, mentoring, technical infrastructure, and access to funding, STPs bridge the gap between academic knowledge and market application. In the context of civil engineering and architecture, they provide a testing ground for innovative construction techniques, green building solutions, and digital transformation initiatives. Strengthening the links between universities, STPs, and the construction industry can create a vibrant ecosystem where entrepreneurial ideas are not only generated but also scaled and sustained.

Ultimately, for Serbia to foster a resilient and forward-looking construction sector, it must reimagine its educational landscape through the lens of entrepreneurship. This involves not only curriculum reform but also institutional capacity building, policy alignment, and cultural change within academic environments. By doing so, higher education institutions can play a transformative role in producing graduates who are not just technically competent, but also entrepreneurial, innovative and socially responsive. They would also become both more employable and self-employable.

Further research is planned be undertaken among the bachelors, master and PhD students, or graduates that are part of a company or who have made their own firms, in order to find out which knowledges did they require and what would have helped them if they knew it before their business venture or before starting to work in an existing company.

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