Exploring Albania's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

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BALKANS

Abstract

For the past quarter century the Albanian economy has been transitioning from communism to an open market. Entrepreneurship can address some of the resulting issues hindering economic growth. In an effort to promote entrepreneurial activity, Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB) initiated this project of mapping the ecosystem which primarily consists of entrepreneurs, organizations, and the interactions between them. To explore the ecosystem in Albania we interviewed 14 entrepreneurs and 10 supporting organizations about their experiences and viewpoints. We provided YSBB with insights and recommendations for the ecosystem, and we applied the information we obtained to create a website that will assist entrepreneurs to navigate the environment and find resources to build their businesses.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our sponsor Yunus Social Business Balkans, especially Ms. Arunima Singh for her guidance at every step of the project. She has been extremely considerate of our needs and has made us feel at home. We feel very lucky to have had her guide us through the social and cultural aspect and core complexities of the project.

We would also like to thank Mr. Vasken Spiru from Swisscontact for sharing his knowledge and experience as an ecosystem facilitator in Albania. His valuable input was indeed crucial in shaping our project.

We are indebted to every entrepreneur and organization personnel who allowed us to interview them. Not only did they give us their time to share their valuable experience, they also expressed great enthusiasm and interest in our work. They gave us insights and knowledge of paramount importance, but it was their good nature and friendliness that truly made our experience remarkable.

Finally, we would like to convey our utmost gratitude to our advisors, Professors Robert Hersh and Peter Christopher, for their continued support throughout the duration of our project. Their constant feedback heightened our social awareness and brought out the best in us as researchers and writers.

Executive Summary

Entrepreneurship is a vital source of innovation and economic growth. It fosters the cultivation of new ideas, technological development, and improves the standard of living through economic proliferation. Development of the entrepreneurial climate can increase the number of startups with the potential to become small and medium-sized enterprises or high growth firms. This activity stimulates economic growth, ultimately generating employment opportunities. For the past quarter century Albania has been transitioning from a communist system to democracy and a market economy. Among many challenges, unemployment and emigration have been very detrimental to shaping the economy. Subsequently, many Albanians travel abroad in search of higher wages and better markets, with the purpose of sending remittances back to family members. Entrepreneurship may prove to be a stepping stone to the necessary economic growth. More jobs and lucrative opportunities may provide hope for many Albanians to remain in their home country, while also encouraging some expatriates to return. While the country has been making major progress in terms of economic growth, there are many aspects such as financing, tax policies, and organizational support within the entrepreneurial environment that need improvement.

Our sponsor, Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB), organizes accelerator programs and addresses specific social problems by investing in businesses that create a social impact. They seek to empower promising entrepreneurs through two core initiatives: financing and mentorship, achieved through one-on-one coaching, accelerator programs, and loans assessing risk and social impact. They have had considerable impact on the community and can contribute significantly in developing the entrepreneurial community, or the "ecosystem".

An entrepreneurial ecosystem is a set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors including the entrepreneurs themselves, entrepreneurial organizations (e.g., firms, venture capitalists, business angels, banks, NGOs), institutions (universities, public sector agencies, financial bodies), and entrepreneurial processes (e.g., the business birth rate, numbers of high growth firms, number of serial entrepreneurs) which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment.

To significantly impact an entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is essential to first understand how it is currently interconnected. We examined existing entities in the ecosystem of Tirana, such as accelerators, mentorship programs, and startup events that promote entrepreneurial growth, as well as factors that may hinder that growth. By interviewing a variety of key actors, most notably non-governmental organizations and entrepreneurs themselves, we gained an understanding of the current ecosystem in Tirana, the barriers to a more effective ecosystem,

and feasible measures that could be undertaken to improve the functioning of the ecosystem. We created a web page for entrepreneurs to help them determine the resources available and to better navigate the environment. The digital resource will promote YSBB and other organizations' efforts in assisting prospective and existing entrepreneurs.

In order to develop a valuable directory of resources for potential and existing entrepreneurs, supporting institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social businesses, and investors, we developed the following objectives:

Objective 1: Obtain the perspectives of entrepreneurs with respect to opportunities, the challenges they face, and their approach to overcoming these challenges.

Objective 2: Determine the points of view of organizations and their role in the entrepreneurial environment.

Objective 3: Determine effective visual representations of the structure, relationships, and resources in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, by drawing from multiple models found in our research. Translate this information into a webpage where entrepreneurs and others can access information regarding support available in the environment.

Entrepreneurs

To achieve the first objective, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a variety of entrepreneurs in Albania, mainly focused in Tirana, each in different stages of growing their business. We investigated topics such as: common challenges entrepreneurs face, the common pitfalls, types of resources (financial and others) that were available at different stages, their interaction with different entities of the ecosystem, the effectiveness of government initiatives/and policies, motivation, their approach toward running their business, and their overview of the ecosystem. Once the information was gathered, we conducted a thematic analysis of the gathered data and categorized the responses according to the research topics. We drew comparisons between different approaches and fates of the ventures, and later made connections to identify missing or weak components of the ecosystem. We compiled our findings and inferences which enabled us to gain a better understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem from the entrepreneur's perspective.

Our findings and analysis from interviews with entrepreneurs and organizations are summarized below.

- There is very little interaction between entrepreneurs and organizations. Many are disillusioned towards organizations; some believe it is required to have personal

contacts within the organizations in order to receive any help and that they only offer support to similar types of ventures, or that they are very political. Entrepreneurs prefer working independently and are often unaware of the support available in the ecosystem.

- The majority of entrepreneurs we interviewed rely heavily on online resources for business, technical and marketing knowledge, and are self-taught to great extent.

- Generally, entrepreneurs in Albania are not sure where to find employees, and they often hire through referrals and internships. This suggests a lack of skilled employees. They reported to hire based more off work ethic rather than background experience.

- There are limited options of financing a startup in the ecosystem in Albania. Although we cannot claim that each of the following statements is a fact, the entrepreneurs we interviewed reported:

    o There is a lack of investment, angel investors, and venture capitalists
    o Loans are difficult to procure from banks due to the lack of credit history, data, and collateral for startups
    o There are high taxes for new businesses
    o Investors are apprehensive of new ventures such as IT that have a hard time demonstrating their worth in the beginning
    o Local investors do not have the same vision as most entrepreneurs, so the business owners usually reject offers from them
    o For startup capital, entrepreneurs have relied on bootstrapping, loans from friends and family, and sometimes money from competition or grants.

- The marketing that entrepreneurs currently use consists mostly of word of mouth, Facebook, or other social media. They rely on friends and family, as their first customers and to spread word about their business. Internet usage is still in development in Albania, so some owners send representatives through the country to market or hire someone to handle advertising

Organizations

Similarly, to achieve our second objective we interviewed a variety of supporting organizations in the ecosystem including NGOs, accelerators, financial institutions, and other involved organizations, and we organized their responses under key research topics. We obtained their views on entrepreneurship, their approaches to improving the ecosystem and their suggestions of what resources can be made available to startups. Their responses about activities and programs enabled us to categorize the organizations according to their role in the

ecosystem for our model. Finally, comparing the perspectives of entrepreneurs regarding organizational support with responses from organizations themselves enabled us to find weak links and where support is needed. The overall themes we saw across the interviews with these organizations are summarized below.

- Organizations in Albania offer a multitude of events and services to entrepreneurs such as competitions, mentorship programs, workshops, and others geared to the specific needs of entrepreneurs

- There are several aspects of the ecosystem through which organizations promote entrepreneurship, including education, role models, foreign investment, and policies. Some of these have been implemented fairly recently so entrepreneurs may not be seeing the effects of programs with their current progress.

With regard to the ecosystem, we our interviews suggest that many community members in Albania do not fully understand the full concept of entrepreneurship, while others are reluctant to take the risk to start a new venture. There is a worry about the risks of entrepreneurship among people in Tirana and disillusionment towards the government and other organizations. There is substantial effort from organizations to change this opinion, but it is often not fruitful because of insufficient penetration and awareness among people. With proper promotion of an entrepreneurial ecosystem within the country, including increased awareness of advantages of entrepreneurship through marketing, education, and governmental support, significant growth in the entrepreneurial ecosystem could be achieved.

Deliverable

After we performed the analysis of our interviews, we devised a way to present this information to entrepreneurs, NGOs, and other interested parties. We ascertained in which domains there was a dearth of actors, what could fill these gaps, which organizations entrepreneurs feel are helpful, how different organizations work together, and how new relationships can be fostered between organizations. Through our interviews we notice that there was a lack of awareness, on the side of the entrepreneurs, of the variety of events and services that organizations were providing to entrepreneurs. From this we concluded that a website cataloguing organizations along with their events and services would be most beneficial for entrepreneurs. On the same site we provided a list of online materials entrepreneurs may find helpful when starting and growing their business.

Studying various ecosystem models, we inferred that there are two ways an entrepreneurial ecosystem can be represented: i) type of service provided by actors, and ii) step in an entrepreneur's journey to which the actor contributes. We utilized both of these

categorizations when describing support in the ecosystem. We identified five key domains that apply to the organizations in Albania. We have classified the initiatives of organizations (continuous services and recurring events) according to these domains: Education, Financing, Networking, Support, and Inspiration. This design enables entrepreneurs to conveniently identify the stage they are in and the type of support they need/seek. This page has been created to be easily embeddable by other organizations/actors so that they can upload it on their own websites. The purpose of this was to reach the largest audience, and it was deemed essential as many entrepreneurs expressed nescience to the initiatives by organizations because of inadequate outreach.

Recommendations

Our research led to several recommendations for entrepreneurs, organizations, the public sector and academia. The recommendations summarized below:

Entrepreneurs:

- **Test the market**: Entrepreneurs should identify their customer segment, and test their product/service thoroughly before scaling or expanding their business. There are several organizations in Albania that can help entrepreneurs with the specific steps to accomplish this. Some of these organizations can be found in Appendix E.

Organizations:

- **Collaborate with similar organizations**: Local organizations should collaborate with organizations that have similar goals and activities, and those in other parts of the Balkans region. This will establish a link for sharing resources, ideas, development strategies and even human resource. This practice can particularly benefit organizations providing mentorship and training to entrepreneurs.
- **Inspire through success:** Success stories, particularly of local entrepreneurs, can inspire aspiring entrepreneurs and set a benchmark for success. Organizations that with a good client base or social media presence can sharing such success stories to motivate entrepreneurs.
- **Adopt sustainable model**: This recommendation applies particularly for organizations that provide financial aid to entrepreneurs through competitions, accelerators, or as grants. Organizations that heavily rely on grants from large foreign agencies should adopt a sustainable model by: creating small revenue streams through their programs; consider providing small term micro-credit finance instead of grants to competition winners; investing in businesses in exchange for "convertible equity". In doing so, both parties benefit as the organizations receive their investment back to reinvest, and entrepreneurs generate capital.

Collaboration between organizations and academia:

- **Promote business idea competitions in academia:** Collaborating with universities, organizations that already host such competitions can bring the experience to university students. This will encourage entrepreneurship from early on among students, boost

confidence through experiential learning and allow for stronger startups to form within universities. It will also market the organizations and their initiatives to a larger audience.

- **Involve students to do due diligence on portfolio companies:** Organizations that invest in businesses can form a collaborative program with universities in which business students help investors by performing due diligence on the portfolio companies. The students can be hired as interns or the program can be done as an afterschool activity. This will provide students with knowledge and exposure to investment, portfolio research, and give organizations a low-cost service. (This recommendation was derived from a previous IQP project, "Making the Link: Entrepreneurship In Costa Rica")

Collaboration between private and public sector:

- **Form Angel Investment Network:** Albania is the only country in the Balkans region that does not have a local angel investment network yet. A collaborative effort between organizations and the government can create an official entity consisting of affluent business-minded nationals within the country or abroad along with a regulatory body.
- **Create Employment Platform**- By collaboration or through independent initiative, creating a search-based employment platform to connect potential employees with companies/businesses can greatly benefit both parties. The government can maintain this from its own budget or private organizations can sustain the service by monetizing it through small fees charged to the companies.

Authorship

When writing the report we had assigned the work of writing the initial drafts of specific sections to individuals and revised them as a team. The list of people assigned to each section is listed below.

Team Member	Chris Cormier	Md Shamsur Rahman Saikat	Bridget Rinkel	James Zheng
Abstract		X		
Executive Summary			X	
Intro			X	
Background	X	X	X	X
Methods	X	X		X
Findings		X	X	X
Conclusions		X	X	X
Deliverables	X			

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a vital source of innovation and economic growth. It fosters the cultivation of new ideas, technological development, and improves the standard of living through economic proliferation. According to Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental economic organization of 35 countries committed to democracy and market economy, 60-70% of jobs in OECD countries are created by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Mason & Brown, 2014). A development in the entrepreneurial climate can increase the number of startups with the potential to become SMEs or high growth firms. This activity stimulates economic growth, ultimately generating significant employment.

Albania, previously a communist country, transitioned to democracy and a market economy throughout the last twenty. Among many challenges, unemployment and emigration have been very detrimental to shaping the economy. As of 2015, the unemployment rate was almost 17% with nearly 1 out of 3 young persons, ages 15-29, unemployed and a total emigrant population of more than 1.25 million people in a country of 3 million (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015; CIA, 2016). Subsequently, many travel abroad in search of higher wages and better markets, with the purpose of sending remittances back to family members (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015).

Furthermore, the international isolation of Albania during the communist regime had completely cut out global trade, as well as the formation of economic ties or trade alliances. For a country currently aspiring to join the European Union, entrepreneurship may prove to be the stepping stone to the necessary economic growth. More jobs and lucrative opportunities may provide hope for many Albanians to remain in their home country, while also encouraging expatriates to return.

In Albania, entrepreneurs face many challenges and there is marked room for improvement. According to Asllani et al (2014), while the country did make major progress in the last two decades, there are many aspects such as financing, tax policies, organizational support, etc. of the entrepreneurial environment that need improvement. Although in recent years some banks have begun offering more options of loans for businesses in need of startup funds (United Bank of Albania, 2015), the interest rates are reported to be considerably high, and SME bankruptcies have begun increasing (Baresel-Bofinger, Ketikidis, & Zaharis, 2015).

There are many government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working locally to help entrepreneurs through funding, mentorship, and various programs. Our sponsor, Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB), organizes accelerator programs and addresses specific

social problems by investing in businesses that create a social impact. They seek to empower promising entrepreneurs through two core initiatives: financing and mentorship. This is achieved through one-on-one coaching, accelerator programs, and loans assessing risk and social impact (Yunus Social Business, 2015). While they have had considerable impact on the community, they can contribute significantly more in developing the entrepreneurial community, or the "ecosystem". An entrepreneurial ecosystem is a set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors (OECD, 1996). Some of these actors include entrepreneurial organizations (e.g. firms, venture capitalists, business angels, banks), institutions (universities, public sector agencies, financial bodies), and entrepreneurial processes (e.g. the business birth rate, numbers of high growth firms, number of serial entrepreneurs, etc.). These formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment.

In order to significantly impact the entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is essential to first understand how it is currently interconnected. Through archival research, we have found several ecosystem mapping projects from various institutions that helped guide our efforts. We examined existing entities in the ecosystem, such as accelerators, mentorship programs, and startup events, as well as factors that may hinder or promote entrepreneurial growth. Using the data gathered, we created resources to help YSBB and other organizations' efforts in assisting prospective and existing entrepreneurs. This will also allow entrepreneurs to find the resources available to them and to better navigate the environment. We interviewed a variety of these key actors, most notably non-governmental organizations and entrepreneurs themselves, to gain a clear understanding of the current ecosystem from entrepreneurs' perspective, the barriers to a more effective ecosystem, and feasible measures that could be undertaken to improve the functioning of the ecosystem. A development in the entrepreneurial climate can increase the number of startups with the potential to become small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or high growth firms. This activity stimulates economic growth, ultimately generating significant employment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The objective of this chapter is to give insight into the entrepreneurial environment of Albania and factors that might hinder or help entrepreneurs. In Section 2.1: Mapping Entrepreneurial Ecosystems we discuss the concept of mapping the entrepreneurial ecosystem to give a starting point for aspiring entrepreneurs. In the following section we describe what is meant by entrepreneurship and why it is needed in Albania. And in the final section, we give a brief background about our sponsor, Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB), and its reasons for starting the project.

2.1: Mapping Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

The purpose of mapping an entrepreneurial ecosystem is to act as a starting point to create and improve opportunities for business development (Aspen Network of Developmental Entrepreneurs, 2013). A map of an entrepreneurial ecosystem can help illuminate the quality of the relationships among ecosystem actors: businesses, financial institutions, investors, public officials, universities, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In order to help organizations map entrepreneurial ecosystems, the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) has created an "Ecosystem Toolkit" by synthesizing important aspects of differ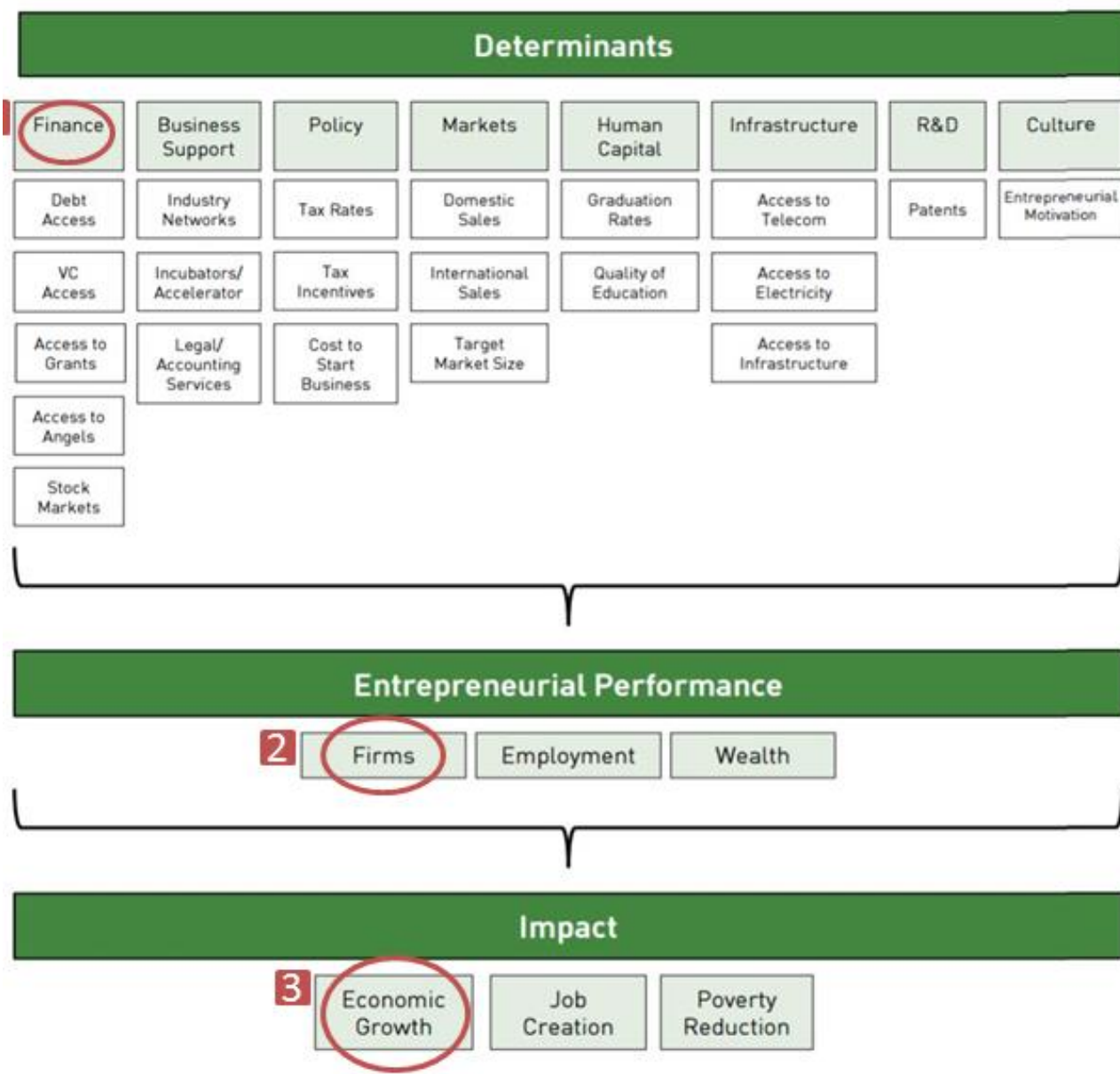ent ecosystem models. The Ecosystem Toolkit breaks down maps of entrepreneurial ecosystems into entrepreneurship determinants, entrepreneurial performance and impact, this is illustrated in Figure 1. Entrepreneurship determinants is described as "the various factors that affect entrepreneurship" (Aspen Network of Developmental Entrepreneurs, 2013). Entrepreneurial performance is the actions that the business or entrepreneur takes that will result in the impacts that they have on the environment. Impacts are simply the value that the entrepreneurs create to benefit the ecosystem (Aspen Network of Developmental Entrepreneurs, 2013). The toolkit breaks each of these elements of mapping down into smaller examples, and in the case of determinants, those examples are narrowed even further.

The ecosystem toolkit details groundwork inquiries that should be taken into consideration when mapping an ecosystem: the geographical location; the depth of analysis, domains of interest, the choice of indicators, and how the data will be collected and analyzed (Aspen Network of Developmental Entrepreneurs, 2013). An indicator is a quantifiable metric which is correlated to the information desired. The toolkit uses the example of time and cost to start a business as an indicator of barriers to formalizing a business (Aspen Network of Developmental Entrepreneurs, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates three examples of

indicators for the different aspects in the framework displayed earlier. The entrepreneur toolkit says that a good indicator must be relevant, accurate, and available across the majority of locations and times being evaluated.

The rest of this section consists of a look into various models of examining entrepreneurial ecosystems and what they have achieved in developing more opportunities for entrepreneurship in different communities. The ANDE Diagnosis toolkit was constructed by combining various models like the ones in the following sections.

Determinants

Finance	Business Support	Policy	Markets	Human Capital	Infrastructure	R&D	Culture
Debt Access	Industry Networks	Tax Rates	Domestic Sales	Graduation Rates	Access to Telecom	Patents	Entrepreneurial Motivation
VC Access	Incubators/ Accelerator	Tax Incentives	International Sales	Quality of Education	Access to Electricity		
Access to Grants	Legal/ Accounting Services	Cost to Start Business	Target Market Size		Access to Infrastructure		
Access to Angels							
Stock Markets							

Entrepreneurial Performance

2 | Firms | Employment | Wealth

Impact

3 | Economic Growth | Job Creation | Poverty Reduction

Indicators (quantifiable)

1. Time & cost to start business

2. Number of new firms per annum

3. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Figure 1: Examples of indicators that can measure parameters in the framework.

Babson Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Project

The Babson Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Project (BEEP) was founded by Daniel Isenberg in 2009 in coordination with Babson College. The goal of the project was to help entrepreneurial leaders around the world create solid environment for entrepreneurial activity (Babson Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Project, n.d.). The project has created a domains model to analyze entrepreneurial ecosystems and provided tips to those who are looking to improve an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

BEEP's model divides an ecosystem into six domains: policy, finance, culture, supports, human capital, and markets as seen in Figure 2. Each of these domains are further divided into smaller sub-domains which in turn has a list of examples. For instance, the human capital domain is divided into labor and educational institutions. Each of these are further broken down into variables such as skilled and unskilled labor, serial entrepreneurs, general degrees, and specific entrepreneurship training. This model allows for a broad and comprehensive view by focusing on multiple aspects of the ecosystem that influence entrepreneurship. (Babson Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Project, n.d.).

This model allows identification of actors and resources, which enables finding
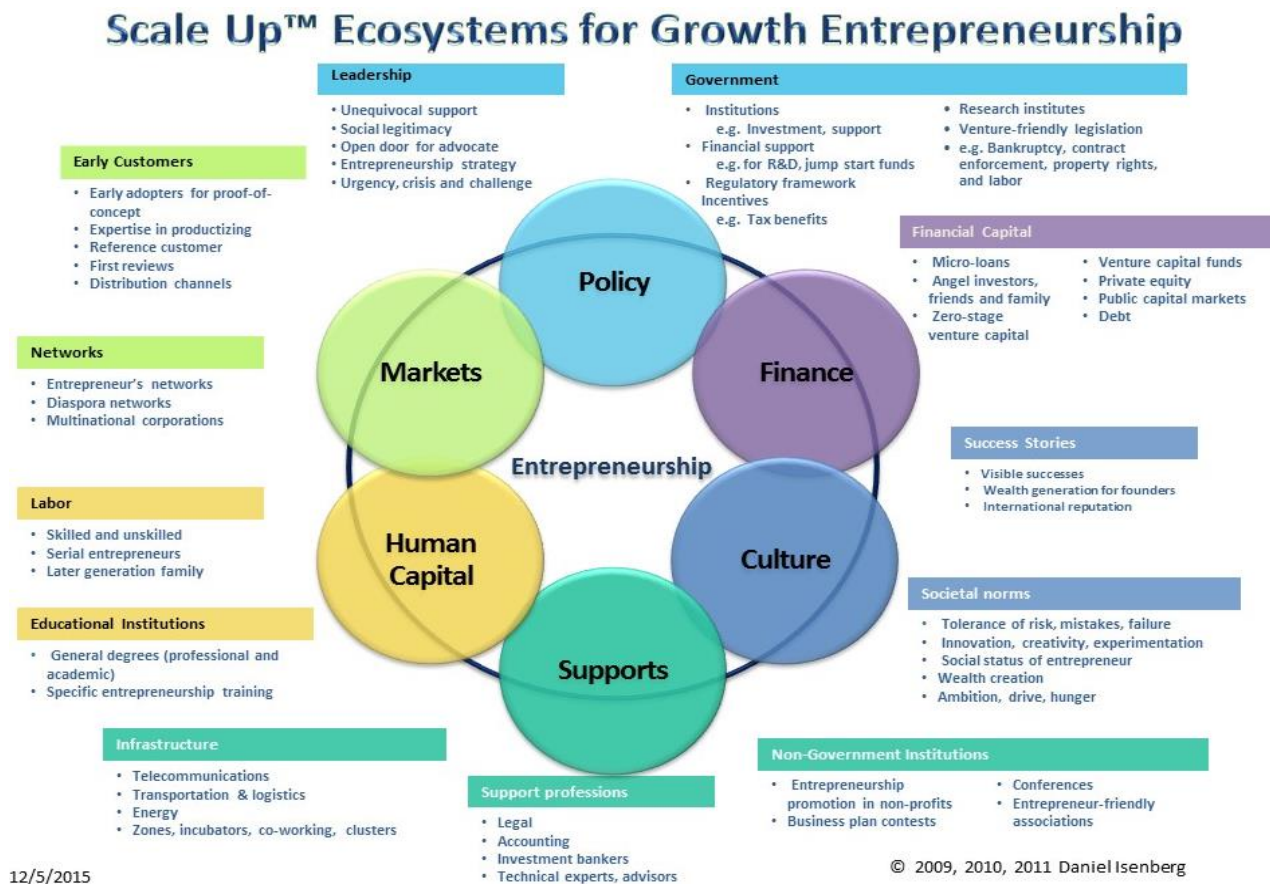

Figure 2: Babson's Domains Model

weaknesses and strengths in the ecosystem. Once the ecosystem is mapped, strategic approach can develop and bolster the different domains. The BEEP has helped foster entrepreneurship and growth in a number of communities. One such example is Scale Up Milwaukee. Greater Milwaukee is a region in the state of Wisconsin, United States renowned for its manufacturing history. However it also harbors a talented creative class, world-class research centers, and a strong financial community, that were not being harnessed to their full potential. Recognizing this, the Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC)—a non-profit civic organization partnered with other regional groups to pursue entrepreneurship-focused initiatives for Milwaukee. In 2013, their efforts led to the launch of Scale Up Milwaukee that was based on the model created by Babson. It is a powerful platform that convenes a diverse group of stakeholders (private sector leaders, public officials, investors, entrepreneurs, university faculty and local economic development support groups) to develop actionable strategies for high-growth, high-impact entrepreneurship in the region. By aligning growth-focused regional institutions around one common vision, Scale Up Milwaukee is creating a vibrant entrepreneurship ecosystem where public and private leaders, entrepreneurs, corporate executives, investors, and faculty members from Greater Milwaukee can collaborate to learn how best to strengthen the local economy. (Babson College, n.d.)

Koltai Six+Six

Koltai and Company, LLC (KolCo) uses a three step process to promote entrepreneurship in a community: diagnosis; design; and implementation. In the first step they survey an entrepreneurial landscape across the pillars of their Six+Six model, described below. Then using that gathered information KolCo identifies, designs, and provides customized entrepreneurship programs necessary to meet the needs of their client or ecosystem in general. In the final step, they assist with execution of these programs. Their model, Six+Six, can be summarized using the diagram in Figure 3.
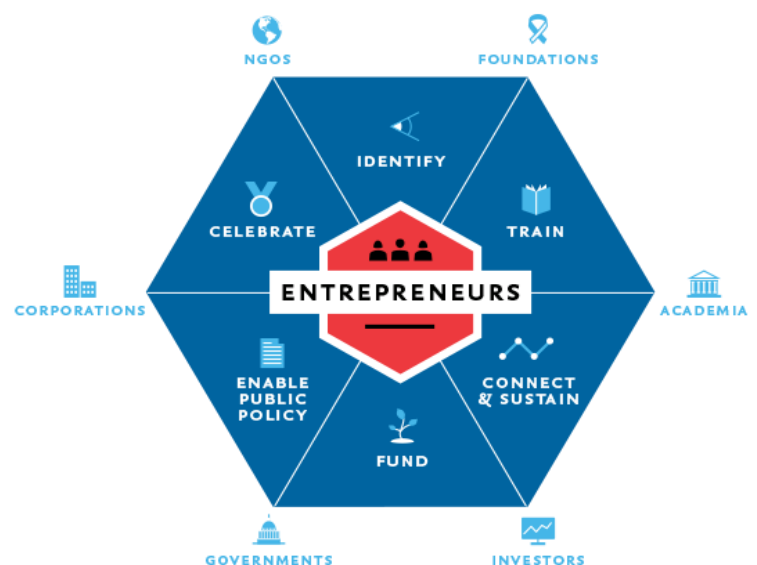

Figure 3: Six+Six Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Model

The center of the image represents the main focus of this model which is the entrepreneurs in the ecosystem. On the outside of the diagram are the six types of organizations that must be involved in the ecosystem. In between the entrepreneurs and organizations are the six actions required for a healthy entrepreneurial

ecosystem (Koltai, Mallet, & Muspratt, 2013). These steps relate to the BEEP domains discussed earlier in this chapter, but they do not correlate one-to-one. For example, funding and policies are in both models, but celebrate and connect & sustain are not in BEEP's model. The categorization of steps puts more focus on the specific action that need to be taken to promote entrepreneurship rather than the conditions that the Domains model focuses on. The separate structure of organizations allows for a two pronged approach that is evident in the Six+Six Chart.

A noteworthy example of mapping the entrepreneurial ecosystem is the diagnostic they performed in Ghana for the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). Over two months, the KolCo staff spoke with entrepreneurs, local and foreign investors, and other ecosystem players such as accelerator programs, shared workspace hubs, and capacity-building programs. Using their Six+Six Model as an analytical framework, KolCo assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the ecosystem and presented DFID with a literature review of entrepreneurship in Ghana as well as high-level recommendations for pro-entrepreneurship programming (Koltai et al., 2013).

Six+Six Chart

Koltai's ecosystem map contains their Six+Six chart and the top twenty organizations that help Ghana's entrepreneurial ecosystem (Koltai et al., 2013). The Six + Six chart places organizations in a chart based on the type of organization they are and the steps they have an impact on, this chart is displayed in Figure 4. The organizations that are more active in a particular stage are indicated as well as the type of organization that is more active. The report notes that the chart should not be used alone to indicate whether or not there is a gap in a particular sector, instead it should be used to see where organizations are currently active (Koltai et al., 2013).

The map also contains an "Ecosystem Top 20". This is a list of twenty organizations that participate in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which are not the most influential organizations in Ghana's ecosystem, but serve as a slice of it and provide the reader with a more general understanding of the ecosystem as a whole (Koltai et al., 2013). This involves including over- and under-performers in each cell. The representation of the ecosystem shows the distinct lack of government resources due to the fact that while the regulatory environment is positive towards entrepreneurs, there is no government agency in Ghana that has the entrepreneurs' interests in mind.

	NGOs	Foundations	Academia	Investors	Government	Corporates
IDENTIFY	churches **Enablis** Ghana's Next Young Entrepreneur Invest in Africa TechnoServe	StartUp Cup **Stanford SEED** **mFriday** **MEST** iSpace Hub Accra	**Ashesi University** KNUST CBD		GAIN	**Growth Mosaic** Porter & Dale, LLC
TRAIN	churches **Enablis** Ghana's Next Young Entrepreneur Invest in Africa Kumasi Center TechnoServe	StartUp Cup **Stanford SEED** mFriday **MEST** iSpace Hub Accra	**Ashesi University** KNUST KNUST CBD University of Ghana OUWA	Acumen Fund Injaro Investments AgDevCo	COTVET Skills Development Fund GAIN GYEEDA **Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT** NBSSI	Empretec Google Ghana **Growth Mosaic** Porter & Dale, LLC
CONNECT & SUSTAIN	**Barcamp Ghana** churches Invest in Africa West Africa Trade Hub	GoBa Hub Hub Accra iSpace **MEST** mFriday **Stanford SEED**	KNUST CBD **KNUST Vodaphone TechHub** OUWA	Acumen Fund	Ghana Multimedia Incubator Centre Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT	Google Ghana Growth Mosaic
FUND	Enablis	**MEST** StartUp Cup		Acumen Fund, Databank AgriFund, Injaro Investments, Jacana Partners, Oasis Capital, ProCredit, Serengeti Capital, UT Bank, AgDevCo	VCTF GAIN	Google Ghana Ghana Stock Exchange / Ghana Alternative Market
ENABLE REGS.	GCEEI West Africa Trade Hub				Minister for Private Sector Development & PPPs	Google Ghana Ghana Stock Exchange / Ghana Alternative Market
CELEBRATE	**Barcamp Ghana** **independent bloggers** churches Ghana's Next Young Entrepreneur	Hub Accra iSpace StartUp Cup	KNUST CBD OUWA		Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT	Business & Financial Times Daily Graphic Google Ghana Joy FM Radio

Organizations **in bold** indicate a strong player relative to other entities in the same Six + Six box. Colour key below corresponds to above KolCo assessments of all activity by players under a Six + Six pillar.

Inactive	Very little activity	Little activity	Some activity	Active

Figure 4: Koltai Six+Six Chart Rotate to landscape

The Entrepreneur's Journey

The Entrepreneur's Journey, shown in Figure 5, is a different kind of model created by TechStars. It describes the steps that businesses go through from before the first inklings of an idea to when they become giants in their industry. Unlike the models described earlier, they use these steps to break down the ecosystem and map the actors in it corresponding to each step. TechStars is a company that provides mentorship and accelerators around the world and has affected many numerous businesses. TechStars develop its activities and programs for entrepreneurs based on this simple model. While it is very simple, it has helped them empower over 4000 people and carry out about 1700 events around the world (Startup Weekend, 2013).

The journey consists of 6 steps: inspire, learn, founder, startup, scale-up, champion (Claire Topalian, 2014). Not all business will go through each step in the journey, an entrepreneur may never fully execute their idea or may become stagnant and never scale their business. The steps are more useful as a representation of when an organization provides their services to an entrepreneur rather than as a metric for success. For example, TechStars has marked at which steps their various organizations and events help entrepreneurs in the picture below, and the colored dots represent the colored events.
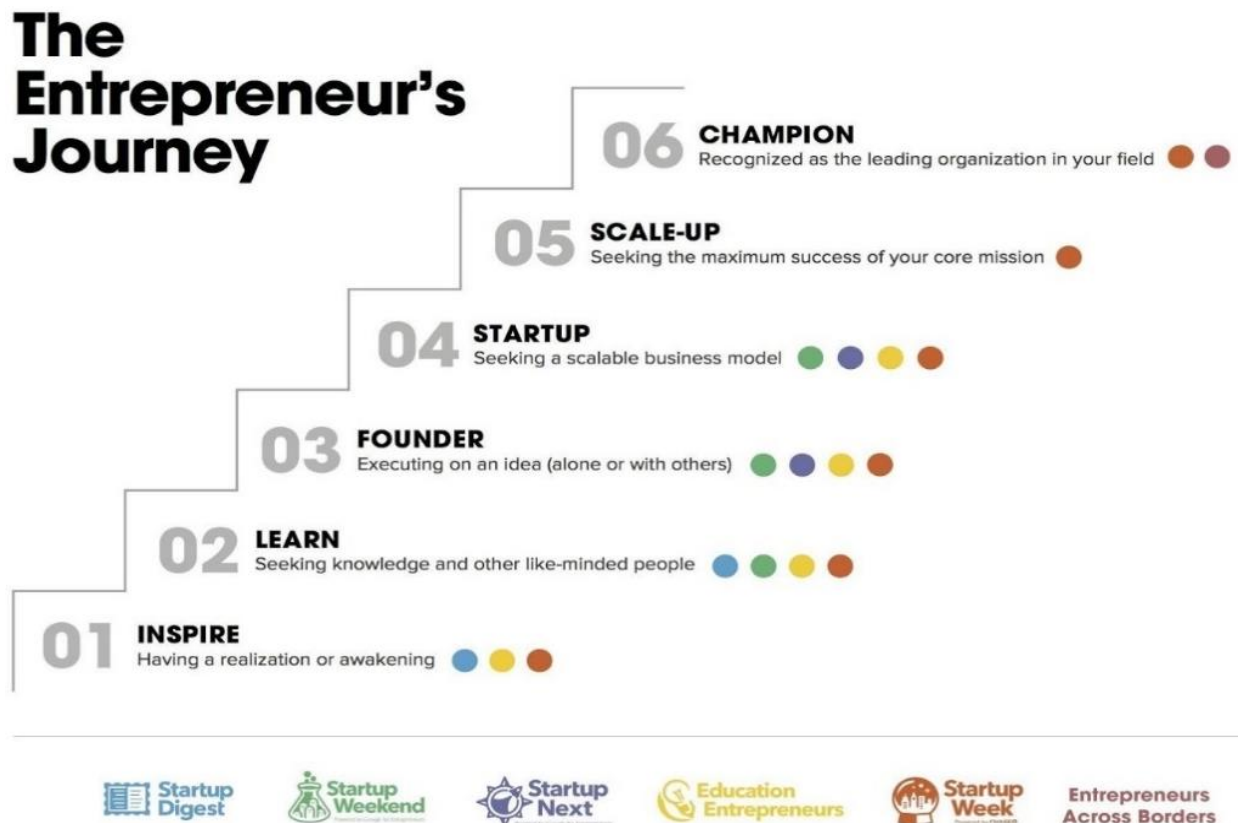

Figure 5: Entrepreneur's Journey by TechStars

2.2: The Need for Entrepreneurship in Albania

Albania is a developing country that has opened its doors to the open-market economy. As a whole, there is much room for improvement shown by the large economic trends such as unemployment, emigration, gross domestic product (GDP), foreign direct investment (FDI), etc. In 2014 Albania had a youth unemployment rate of 32.5 percent. Looking at the total emigrant population, there are more than 1.25 million people, and one of the world's highest emigration rates at 3.3 migrants per 1,000 people every year (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015). The amount of emigrants is now higher than the resident labor force, which was about one million people in 2014, this can be seen in Figure 6 (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015).
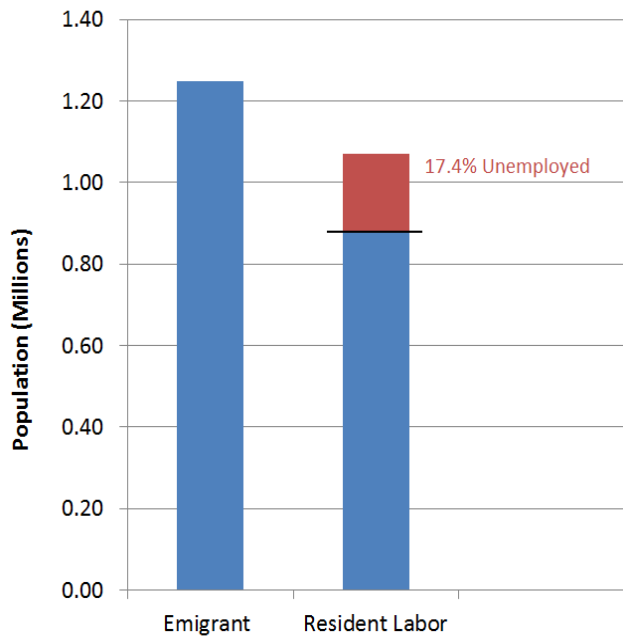
The remittance from the emigrants contribute to the country's economy. For instance, it reached a maximum contribution to the country's GDP in 2007 when it was responsible for 15% of the GDP
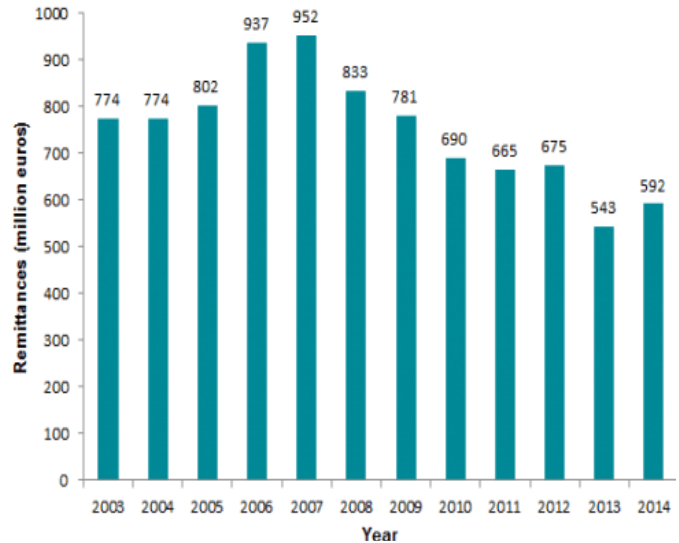

Figure 7:"Remittances Received in Albania, 2003-14" (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015)

at 952 million euros (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015). However, remittances have since declined after the economic crisis of 2008 (seen in Figure 7), which brought about decreased incomes and the growth of education expenses (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015). Despite the contributions that remittances have on an individual level, the alarmingly high rate of emigration, according to Nicholson (2001) hinders the development of the country. As seen from Figure 8, the GDP was 11.5 billion USD as of 2015, lowest in the last 5 years (World Bank, 2016).

Albania's growth percent, the increase in inflation-adjusted market value of goods and services produced, according to the World Bank, has gone down roughly 20% in 2014 since 2009 (World Bank, 2016).

Figure 6: Chart comparing population of emigrant, resident labor and unemployed labor as of 2014

GDP (current US$)
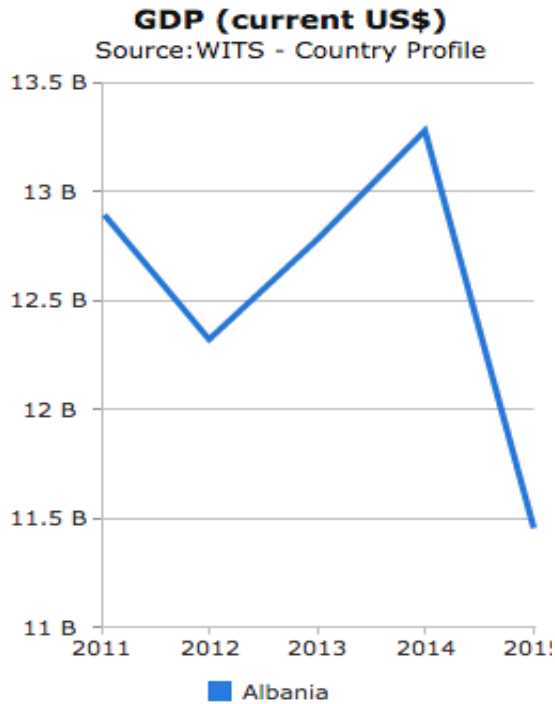Source:WITS - Country Profile

Figure 8: Albania GDP (Current USD)

This serves as more compelling evidence that the economy requires new businesses and growth of existing ones. Therefore, entrepreneurship can be a vital source for innovation and economic growth.

An entrepreneur is responsible for exchange and circulation in the economy, and has the ability to open new markets (Iversen, Jorgensen, & Malchow-Moller, 2008). The entrepreneurial environment is characterized by finance, human capital, support, markets, culture, and policy which all play integral roles in the market economy. These factors will be explored in the section below.

Financing

One of the most fundamental needs of starting a business is financial support. Developed countries have established banking systems, available loans, business incubators, angel investors, venture capital organizations, and set policies in place for patents and contracts (Asllani et al., 2014). Often developing countries, such as Albania, are lacking one or more of these aspects. The amount of loans in Albania between 2006 and 2010 are shown in Figure 9. These financing options deters individuals from seeking to start a business due to lack of support and the high

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Individual Loans (in Billions)	$1.77	$2.71	$3.68	$4.17	$4.55
	100%	153%	208%	236%	257%
Retail Loans (in Billions)	$0.60	$0.96	$1.31	$1.34	$1.37
	100%	161%	218%	223%	229%
Corporate Loans (in Billions)	$1.18	$1.75	$2.37	$2.83	$3.18
	100%	148%	201%	240%	270%
% of Deposits	$37.66	$46.4	$62.04	$64.8	$60.1
	100%	123%	165%	172%	160%

Figure 9: Banking Industry Development in Recent Years
Albanian currency is converted to US$ using the conversion rate of 1 ALL = 0.0092773 USD (as of October 13, 2012)

financial risk. Having a set of established rules and policies in place for legal investments and shareholders also helps by encouraging investors to support entrepreneurs (Asllani et al., 2014).

Albania has had an unstable banking system since the end of communism in the early 1990s. The banking network has grown, with more than 524 financial institutions operating in Albania today, and a new set of banking regulations having been approved in July 1998 (Asllani et al., 2014).

However, the banking sector provides difficult options for loans to SMEs due to the high risk and low margins involved (Baresel-Bofinger et al., 2015). The United Bank of Albania offers a "wide range of funding to companies in the initial stage of growth…. or who have a deficiency in current assets and are seeking to achieve greater efficiency in terms of business activity," (United Bank of Albania, 2015). However, loans from banks such as these are reportedly hard to pay back for entrepreneurs, and SME bankruptcies and non-performing loans have increased in the past (Andreas Baresel-Bofinger et al., 2015). With limited access to credit or loans, entrepreneurs face various obstructions such as acquiring new technology or increasing production of goods or services, therefore the productivity of a business is usually obstructed (World Bank & Open Knowledge Repository, 2009).

An alternate source of capital for many has been remittances, discussed earlier. In some cases they serve as funds for small businesses, families, and others living in Albania. The goal of emigrants working abroad is to receive higher wages and create a source of income to send back to support their family. Eventually, they may return to Albania and use their earnings as start-up capital for a family enterprise. Additionally, these returnees may use their earnings to further develop a family business by purchasing equipment or technology. This improvement may be done by directly purchasing the equipment for the family business or giving loans to family members (Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015).

Human Capital

The availability of human resources has been on the decline in Albania due to the lack of job opportunities and lending institutions. The prospect of going abroad for more opportunities entices many young people to emigrate, especially educated and skilled workers. This is corroborated by the aforementioned high youth unemployment and emigration rate. Many emigrants go abroad during the harvest or construction seasons, and when they come home they live off of their savings (Piracha & Vadean, 2009). In this sense, they do not contribute to the workforce in Albania directly even though their remittances contribute to the capital gains. This is exacerbated by the fact that a big portion of emigrating population are those who are more educated, leaving a dent in the educated population in Albania.

To counter this tendency for the educated to seek opportunities abroad, universities may aid in the promotion of an entrepreneurial environment by teaming up

with research institutions and local businesses to get the youth population interested and involved at an early age (Asllani et al., 2014). Universities have the ability to create an entrepreneurial culture among students and professors in a stimulating environment through various programs, courses and activities (Diaconu & Dutu, 2015).

Although there are over 38 private institutions in Albania, many of them have been found to have some form of corruption or violation of laws (Asllani et al., 2014). A study from 2010 reported how at the time several private universities granted degrees to students who did not attend a single class, and the government made no efforts to suspend any licenses despite this (Asllani et al., 2014; Karameta, 2010). This inaction marred the reputation of the Albanian education system and encouraged more migration of the youth population for higher education, thus decreasing the pool of skilled labor and leaders who would be willing to take on entrepreneurial ventures (Asllani et al., 2014). However, in recent years efforts to incorporate interactions between universities and the community by the government has improved the public image. This has cultivated in raising awareness and implementing the Third Mission initiative to name one example, which is a variety of activities that involves the "generation, use, application, and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments." This encompasses activities related to technology transfer and

innovation), generation of ideas, jobs and companies; enhanced engagement with the community; and research focused on social needs. These facilitate development of graduates that are well suited to participate in professional life, and aware of their social context (Mora, Ferreira, Vidal, & Vieira, 2015). Thus they are better prepared to take on entrepreneurial roles in the community.

Infrastructure

To effectively run a business, an entrepreneur can benefit from a well-functioning infrastructure---roads, electricity provision, transportation, and communications. An environment lacking well maintained roads and communication network hinders the ability of a business to function efficiently, and will deter other organizations from investing in businesses (Asllani et al., 2014). One of the biggest issues reported by Albanian firms is an unreliable electric supply as shown in Figure 10.

Because of this inconsistency in the electrical grid, many firms share back-up
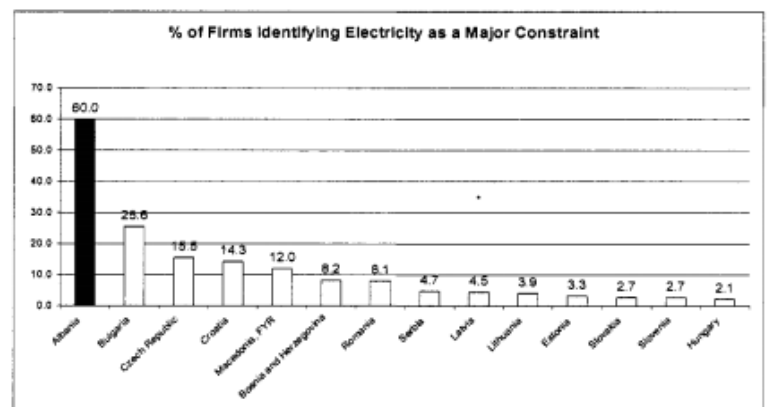
Figure 10: Electricity as a Major Constraint Regional Comparison (Albania - Building Competitiveness)

generators, which costs time and money (World Bank & Open Knowledge Repository, 2009). Albanian businesses also report insufficient access to telecommunication facilities. There are abandoned facilities and insufficient access to power, water, and sewer systems (Asllani et al., 2014). Transport is an issue as well; imports and exports from Albania take excessively long to clear customs (World Bank & Open Knowledge Repository, 2009).

Markets

One factor that is integral to the growth of a business is the scope of the market to which the entrepreneur has access to. Albania is still relatively isolated from the rest of the world in terms of expanding their businesses abroad and not being a part of the European Union. Currently the businesses are small scale since they mainly have access to Albania's domestic market of 3 million people (Asllani et al., 2014). This fact was prevalent in 2011 where about 97.6% of active enterprises were SMEs with an employee count range from 1-9 making up 95.2%, 10-49 constituting 3.9%, and the last .9% occupied by those with 50-249 employees (Hoxha & Dika, 2013). Since SMEs constitute much of the active enterprises, their small scale along with the small market hinders the potential of many businesses, and access to larger markets may alleviate this problem.

Albania has been integrating its imports and exports on a more international scale, but 2006 exports consisted of low-skill, manual labor services, with 97% of total exports being articles of apparel and clothing accessories, leather, leather manufactures, and footwear (CIA, 2016). Currently Albania's main trade agreements are with a few surrounding countries: Italy, Spain, Serbia, Malta, and Greece (World Bank, 2016). Better marketing of Albania's extensive natural resources, such as its exports of textiles and clothing, metals, fuels, minerals, footwear, wood, and vegetables to a broader spectrum of countries would help with this expansion (World Bank, 2016). Foreign trade can stimulate innovation and a competitive atmosphere within businesses to improve their products and services to meet the expectations and needs of foreign buyers (CIA, 2016).

Entrepreneurial Culture

Entrepreneurship is influenced by cultural values. As Asllani (2014) notes, "Albanians are resourceful and hardworking, both critical factors in positive entrepreneurial outcomes," (Asllani et al., 2014). Caring for family, especially the elderly, is a strong tradition, and not having the security of a stable job removes the reassurance of the ability to do so. Limited access to start up loans from banks and other lending institutions, as discussed earlier, means that many entrepreneurs are forced to start businesses with loans from families and personal contacts. Thus, starting a business poses financial risk not only to the entrepreneur but for his or her family. If the venture fails, they will lose a lot of investment and will be left without a steady income source to take care of the

family. It is a risk a lot of people are not comfortable with.

Being an entrepreneur in Albania comes with a list of obstacles that one must surpass, with one being the lack of role models in entrepreneurship. With start-ups usually lasting around a year, those who wish to start businesses themselves find it hard with no current successful entrepreneurs from whom to learn. Another problem within businesses is the gender discrimination in regards to the community relationship. "According to EU the countries with the lowest levels of female ownership in business are Albania, Azerbaijan, and Kosovo," (Imeraj & Gruda, 2013). This sort of mentality makes women reluctant to become entrepreneurs, and attempting to make progress while taking care of their family is a challenge in itself. Yet not all of the cultural aspects of Albania hinder the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Earlier in the chapter it was stated that family could also be a source of capital through donations or remittances to start a business. Those who do not find aid through banks or NGOs can receive help from family. Many Albanians have the enthusiasm to start a new business and rely on familial support both financially and for motivation. During the communist regime individuals often worked in only one area or occupation; however, with the transition to a market economy, a more flexible mindset is needed to jumpstart entrepreneurship in Albania (Asllani et al., 2014).

Government Policy

Government policies can play a vital role. While the Government of Albania has implemented certain regulations in the recent years, there is still much room for improvement. Some of the different types of regulations that influence the entrepreneurial growth are discussed below:

Tax Regulations

As of fiscal year 2016, businesses with annual turnover from 0-5 million Albanian Lek (ALL, $38,000USD) are not required to pay any tax on their profit, as opposed to the previous flat 25,000 (ALL, $2,000 USD) tax for turnover in the bracket of 0-2 million (ALL, $15,500 USD) (Deloitte, 2016). For businesses with annual turnover from 5-8 million (ALL, $38,000-$62,000 USD) the tax rate on profit is 5%. The previous policy was a 7.5% tax on annual turnover from 2-8 million ALL, with a minimum tax of 25,000 ALL (Deloitte, 2016). While the changes are aimed to improve the business climate, frequent changes to the tax code has led to confusion among business owners and individuals (Asllani et al., 2014).

Property Rights

Disputes and issues regarding property rights have been a problem in Albania since the fall of communism, when the government started the process of restituting ownership for properties that were expropriated by the communist government (US Department of State, 2014). Although there have been recent changes in legislation, the process of

registering property itself is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. For instance, a notary public now has access to real estate registers and can confirm legal ownership of property and disputes related to property rights are adjudicated by the civil court (US Department of State, 2014). However, the decisions from civil courts often take many years and authorities often do not enforce court decisions. These unresolved property issues have considerably hampered the development of the system (US Department of State, 2014).

Business Registration

Registration and licensing of businesses, however, have become much easier through the establishment of National Registration Centre (NRC) and National Licensing Centre (NLC). Both of these centers serve as a so called "one stop shop". NRC allows registration within one business day and with a minimum cost of 100 ALL (Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administrationde, 2016). With shortened, transparent and quick procedures, the NLC reduces the administrative barriers to enterprises, reduces the costs of business related to the licensing process and minimizes the level of informality, thus reducing the hassle involved in the overall process (US Department of State, 2014).

Contract Enforcement and Investment Protection

The current policies regarding foreign direct investment (FDI) in Albania attempt to create a business friendly environment for foreign investors to invest in local businesses. Some of the incentives include equal treatment as local investors guaranteeing similar tax benefits, access to all sectors, special state protection for investors who make investments at least $13 million on property made available by the government (US Department of State, 2014). Both entrepreneurs and foreign investors are reluctant to purchase property or do business in Albania since property rights and ownership are often unclear, and contracts are not enforced properly. Under the special state protection, a foreign investor is represented in the judicial process by the Albanian state and any injunction order issued by the court shall be executed over state properties. There are no restrictions on the purchase of private property and foreign investors have the right to submit disputes to an Albanian court. However, the sluggishness of the courts and corruption in the system often discourage investments (US Department of State, 2014).

Corruption

A significant problem holding back the Albanian economy is corruption in the system. According to Asllani e al. (2014), "many Albanians admit to having given bribes to obtain public services." In the recent years there have been attempts by the government to fight corruption, promote a culture of transparency and accountability, and increase people's faith in government services. In February 2015, the government introduced a unique portal to denounce corrupt practices, "www.stopkorrupsionit.al" (Minister of

State for Innovation and Public Administrationde, 2016). This website serves as a platform for citizens to anonymously report corrupt practices they have witnessed. The denunciation is relayed to four different locations: the office of the Prime Minister, Office of the National Coordinator against Corruption, ACU in the Prime Minister and to the Hall Operations, which works to ensure the tracking of all the denunciations and to have control of the whole process of treatment of 30 days of any denunciation (Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administrationde, 2016). As of today, there have been 10543 cases reported, out of which 5265 have been resolved, 92 resulted in disciplinary measures and 71 criminal charges (Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administrationde, 2016).

2.3: Yunus Social Business

In 2012, in an initiative to improve the economy through social and sustainable businesses, the Government of Albania invited Yunus Social Business (YSB) to the country. Co-founded by Peace Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, YSB is an organization that promotes social businesses. Social businesses are businesses specifically created to address social problems. YSB draws from Professor Yunus' experience in setting up over 40 social businesses in Bangladesh, and has branches in 7 regions ranging from Tunisia to Brazil. The organization empowers promising entrepreneurs through two core initiatives - Entrepreneur Service and Financing. Entrepreneur services include accelerator programs, one-on-one coaching, and other opportunities. Financing is executed in the form of loans, rather than donations, which leads to the efficient and revolving use of capital - "each dollar is recycled multiple times, creating more impact each time" (Yunus Social Business, 2015). After establishment, the business is monitored by YSB to observe advancement and provide advice whenever needed.

Since its establishment in Albania, Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB) conducted several programs, events and workshops to promote entrepreneurship and create a social impact. They have supported more than 200 entrepreneurs in Albania, created numerous jobs for low-income groups and financed 5 social businesses, directly financing more than $700,000 (Yunus Social Business, 2015). Their activities help entrepreneurs mostly in the startup stage. However, there are a lot of factors and players in the community that affect the development of entrepreneurial economy. Therefore, to better understand how to encourage an entrepreneurial economy, YSBB would like to identify the interactions among key stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, lending institutions, job training

Figure 11: Yunus Social Business Logo

providers, universities, non-government organizations, government agencies, and other key actors. They want to find what aspects they may be missing that we can observe as students, as opposed to when entrepreneurs talk to organizations like themselves. YSBB also wanted to learn about the opinions and perspective of entrepreneurs of the environment. Our team has been asked to conceptualize this through mapping the entrepreneurial ecosystem. For our deliverable, we created an online resource that will help entrepreneurs navigate their way to finding what they need, including which organization can help address that need.

Chapter 3: Methods

The overall goal of our project was to map the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Albania and create a directory of resources for aspiring entrepreneurs to help and encourage them in their endeavors. The groups we hope to target with this map include potential and existing entrepreneurs, supporting institutions, government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social businesses, and investors. We have achieved this through the following objectives:

Objective 1: Obtain the perspectives of entrepreneurs with respect to opportunities, the challenges they face, and their approach to overcoming these challenges. Conduct interviews with a broad range of entrepreneurs. Examine the fields they work in, the size of their business, and which of their goals they have or have not achieved.

Objective 2: Qualitatively assess the support systems that entrepreneurs have access to with respect to their levels of interactions in the ecosystem. Interview support systems including NGOs, universities, government programs, mentorship/training programs, financial resources, and other involved organizations.

Objective 3: Determine effective visual representations of the structure, relationships, and resources in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, by drawing from multiple models found in our research. Categorize the actors in the ecosystem by various criteria, such as how they interact with entrepreneurs or their role in a particular stage in the development of the startup. Translate this information into a webpage where entrepreneurs and others can access information regarding support available in the environment.

3.1 Interviewing Entrepreneurs

We conducted semi-structured interviews with a variety of entrepreneurs in Albania, who ended up all being mainly focused in Tirana, and each were in different stages of growing their business. The interviews were about an hour long and we investigated topics such as: common challenges entrepreneurs face, the common pitfalls, types of resources (financial and others) that were available at different stages, their interaction with different entities of the ecosystem, the effectiveness of government initiatives/policies, motivation, their approach toward running their business, and their overview of the ecosystem.

We grouped the interviewees according to business sectors to include a wide variety of approaches. Our initial list of entrepreneurs were obtained from web searches of startups, and we contacted them through social media pages of their business. We also identified additional interviewees through referrals from other interviewees and organizations. In the end,

we were able to interview 14 entrepreneurs. In order to facilitate the process, each interview was conducted by a pair of interviewers. One of the interviewers took initiative in asking questions while the other took extensive notes and provided support. This method of using teams of two allowed for more interviews to be done as well as allowing the entrepreneurs to feel more comfortable. In a similar vein, we decided that taking handwritten notes instead of audio recordings or typed notes would allow the entrepreneurs to talk more freely.

Once the information was gathered, we conducted a thematic analysis of the gathered data. We followed five steps to carry out this qualitative analysis (Marcus Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). First, we reviewed the notes from each interview immediately to assess the quality and significance of the data according to the background and experience of the entrepreneur, and richness of the responses. Subsequently, we categorized the responses according to the research topics mentioned earlier. From the categorized responses, our team tried to find commonalities and differences under each category. This enabled us to draw comparisons between different approaches and fate of the ventures, and later make connections to identify missing or weak components of the ecosystem. Finally, we compiled our findings and inferences which enabled us to reach a consensus on the entrepreneurial ecosystem from the entrepreneur's perspective.

3.2 Interviewing Organizations

In order to map the entrepreneurial ecosystem, we identified and assessed the factors that influence the system through interviewing groups such as officials from organizations such as Partners Albania and Protik ICT Center, as well as international organizations, such as Swisscontact and Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). We saw their views on entrepreneurship, their approach to improving the ecosystem and what resources can be made available to startups.

Our interviews covered the following topics:

- What activities have they been involved in to foster entrepreneurship?
- What resources are necessary to galvanize entrepreneurship?
- How can we make the current resources more available to entrepreneurs?
- How do they communicate with prospective entrepreneurs to alert them to relevant resources/programs?
- How they assess the impact of such programs?
- What can the organizations do to be more useful for entrepreneurs?

With the above research questions, we came up with interview questions listed in Appendix B. Out of 20 organizations we found (listed in Appendix D), we contacted and interviewed ten officials from ten organizations actively involved in promoting entrepreneurial activity. The information gathered from these interviews was

analyzed with a similar method outlined in Section 3.1. The responses are categorized under key research topics and themes. Their response about activities and programs enabled us to categorize the organizations according their role in the ecosystem for our model. Finally, comparing the perspectives of entrepreneurs (from Section 3.1) regarding organizational support with responses from organizations enabled us to find weak links and determine where support is needed.

3.3. Creating Deliverables

Once the data was collected, we analyzed different aspects of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. There are several facets that we explored:

- In what domains are there a dearth of actors? What could fill these gaps?
- Which organizations do entrepreneurs feel are helpful?
- How do different organizations work together?
- How can new relationships be fostered between organizations?
- Are there communities of entrepreneurs that would welcome new membership?

After we performed our analysis, we devised a way to present the information to entrepreneurs, NGOs, and other interested parties. The following questions formed a set of guidelines for the creation of the designs:

- Who are the target audiences for the report?
- What information is meant to be conveyed?
- Does the design enhance the understanding of the information (based on feedback from entrepreneurs and organizations)?
- Through what media is this meant to be distributed (ex. print, online, television, etc.)?

Based on our research, we prepared a mock website categorizing organizations and events in the ecosystem. The design will serve as a directory of the support offered in the ecosystem for entrepreneurs seeking aid in the development of their business.

3.4 Data Management

All interview responses were recorded by hand-written notes with the consent of the participants after they were informed of what purpose the recordings were used. These notes were typed up for analysis at a later time. We exchanged documents and information in a secured way with our sponsor through a shared Google Drive folder that is only accessible to the team members and the sponsor. All devices that hold the data are password protected and shared with our sponsor Yunus Social Business Balkans. The interview data will be deleted from the students' devices after the project is completed.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

By analyzing the information gathered from our interviews and research, we composed the following findings concerning the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tirana and various factors that affect startups. These findings are divided into three sections corresponding to our methodology:

4.1 Entrepreneurs

We found commonalities with respect to our key themes about the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tirana. In this section the main factors we look at are motivation, resources, employees/staff, financing, supporting organizations, and marketing. Despite each interviewee having a wholly unique experience when starting their business, we've noticed several themes across multiple interviews, these themes shown in Figure 12.

There were specific limitations to our findings due to our selection of interviewees. It is important to note that Yunus Social Business Balkans specifically requested us to reach out to entrepreneurs with whom they have had little to no contact. This may indicate that those entrepreneurs are disconnected from the support systems in the ecosystem here, and work very independently, which could be unrepresentative of the larger pool of entrepreneurs. Many entrepreneurs we talked with did not receive any help from supporting organizations. They often had the mindset that a true entrepreneur has all the resources he or she needs to create a business. Because most of the entrepreneurs we interviewed held this viewpoint, the ecosystem we perceived may be more disjointed than in reality.

Furthermore, half of the ventures we talked with were in the IT industry, which may also produce biased results based on their specific needs and experiences. We also ended up interviewing ventures based mainly in Tirana, which may have had an impact on our data. We were unable to contact people outside the country who are Albanian but living abroad and working abroad. Since we are focused on the ecosystem specifically in Albania, we did not interview the diaspora.

Resources

Entrepreneurs we interviewed utilized their education and past work
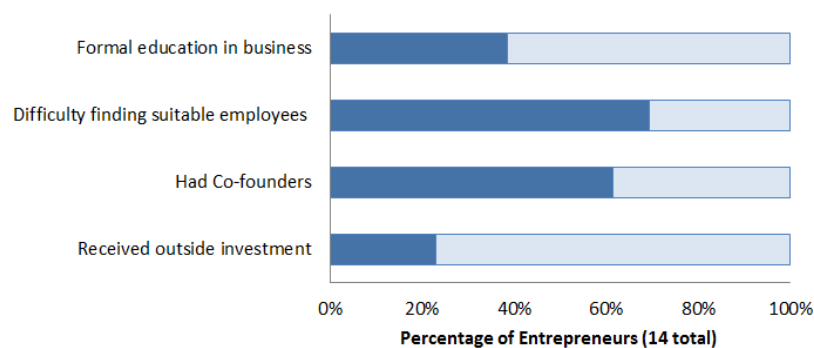
Common Themes Among Entrepreneurs

Figure 12: Common traits among our thirteen interviewees

experience to fill their technical and business needs of starting and planning their venture. Most entrepreneurs had the necessary educational background to be able to start their business independently without external mentors. They had educational background in their respective fields (such as IT, advertisement or web design) or business. In some cases they used online resources to gain better technical or business understanding. Ventures that were founded by a team had co-founders with different educational backgrounds and made unique contributions to the team. Not many people received consultancy from organizations or other sources when planning their venture, because they either had the necessary background or were self-taught.

Employees/Staff

From our interviews with entrepreneurs, most had difficulty finding suitable employees. They wanted to expand their company and start building a staff, but they do not know where to look in the ecosystem. Many of the ventures we spoke to that were able to build a staff found employees either through referrals or internship programs. We learned of many successful entrepreneurs who took on employees after observing their work as interns. Some reported that the best employees were not necessarily the ones who had background in the industry, but were simply those with the required mindset and ambition to work. Entrepreneurs we interviewed hired more based on character, responsibility, and work

ethic rather than work experience. Even those with degrees from universities may be lacking in work capacity, particularly technical knowledge and skills. Entrepreneurs find that those who are well qualified often prefer to work in more stable environments. There are obstacles in finding motivated, capable employees who are willing to join a new venture. It is challenging for entrepreneurs to build a staff in the ecosystem in Tirana for these various reasons.

Financing

For startup capital most entrepreneurs currently rely on bootstrapping, which consists of using personal savings, loans from friends and family, or revenue from the business itself. However, the majority reported that more investments would have helped them develop their business, particularly in the beginning stages.

We learned from our interviews that bank loans are very difficult to obtain in Albania because banks require collateral and need to see hard assets of a company which a startup usually does not have. There is also a lack of venture capitalists and angel investors, affluent individuals who finance startups in exchange for share in the company. Because of this, some entrepreneurs we talked with looked for investments abroad. Because relatively few Albanian companies have been bought out by larger companies or have gone public on a stock exchange, investors do not see a path for them to gain their investments back. The entrepreneurs we talked with

who had been approached by local investors did not agree with the investors' vision for the company, and therefore did not accept these investment offers.

Several entrepreneurs claimed it is difficult for startups, especially IT businesses, to demonstrate their company's worth to investors. They noted that the apprehension about IT ventures is because many do not understand it and can not see what they are putting their money towards or the revenues it could bring. Therefore, many investors opt to invest in more stable businesses that offer collateral or guarantee like agriculture, real estate, and restaurants for example.

The findings presented in this section align with what we found in our literature review about financing entrepreneurial ventures. This includes research regarding loans from banks, investors, and startup capital.

Policy

In terms of policies that affected businesses, comparatively we obtained varied responses from the entrepreneurs. We found that about half our interviewees mentioned they had difficulties interpreting the tax policy. Two in particular reported experiencing confusion when trying to determine the type of entity their business qualified as. In addition, they were not made aware of the Value Added Taxes that applies to their business at the time of registration. They also mentioned that different sources provided them with different information and even government officials could not provide them with a

conclusive answer. The reason behind such confusion, as reported by some entrepreneurs, is the frequent changes in the tax policy. This also makes it difficult for businesses to project expenses. However, some entrepreneurs mentioned they did not experience difficulty navigating the tax codes. They even found it straightforward and that others need to "just read through it." This difference in opinion could be attributed to the level of experience of entrepreneurs, the different legal procedures or policies required depending on the business type, or different experiences with various regional authorities. Regardless of this issue, overall businesses that have had more time to develop in the ecosystem tended to have lawyers or accountants on retainer to avoid these concerns.

Supporting Organizations

Many entrepreneurs reportedly are disillusioned with the supportive organizations in Tirana such as NGOs, incubators, and accelerator programs. Some believe these organizations are very political and one needs contacts in them to receive any help. Others believe they only grant aid to similar types of ventures and it is fruitless for them to seek support. Many have gone to organizations and presented their ideas, and have even been well received, but nothing came of it and they viewed it as a pointless effort. Some entrepreneurs have either an unclear vision or distorted views about the extent of services and support that organizations offer in Tirana's ecosystem.

Some entrepreneurs, by contrast, are simply unaware of organizations providing financial and technical support, and have built their business model solely on their own research and personal work experience. There is not enough awareness in the community about the opportunities these organizations can provide. Figure 13 shows that shows that six, approximately half, of the entrepreneurs we interviewed had no interaction with any organizations. This is a missed opportunity. Organizations can also offer networking opportunities, connections to other entrepreneurs with success stories, and future opportunities for mentorship.

Experience with organizations

- 46% None
- 23% Negative
- 31% Positive
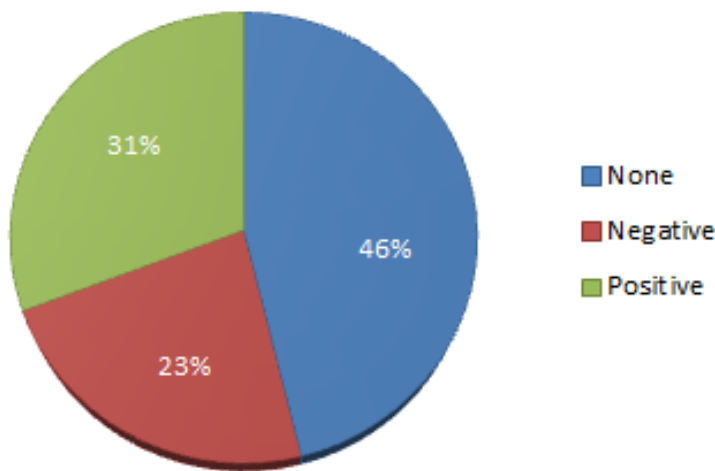
Figure 13: Distribution showing interaction of our interviewees with organizations.

Customer Base and Marketing

About a quarter of the entrepreneurs we interviewed have a presence in the global market. From what they expressed, this gave them a large expansion in customer base and growth potential. Relatively few local businesses currently tap into the international market. Some of the challenges of going global, as mentioned by our interviewees, were: larger competition, expensive procedures such as licensing and certification, and unawareness of international market trends.

Understanding the market is important when focusing locally as well as internationally. This involves doing due diligence regarding the product-market fit. By contrasting between how our interviewees built their business, we noticed that few realized the importance of product testing. In comparison, those who did had a better defined customer segment. Thus they were more capable of catering to customer demands, and had a clear and confident approach to their business.

The marketing strategies used by entrepreneurs in Tirana are very limited and usually consist of word of mouth and Facebook. Most entrepreneurs rely on family and friends both as their first customers and to spread word about their services. Even ventures that are mainly web based market physically through flyers and personal interactions. A few web-based entrepreneurs we talked to even sent representatives throughout the country to market their website and demonstrate benefits of its use. Others reported they would like to hire employees dedicated for advertisement but do not know where to look.

4.2 Organizations

To obtain an objective overview of the entrepreneurial environment, it was essential to understand the niche occupied by various organizations and their activities. A list of organizations we interviewed is represented by Figure 14One major feature that organizations have in common is the passion to help Albanians. Though their interactions encompass how they provide support to the entrepreneurs themselves, through perhaps finance, mentorship, or accelerator programs. Indirect interactions involve how organizations affect the environment entrepreneurs exist in, whether by improving infrastructure or creating more favorable government policies. Many organizations form

Name of Organization	Type	Description
Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB)	Finance & Mentorship	Founded as a branch in 2012, YSBB focuses on capacity building and financing for entrepreneurs to create social businesses that create a positive impact on the local community.
Protik ICT Center	Mentorship	Nonprofit organization that promotes innovation in the ICT sector through training and various activities.
Albanian American Development Fund (AADF)	Entrepreneurial climate development	National organization that focuses on bringing foreign investment and internal development in areas such as education, tourism, and investment funding.
GIZ	Entrepreneurial climate development	German development agency with the branch here in Albania focusing on the technical aspects of entrepreneurship.
Partners Albania	Finance & Mentorship	Involved with policy development and hosts annual competition for green business ideas.
Startup Grind	Mentorship & Startup Community Competition	Internationally known startup community that was founded in Silicon Valley helping entrepreneurs through education, inspiration, and offers a competition to facilitate this.
Oficina	Accelerator & Co-working Space	Located in the Harry Fultz Institute, Oficina gives a suitable work environment and conducts accelerator programs for startups.
AIESEC	Mentorship & Training Employment Opportunities	Student run NGO focusing on giving leadership skills and providing opportunities to young people.
ENGIM	Development Agency & Mentorship	Italian NGO whose mission is for regional and citywide development including a training program for entrepreneurs.
My Office'al	Co-working Space	Inspired by similar spaces in other countries in Europe, this provides a diverse work environment for those looking for an alternative solution for office space.

Figure 14: Organizations Contacted

specific goals may not be exactly aligned, they all have services, projects, investments, or other endeavors that offer assistance towards entrepreneurs. These organizations work on a variety of levels, interacting with entrepreneurs whether working directly or indirectly. Direct partnerships with others having similar interests. These partnerships help fund activities that benefit entrepreneurs and promote communication between entrepreneurs and other organizations.

Organizations and Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs who are looking for assistance can turn to organizations that each have specific areas, activities/events, and steps they can help with. There are organizations that offer mentorship or training for those looking for the acquisition of business skills. These vary depending on the organizations, some being weekly workshops to 7 week long training accelerators. AIESEC (originally an acronym for Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales) is a student run NGO that works to inspire young people to develop skills they need in the field. Events such as Startup Grind work to increase communication between entrepreneurs and to facilitate the exchange of information and foster entrepreneurial communities. Business competitions can provide financial benefits to the winners, but can also serve as networking events and basic mentorship opportunities. Of the organizations that we interviewed, most sponsored or hosted competitions that involved entrepreneurs designing their own business ideas.

A number of organizations are nonprofit, though each requires a source of funding. There are some that work through investments, and receive a portion back over time or equity. Some run on grants given by the government, but unfortunately these are limited. Another way some organizations receive funds is to charge fees on services and competitions.

Promoting Entrepreneurship

In order to promote entrepreneurship, factors such as education, role models, foreign investment, and policies need to be present in an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Fortunately organizations have provided various solutions to these needs. Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF) hosts the Albanian branch of the international program Junior Achievement. Junior Achievement Albania currently provides entrepreneurial education to high school students and allows them to experience the world of business. Allowing the younger generations to gain experience firsthand provides them with more knowledge about entrepreneurship and the ability to consider becoming an entrepreneur from an earlier age. Similarly, AIESEC gives students and other volunteers the opportunity to hone their skills and become leaders. Supported by a number of organizations, the students develop both soft skills, such as sales, negotiation, facilitation, and communication, and hard skills, like IT or coding related work.

It is important for prospective entrepreneurs to have successful role models to aspire and look up to. A balance of international and local success stories is also important. Business Magazine Albania and Startup Grind both attempt to share these stories in different ways. Business Magazine Albania shares these stories through their periodical, while Startup Grind hosts monthly seminars with talks from successful entrepreneurs and business

people. These stories can inspire people to become entrepreneurs as well as demonstrating that it is possible to succeed in Albania. Organizations that depend on new entrepreneurs, such as accelerators, will gain more potential clients when these stories are shared.

Organizations working closely with the government have worked to develop policies that address issues such as property rights. With foreign investment in mind, some work on improving the business climate to attract foreign investors. Investors are uncertain as to whether or not their assets will be protected due to policies regarding land ownership. GIZ worked with the Albanian government on the Strategic Investment Law (SIL) which was made to attract potential investors interested in agriculture, tourism, and energy. To provide more incentives to invest in Albania, the SIL also guarantees property for the investors. These are main factors to promoting entrepreneurship in Albania.

4.3 Ecosystem Models and Deliverables

From the beginning of this project, our sponsor, Yunus Social Business Balkans, wanted some sort of deliverable that they could use in the course of their operations. After performing and analyzing the interviews, we realized that there was extensive activity in the ecosystem executed by organizations that the entrepreneurs we talked to were not aware about. To help our sponsor alleviate this issue, we decided to create an online

framework that could be used to help promote the various events held in Albania.

We had a list of three goals we wanted to achieve in making this resource. Firstly, it needed to easily convey the important information about each event and service in the ecosystem. Next, the online resource should be easy to implement and maintain. Lastly, we felt that the time we had spent in Albania was enough to get a broad understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, but we wanted others to have the ability to modify the final product to suit more specific needs.

Using the models

From our research of ecosystem models (discussed in the background chapter), and information gained from interviews, we have prepared a two-step deliverable. First, we identified elements and aspects of the models to best represent our findings regarding the organizational support. Using the analysis discussed in 4.2, we categorized the services and events offered by organizations according to the domains and relevant steps in the Entrepreneur's Journey. The particular domains we decided to include are Mentorship/Training, Financing, Networking, Support System, and Inspiration.

Mentorship/Training- Encompasses events and services that have a focus on increasing the entrepreneur's knowledge base. This includes both long term mentorship, incubators and accelerators, as well as more short term services in the form

of critiques, for instance during a business competition.

Funding- This represents the entities that can provide financial support for businesses, such as angel investors, VCs, and banks.

Networking - This encompass events and programs that can provide entrepreneurs with networking opportunities and connect individuals with employee support, co-founders, mentors, or any other support types.

Support Systems - This consists of entities that provide marketing, accounting, legal services, and affect policy and entrepreneurial climate development.

Inspire (Success stories) - This domain consists of any media or resource that presents success stories, and celebrates achievements and milestones of ventures.

Through our interviews we have learned that organizations provide multiple services that can exist in different domains. Therefore, instead of just representing the organizations, we have classified their initiatives (services and events) according to these domains, and each service or event may fall under several different domains. In addition, we will be representing these services and events according to the relevance in the steps of the Entrepreneur's Journey. This will enable entrepreneurs to conveniently identify the stage they are in and the type of support they need or seek.

Web Page Layout

The first page of this resource contains a brief explanation of the general model we are using. From here, if the entrepreneur using the site wishes to learn more about each individual stage, they can navigate to the page detailing each of the domains and phases by clicking on any of the relevant buttons, as seen in the Figure 15.

Figure 15: Legends bar for color coded domains

Each service and event will be presented using individual cards, as shown in Figure 16. The card would be able to display information such as a description, the organization name and logo, time, and duration. The domains are represented by color coded circles and the stages by bolded numbers for ease of

Figure 16: Layout for the service/event cards

identification for each service or event. Figure 17 shows a page that contains a series of service and event cards relevant to the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Albania. In order to facilitate the navigation of this list, there are options for searching, sorting, and filtering services and events by domains, stages, date, frequency, duration, etc. There also is a page dedicated to helping facilitate management of the event and service cards list, shown in Figure 18. It contains a section to create a new service or event card as seen in. Since services do not often have a specific time associated with them, those fields are initially left off the form and can be added by marking the appropriate check box. Additionally, for each of the domains and phases, we incorporated the option to have custom text that appears when a user hovers over the appropriate icon. This is so that the domains and phases can be described in other languages. Once the list of event and service cards is satisfactory, the maintainer can download the file and simply needs to replace the file currently in use to update the list of cards being displayed on the website.
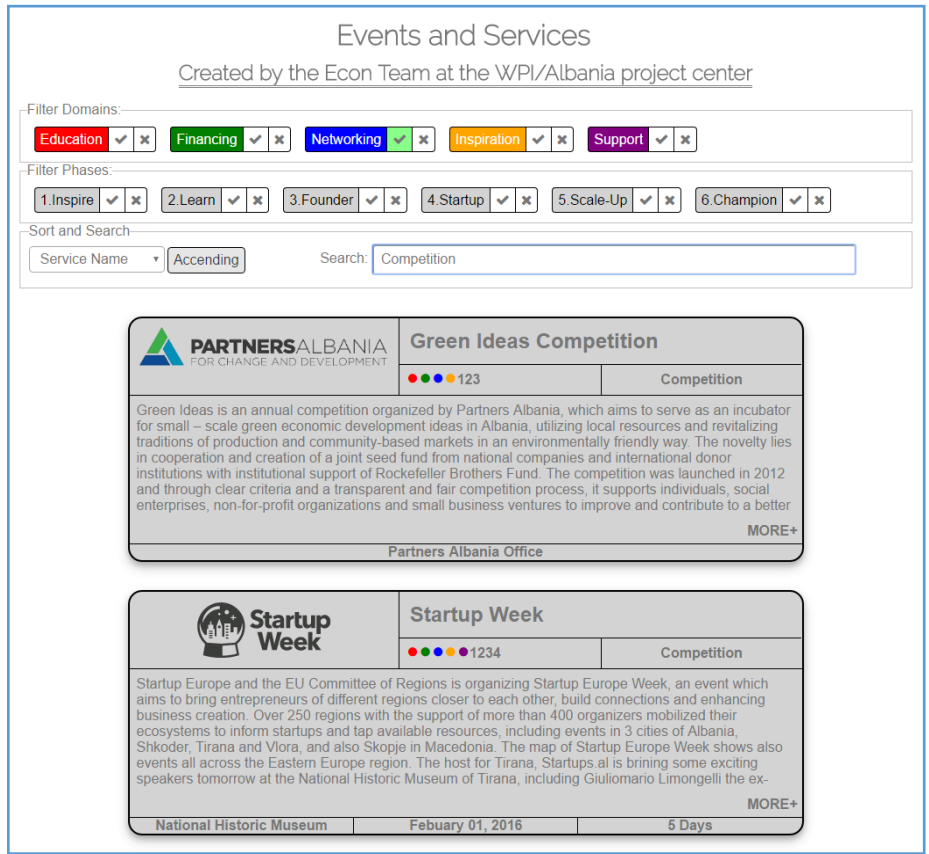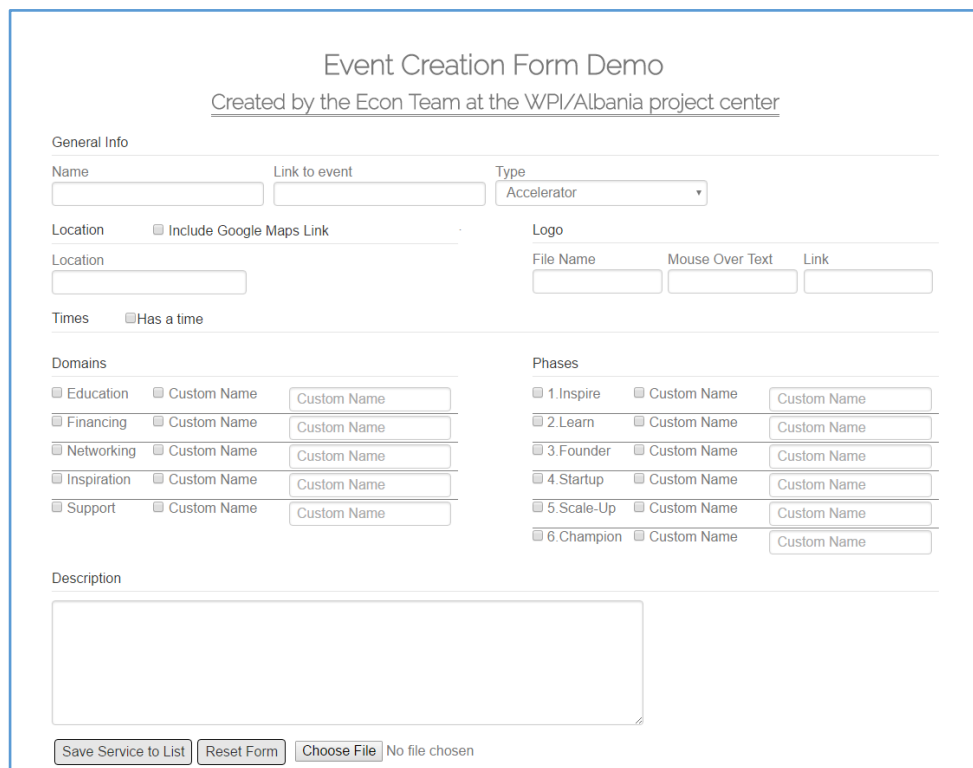

Figure 17: Displaying a Card List

Figure 18: The Card Creation Form

Figure 19 is the landing page of the website, it is the first thing people will see when the visit. At the top, the card layout is introduced and below a brief description of the domains and phases model is explained. If someone is interested in learning more about any specific domain or phase, they can click on the relevant bubble to be taken to a page that goes into more detail about each, shown in Figure 20.

Publishing and Hosting

We have decided to publish and host the site through GitHub pages at cjcormier.github.io/Entrepreneur. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly GitHub provides free basic web hosting. The downside of this is that there is not backend services available. The second, and more persuasive, benefit is that GitHub allows for other interested parties to take our website and copy (or "fork") it into their own project and then modify the project to suit their own needs. This allows for the website to be adapted to new circumstances and creates the possibility to be used in other entrepreneurial ecosystems outside Albania.

Limitations

Due to making the decision to create this deliverable only a few weeks before the end of the project, we decided to focus on

Figure 19: Explaining the Service Cards

Figure 20: Landing Page

functionality over visual attractiveness of the website. This does not mean we ignored the aesthetics, simply that we did not prioritize it over the technical portions of
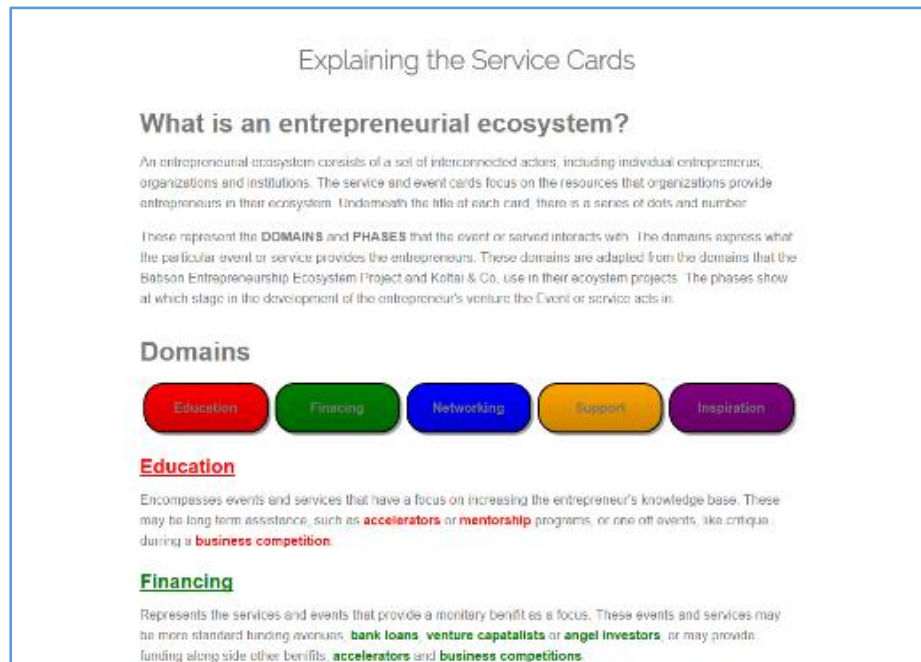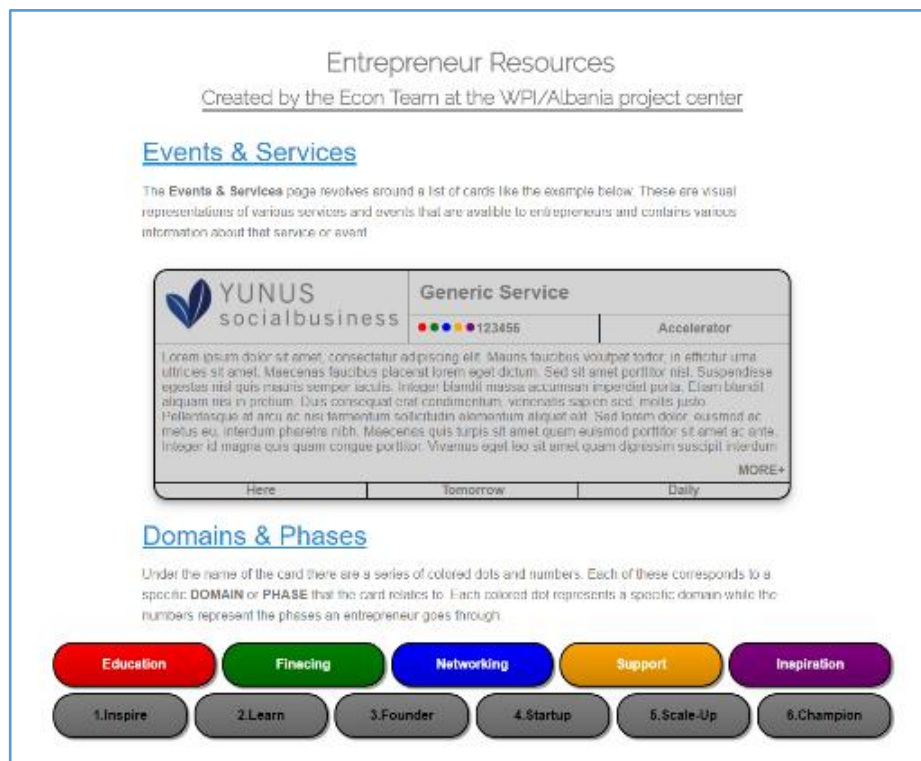
the deliverable. Another issue was briefly mentioned above: the lack of a server backend. This restricts some of the potential functionality, such as more complex server requests or user comments on cards. This issue can be avoided by those who implement the deliverable by using a host that allows for backend support. More information on the technical limitations and room for improvement can be found in Appendix F: Deliverable Technical Details.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1: Conclusions

Albania has seen numerous ups and downs in the governance, economy and standard of living of people over the last quarter century. Despite notable economic development since the demise of communism in Albania, the country is still working to join the European Union. Due to the condition of Albania's infrastructure, transparent government, and bureaucratic institutions, improvements are being focused to address these issues first before joining the EU becomes a priority (Asllani et al., 2014). As the Albanian economy continues to transition to an open-market, the need for entrepreneurship has become prominent as a partial solution for problems, such as high youth unemployment. Many in Albania do not fully understand the concept of entrepreneurship, while many others are reluctant to take the risk. This results in a fewer new businesses in Albania than there otherwise could be.

With proper mapping and promotion of an entrepreneurial ecosystem within the country, significant economic growth can be achieved. In order to gain a better understanding of the ecosystem, we conducted interviews with entrepreneurs and other actors, primarily organizations that promote entrepreneurship.

From our interviews, we learned about the perspectives of entrepreneurs, the resources present in the ecosystem, the level of entrepreneurial learning, and governmental and non-governmental support. With the uncertainty of new businesses and expectation for ventures to fail, many prefer to hold a steady job instead of pursuing entrepreneurship. In addition, entrepreneurs we talked to were disillusioned with the government and organizations involved in business development. This inhibits organizations' abilities to promote innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurship. There is substantial effort from organizations to provide beneficial services to entrepreneurs, but based on comments from the entrepreneurs we interviewed, those efforts may not be as effective as they could be. Apparently there is a lack of awareness among entrepreneurs of the efforts of organizations.

In terms of the needs of entrepreneurs in Tirana, we found that while lack of funding is a commonly reported obstacle, it is not always a limiting factor in the success of businesses. A factor more detrimental is the lack of effective and pragmatic education to prepare the youth for industry. Efforts, such as the ones by AADF and AIESEC mentioned in Chapter 4, are being made from both the private and public sector to address a wide range of such issues.

Overall, despite the many difficulties that Albania has faced in the last quarter century, we have found substantial

endeavors being taken in the ecosystem. Based on our research and interviews conducted here in Tirana, our personal opinion is that the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and general economic situation, of Albania will continue to develop and improve in the coming years.

5.2: Recommendations

Our research led to several recommendations for entrepreneurs, organizations, the public sector and academia. The recommendations summarized below provide justification of the potential benefit, means of implementation, and the stakeholders.

Entrepreneurs:

- **Test the market**: From our interviews, we, with both entrepreneurs and organizations, understood that often the importance of testing the product-market fit is not realized. While some entrepreneurs have great ideas, their business model may not be feasible or sustainable. Thus, entrepreneurs should identify their customer segment, and test their product/service thoroughly before scaling or expanding their business. There are several organizations in Albania that can help entrepreneurs with the specific steps to accomplish this. Some of these organizations can be found in Appendix E: Implementing the Deliverable.

Organizations:

- **Collaborate with similar organizations**: Local organizations can collaborate with organizations that have similar goals and activities, and those in other parts of the Balkans region. This will establish a link for sharing resources, ideas, development strategies and even human resource. Unfortunately, only a few organizations we interviewed had any collaboration with other organizations outside Albania. This practice can particularly benefit organizations providing mentorship and training to entrepreneurs. One way of achieving this can be by designating representatives to set common short-term and long-term goals, updating and sharing both parties' experiences over bi-monthly meetings, and determining the best set of practices. Consequently this will also market the organizations to a larger audience.

- **Inspire through success:** Inspiration in the form of success stories, particularly of local entrepreneurs, can help aspiring entrepreneurs to relate to others who started out just like them and later became big names in the industry. This can set a benchmark, help stimulate creativity, learning opportunity and most importantly hope to those who perceive entrepreneurship as a risky endeavor. Currently, the organization Startup Grind invites guest speakers for monthly seminars and online periodicals like Business Magazine publishes articles regarding noteworthy startups. However other organizations that with a good client base or social media presence can take this initiative further

by sharing such success stories and motivating entrepreneurs.

- **Adopt sustainable model**: This recommendation applies particularly for organizations that provide financial aid to entrepreneurs through competitions, accelerators, or as grants. Providing finance for capital is a valuable resource. These local organizations should strive to become more self-funding instead of solely relying on grants from foreign agencies such as USAID and the Italian Cooperation for Development. This self-financing can be achieved by creating revenue streams, through small fee for events or programs and providing small term micro-credit finance instead of grants to competition winners. Alternatively, they can invest in businesses in exchange for "convertible equity". This essentially will allow them to maintain a certain percentage of ownership of the business until the business-owner is capable of returning the investment, maybe even at a small interest. In doing so, both parties benefit as the organizations receive their investment back to reinvest, and entrepreneurs generate capital.

Collaboration between organizations and academia

- **Promote business idea competitions in academia:** Several entrepreneurs reported that there is much room for improvement in fostering the entrepreneurial mindset in universities. We also learned that business idea

competitions help many learn the essentials for entrepreneurship and help them start actively working their ideas. Collaborating with universities, organizations that already host such competitions can bring the experience to university students. This will encourage entrepreneurship from early on among students, boost confidence through experiential learning and allow for stronger startups to form within universities. It will also market the organizations and their initiatives to a larger audience.

- **Involve students to do due diligence on portfolio companies:** Organizations that invest in businesses can form a collaborative program with universities in which business students help investors by performing due diligence on the portfolio companies. The students can be hired as interns or the program can be done as an afterschool activity. This will provide students with knowledge and exposure to investment, portfolio research, and give organizations a low-cost service. (This recommendation was derived from a previous IQP project, "Making the Link: Entrepreneurship In Costa Rica")

Collaboration between private and public sector:

- **Form Angel Investment Network:** Albania is the only country in the Balkans region that does not have a local angel investment network yet. A collaborative effort between organizations and the government can

create an official entity consisting of affluent business-minded nationals within the country or abroad along with a regulatory body. The regulatory body can carry out the day to day operations of businesses with potential, doing due diligence, advising, etc. The operating expenses can come from profits on investment once this "organization" starts generating its own revenue. A particular source of individuals capable of investing could be the diaspora. Their participation can be facilitated by continuing to hold annual Diaspora summits. The first of its kind was held by the government in 2016, at the time of this project.

- **Create Employment Platform**- We also learned from our interviews that there needs to be more ways for entrepreneurs to find suitable employees; there is currently a lack of a human resources directory especially for those with blue collar occupations. By collaboration or through independent initiative, creating a search-based employment platform to connect potential employees with companies/businesses can greatly benefit both parties. The government can maintain this from its own budget or private organizations can sustain the service by monetizing it through small fees charged to the companies.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions for Entrepreneurs

- Their background
  - Tell us about yourself
    - Schooling
    - past experiences
  - Why did you choose entrepreneurship
- Reasons for starting a business
  - Inspiration-what past experience inspired them to become an entrepreneur
  - Why this industry
  - Reasons for starting this business in particular
- What was the first thing that you did after you had the idea of the business? Can you walk us through the process?
- Challenges
  - What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
    - List examples to stir their memory
  - Who helped you out?
  - We know that when starting a business, it can be hard to find the right people. Can you walk us through how you went through this process?
  - What kind of support did you receive from those around you?
    - Friends and Family
    - Moral support
    - Through services
  - How difficult was finding financial support? Who did you ask?
  - Can you describe your interactions with the government or government policies
    - Government policies
    - Taxes
    - Registration
    - Trade laws
    - Corruption
  - To what extent did the infrastructure (i.e. roads, utilities, and internet) affect the founding or operation of your business?
  - How would you describe your interactions, in terms of competition or support, with the businesses in the surrounding area?

- How did you plan and develop your customer outreach? What assistance did you get?
- Overview of ecosystem
  - Who would you say are big actors in the entrepreneurial space in Albania?
  - If I was a prospective entrepreneur looking for help starting a business, where/who would you direct me to?
- Recommendations for ecosystem
  - 10 years from now how do you envision the ecosystem improving?
- Who should We talk to
  - ask for general list
  - in follow up email, ask about contact info for a few people
- Is there anything that you wanted to talk about, but we didn't bring up?

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions for NGOs

- What are their goals
  - What were the motivations that this organization was founded with?
  - What are the goals of your organization?
- How they are achieving those goals (& difficulties)
  - How is your organization attempting to achieve these goals?
    - Past achievements
  - How does your organization interact with entrepreneurs?
    - How does the relationship start?
      - Entrepreneurs come for consultation
      - Entrepreneurs apply for accelerator/ incubator
      - Organization contacts entrepreneur
  - What difficulties have you encountered while attempting to achieve your objectives?
  - Which programs that you ran did you find more effective/successful?
- Interactions with other organization (& difficulties)
  - How did your organization collaborate with other organizations or the government?
    - How successful were these programs?
    - What challenges did you face when collaborating with them?
    - If you were to do this again what would you do differently?
  - What are your thoughts about interactions between your organization and academia (universities) to help promote the business culture?
- About Entrepreneurs
  - What would you say is the most difficult part about navigating the process of starting a business?
  - What intrinsic factors (such as skill, knowledge, motivation, etc.) of entrepreneurs do you think attribute most to success or failure?
  - What can entrepreneurs do to prepare themselves better?
- Overview of the ecosystem and how it can be improved
  - What are the changes you would like to see in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the next 5/10 years?
  - What other organizations do you think we should talk to?
  - What entrepreneurs do you think would like to speak with us?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

- Interviews in teams of 2
    - o One person taking charge
    - o One person note taking/covering
- Make interviewees feel comfortable/greetings
- Introduce ourselves and the main goal of the interview
    - o Remind them that they can take time to think over their answers and can refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer
    - o Explain what a map of an entrepreneurial ecosystem is.
- Ask consent to take notes of the interview and inform them of their right to confidentiality/anonymity
- Ask interview questions (Prepared beforehand)
    - o Allow time for the interviewer to think
    - o Listen carefully and ask probing question to follow up and confirm our interpretation
- Ask if there was anything they would like to say that we did not ask about
- Thank them for their time

Appendix D: List of Organizations

1. AIESEC*
2. Albanian American Development Foundation (AADF)*
3. Albanian Innovation Accelerator
4. Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA)
5. CEED Albania
6. Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*
7. ENGIM*
8. Junior Achievement Albania
9. Kosovo Business Angels Network (KOSBAN)
10. MyOffice'Al*
11. Nucleus Albania
12. Oficina*
13. Partners Albania*
14. Protik ICT Center*
15. Startup Grind*
16. Swisscontact
17. Talent Garden
18. Tirana Business Park
19. USAID
20. Yunus Social Business Balkans (YSBB)*

* Organizations Interviewed

Appendix E: Implementing the Deliverable

Displaying the Card List

To display a card list, there are three CSS files and one JavaScript file that need to be included in the HTML page. These files are "card.css", "font-awesome.min.css", "pure-min.css", and "cards.bundle.js". The CSS files can be found in the css folder of the project, while the JavaScript file can be found in the lib folder. The pure-mni.css file can also be replaced with the content delivery network location which can be found at https://unpkg.com/purecss@0.6.1/build/pure-min.css.

The CSS files should be included in the header of the HTML file while the JavaScript should be included at the bottom of the body. The reason the JavaScript file is included later is so that the page can load and render before the web browser attempts to load and execute the JavaScript file.

To display the card list with a, somewhere in the body of the webpage the following tag must be included:

```
<div id="FilterableCardList" internal=(Card list file location)>
      (Pre-load content)
</div>
```

Where (Card list file location) is a valid location on the server that will return the card list file when requested. The (Pre-load content) represents any HTML that should be shown while the card list is being requested and rendered, it will be replace once the card list is ready to be seen. (Pre-load content) can also be left blank if no content should be displayed

Similarly to display a list of cards without a filter the following tag must be present:

```
<div id="CardList" services=(Service) internal=(Card list file location)>
      (Pre-load content)
</div>
```

Displaying the Card Creation Form

The (Card list file location) and (Pre-load content) fields are the same as the previous example. (Service) should be a JSON string that contains the card data to be displayed. This technique allows for the cards to be rendered immediately, but should only be used when displaying a few static cards, as they will not easily be edited.

The event and services cards are stored in a file format called JSON, and should be located in a folder on the server that also contains the logo image files. These files can be created and modified through the card creation form.

The card creation form requires two CSS files and one JavaScript file. These files are "form.css" "pure-min.css", and "form.bundle.js". The location of the files as well as the advice for importing them are the same as above. To implement the form, simply include the following HTML tag:

```
<div id="EventCreationForm">
        (Pre-load content)
</div>
```

As with the tags to display card lists, the (Pre-load content) line should be replaced with the HTML that is to be displayed as the form is loading.

Creating Cards

To create a card, you simply need to fill out the relevant information. Only the name is required, but it is recommended to include a logo image, a description, a type, and all the relevant domains and phases. To include a time for an event, click the "Has a time" checkbox, this will add a section to fill out the start and end times for your event. To have custom hover text for the domains and phases, make sure the both the main checkbox and the "Custom Name" checkbox are active and the new hover text you want is in the text box. Once you are satisfied with your event or service, click the "Save Service to List" button and the data will be saved. You can also upload an existing JSON file that contains card data by clicking the choose file button and selecting the file to be edited. At this point you can choose to create more cards, edit or remove an existing card, or download the data as a JSON file. Once you download the file, to update the website, you simply have to replace the old file with the new one.

Appendix F: Deliverable Technical Details

This appendix goes into more detail about the technical aspect of creating the deliverable. If further detail is desired, the documentation of the project can be found in. Firstly there are three basic technologies that go into designing a frontend for a website: Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and JavaScript. HTML dictates how the web page is structured semantically, CSS describes the visual aspect of the website, and JavaScript defines the interactivity of the web page.

On top of this foundation, there are several libraries and frameworks that we used. Firstly, npm (Node package manager) was used to install various JavaScript libraries and tools. The React frame work, created by Facebook, was used for the features that facilitate the creation of more reactive user interfaces. React achieves this by a system they call components. Components are like a combination of JavaScript functions and HTML tags. Components can also call other components and these subsequent calls can be modeled as a tree hierarchy. They allow React to perform calculations, based on its own internal state and inputs passed through the HTML attributes or "properties", before allowing the browser to render parts of the webpage. More in-depth detail about React can be found through their online documentation at https://facebook.github.io/react/docs/hello-world.html.

Because some of convenience implemented by React is based on ECMAScript 6 and JSX, a compiler is highly recommended to convert the code to JavaScript. If a compiler is not used, the React code must be written in a more arduous manner. The compiler used in this project was Babel. The module bundler webpack was created to "pack" the code from multiple files into one file as well as minimize the overall file size. This is necessary for the webpages to load faster.

Brief Technical Design

There were three technical aspects to the website: displaying the event and service cards themselves, user creation of the cards, and filtering and sorting the cards.

Displaying the cards

The display for the cards are controlled by the "Card" component and is relatively simple. This component takes all of information that is to be displayed as an input through the data prop. Some of the processing of the data is passed to several different components, "CardLogo" takes care of the logo image in the upper left of the card, "CardLabels" renders the domain and phase icons underneath the card title and calls several other components, and "CardLower" controls the lower section of the card that contains the location and time

information. The "Card" component also remembers if the description is expanded as part of its internal state.

Creating Cards

The component that controls the card creation form is "EventCreationForm", this takes no inputs and has two data structures in its internal state. One structure holds the list of created cards, which can be selected for editing. The other structure contains the data for the card currently being edited. The EventCreationForm has several sub-components. The one component is the "DownloadDialog" component that controls the list of already create cards and the options to remove, edit, and download them. The rest control the individual sections of the form

Filtering the cards

The list of filterable cards is controlled by "FilterableCardList" and takes one input through the internal prop. This is the location of the list of cards that is to be displayed. The list of cards are stored in the internal state of the component as is the chosen filter options. The two main components of "FilterableCardList" are "CardListFilter" and "CardList". The first component displays the filter interface and tells "FilterableCardList" when the user has changed the filter, while the second component simply displays the list of cards passed to it by "FilterableCardList". Neither sub-component stores information in their internal states and instead receives all relevant data through various props.

When "FilterableCardList" is told by "CardListFilter" that the filter has changed, it updates the internal filter state accordingly. Once the filter is changed, the entire list of cards is run through consecutive filter functions that remove cards that do not match the requirements of the filter. The remaining cards are then passed to "CardList" to be displayed in the webpage.

Limitations and Possible Improvements

Due to the very limited amount of time that was available for the project, there are a variety of improvements that could be made. We categorized into four categories: maintenance, technical, functional, and visual.

Maintenance improvements would be those that would make it easier for the project to be maintained and improved in the future. Some examples are improved documentation, separating some functionality into their own dedicated components, moving components to different files.

Technical improvements would allow for expanded capability and handling of larger sets of data, this would make a larger array of other improvements feasible. Several technical areas that could be improved are the storage of the card data, the lack of backend server support, and the efficiency of the filtering algorithm.

Functional improvements add additional functionality to the website, this includes google calendar integration, the ability to have multiple lists, and coping cards in the creation form.

Visual improvements encompasses any aspect of the website that the user sees. As none of the team were artists of any sort, the aesthetic of the website is extremely basic and could be improved in multiple ways, such as color scheme and layout.