

Summer School in

New approaches to the study of enterprises: the role of motivations

Trento - Italy

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Introduction

A pluralism of entrepreneurial forms have traditionally characterised economic systems and the production of an increasingly varied goods and services. New organizational typologies are also emerging, such as cooperative and social enterprises, which are owned by stakeholders rather than investors and have constraints regarding profit distribution (like Community Interest Companies in UK and Low Profit, Limited Liability Corporation in the USA). The traditional economic approach to the study of firms developed during the '80s, which focuses mainly on the role of transaction costs and governance structures, begins to explain this plurality of entrepreneurial forms. However, this approach is limited and many features of entrepreneurial forms remain unexplored.

In order to deepen the understanding of the nature and the plurality of firms, it seems useful to also examine the diverse drives of different stakeholders. Specifically, more attention needs to be devoted to the values and motivations that govern enterprises, explain the definition of organizational and members' aims, and influence the planning of the organizational structures by managers. Traditional tools of investigation must be integrated with the psychological dimension of economic decision making.

The most promising perspective to move toward is linked to the psychological extra-monetary motivations of the actors involved in the organisations and to the matching process. Among these psychological mechanisms, the most interesting are those related to social wellbeing, reciprocity, and inequity aversion. Organizations can internalize social wellbeing in their goals, they can be socially responsible, and they can equitably manage their human resources and the transactions with their stakeholders. The internalization of social wellbeing at different degrees in the organizational goals helps explain the heterogeneity of organizations both in their aims and in their ability to enhance cooperative behaviours.

The integration of behavioural aspects in the economics of the firm is essential for explaining the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders in general, enforcing the economic theory of the firm, and especially for explaining the increase of organizations and of individuals moved by altruistic and social interests and pursuing the maximization of social wellbeing.

A possible way to cope with the understanding of the psychological role of motivations within organisations is to carry out a strict comparison between the diverse types of enterprises.

The Summer School will use both economic theory of the firm and behavioural economics in order to understand the relevance of cooperative drives within firms. Empirical and experimental contributions will give support to theoretical assumptions. Intensive debate among scholars of different training (psychology, sociology, behavioural and institutional economics) is therefore encouraged.

Given the demand for, and interest in, this topic, a representative group of scholars and institutions are involved: Euricse (the European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises), the CEEL (Computable and Experimental Economics Laboratory), AICCON (the Italian Association for the promotion of Cooperative and Non profit Culture), as well as researchers and professors from the Department of Economics - University of Trento.

Scientific aims

The Summer School provides an opportunity to learn and elaborate on different approaches and competencies for studying firms' values and stakeholder motivations, thanks to the presence of scholars with diverse training and interdisciplinary participants (economics, psychology, sociology, neurosciences, etcetera) deriving from countries where the presence of the different types of organizations is heterogeneous.

By comparing and integrating these various approaches and specific knowledge, the Summer School aims to give participants the theoretical and methodological instruments to understand the presence of various types of firms and of not-self-interested behaviours within organizations, among their members, workers, and various stakeholders. Particular attention will be devoted to the notion of motivations and specifically to that of altruism, reciprocity, trust, fairness, and democracy. Furthermore, these notions will be tested experimentally and empirically in firms, by looking at ethic principles, corporate social responsibility, and at the cooperative and social enterprises sector. As introduced, the focus of the analysis is that an organizational pluralism and especially the presence of cooperative and social enterprises can offer an important contribution to the satisfaction of economic and social needs.

The Summer School will also provide analytic competencies to students of behavioural economics in order to understand the application of not-self-interested behaviours in specific contexts, while researchers on the economy of firms will be supplied knowledge on not-self-interested preferences. The modern economic theories will be therefore combined with the innovative approach of motivational psychology.

Finally, a comprehensive approach to the theory of organisations will be proposed and implemented with the participation of scholars and young researchers. The aim is to translate the institutional and motivational features into policies for supporting their efficiency and effectiveness and into legal proposals to allow for the development of organizational types with social aims and cooperative principles.

Who should attend the Summer School?

The Summer School is designed for Phd students and young researchers (academic or not) who are especially interested in behavioural economics, cooperative firms, and social enterprises. The selection of participants will be based on the applicant's Curriculum, publications and, for PHD students, thesis in progress.

For additional information please contact:

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