

EELab Publications

January 2026 - #7

Exploration of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Identity: A deep dive into Mauritian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Entrepreneurial ecosystems seek to bring together actors with diverse logics around a vision, that may be more or less shared, of the entrepreneurial development of a territory [1]. Beyond infrastructures and support mechanisms, the dynamics of these ecosystems rely on the construction of an entrepreneurial ecosystem identity composed of shared values, collective narratives and mechanisms of mutual recognition. However, this concept remains relatively underexplored in the literature.

This issue of EE Lab Publications proposes to explore this concept through the analysis of Mauritius, one of the most dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems in Africa. This island territory provides a privileged setting for understanding how cultural diversity, economic ambitions and strategies of international openness interact.

Methodology

A qualitative study was conducted with 31 experienced actors of the Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem (interviews and observations carried out from March to June 2024).

Category of actors	Description	# of interviews
Public policy actors	Representatives of the Ministry of Industry, the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC), and public organisations responsible for economic development and innovation.	2
Economic and institutional actors	Representatives of professional associations and sectoral chambers.	4
Entrepreneurial culture and human capital actors	Academics, economic journalists and actors involved in training and promoting entrepreneurial culture.	9
Entrepreneurial financing actors	Managers of public and private financial institutions, investment funds and development banks	3
Support organisations	Managers of public and private incubators and coordinators of support mechanisms.	7
Entrepreneurs	Founders of start-ups in digital, fintech, agri-food and emerging technologies.	6

The study is based on 31 semi-structured interviews conducted with public, private and academic actors, complemented by observations and secondary data. The results highlight the relational and symbolic dynamics that shape a collective identity [2], which act as a lever for cohesion, legitimacy and sustainability for the Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem. Entrepreneurial ecosystem identity appears as the collective and evolving representation that emerges from interactions, practices and shared narratives among ecosystem actors, giving meaning to their collective action and guiding its trajectory.

1. Mauritius: A Developing Ecosystem

Mauritius has emerged today as one of the most dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems in Africa. Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of this distinctive context [3,4]. Since its independence in 1968, the country has gradually transformed an economy originally based on agriculture and textiles into a model

geared towards finance, the digital economy, and innovation. This trajectory has been supported by a stable governance and by major structural reforms such as the SME Act (2017) and the Business Facilitation Act (2019), which have strengthened the business environment and stimulated business creation.

Initiatives such as the National SME Incubator Scheme (NSIS), led by the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC), as well as structures such as La Plage and La Turbine (private incubators), illustrate this commitment to structuring the ecosystem and supporting innovation. Yet behind those dynamic initiatives lies a key question: how can the diversity of actors, cultures, and trajectories be reconciled with the search for collective coherence? It is within this balance that the Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem identity takes shape.

CONTEXTE	MAURITIAN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Island in the Indian Ocean, at the crossroads between Africa and Asia - Strong international openness
Historical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Former French and British colony - Independence in 1968, economic diversification since the 1980s
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stable governance, pro-entrepreneurship policies - Key frameworks: SME Act (2017), Business Facilitation Act (2019), MRIC-NSIS
Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multicultural and multilingual society - Community networks, openness and cooperation
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Service-based economy: finance, tourism, digital sector - Incubators and innovation hubs

Table 1. Contextual characteristics of the Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem

2. The Dynamics of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Identity Creation

The Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem identity (EEI) emerges from a collective process in which actors learn to recognize one another, to cooperate, and to view themselves as stakeholders in a shared territorial project. Interviews reveal that this identity is constructed at the intersection of two complementary dynamics: collective identity work and collective identity play [5].

The first relies on recurring and institutionalised practices: public support programs, initiatives led by incubators, and entrepreneurship training. These mechanisms, often supported by the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC), stabilise shared meanings around modernity, creativity, and collective success.

The second, a more experimental dynamic, unfolds during occasional events (forums, hackathons, Green-Tech Summits, or Startup Weekends), where new narratives emerge and renew representations of “doing things together.”

The balance between these two dynamics proves to be essential: it enables the consolidation of a common identity while opening the ecosystem to exploration and innovation. This ongoing co-evolution, alternating between stabilising routines and creative experimentation, illustrates the Mauritian capacity to transform the diversity of initiatives into a shared narrative. The EEI thus appears as a living process, shaped by dialogue among actors and by their willingness to give meaning to collective action in a context of transition.

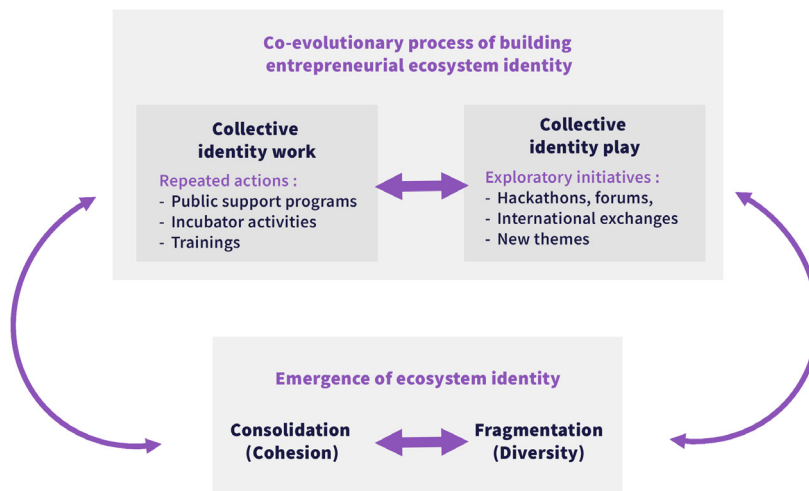


Figure 1. Process of building entrepreneurial ecosystem identity (need to change in the title of the figure as well as follows: Co-evolutionary process of building an entrepreneurial ecosystem identity)

3. Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Identity

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem identity can be defined as a collective and evolving representation emerging from interactions, narratives, and shared practices among actors. It takes form through a co-evolutionary process in which diversity and coherence are constantly articulated. This identity arises from the interaction between territorial logic (local roots, history, reputation) and entrepreneurial logic (innovation, competitiveness, openness). It results from a productive tension between consolidation and fragmentation, which continuously leads actors to negotiate the meaning of the sense of community.

As illustrated in Figure 2, four interdependent dimensions structure this identity:

- a territorial dimension, based on attachment to an island territory open to the world;
- a sectoral dimension, combining historical economic sectors with emerging ones;
- a social dimension, supported by community networks; and an entrepreneurial community dimension, driven by incubators, associations, and collaborative events. This identity remains fragile, as it is still under construction. The diversity of actors, narratives, and institutional logics require a constant adaptation. Yet it is precisely this fragility that fuels its vitality, making the Mauritian ecosystem a dynamic space for experimentation and collective learning.

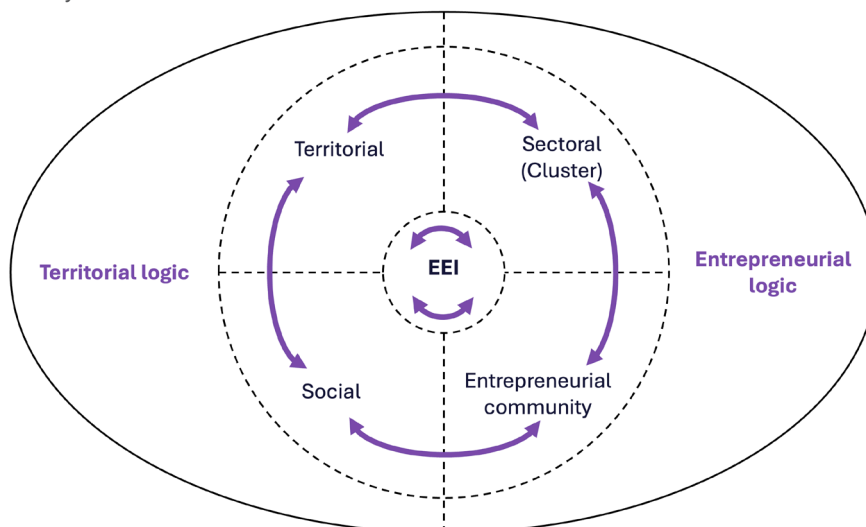


Figure 2. The dimensions of Ecosystem Entrepreneurial Identity (EEI)

4. Recommendations

1. Encouraging the construction of shared narratives

Strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem identity relies less on the infrastructure than on the ability of actors to develop a shared narrative. Public authorities can contribute by supporting a platform for intersectoral dialogues, public-private initiatives, and collaborative events that foster interaction between the logics of start-ups, SMEs, and social innovation.

2. Highlighting the intermediary role of support structures

Support structures play a key role as sense-making brokers between sometimes competing logics. By combining recurring actions (training programs, mentoring and support schemes, competitions) with experimental initiatives (hackathons, summits, international collaborations), they contribute both to the stabilisation and the renewal of collective identity.

3. Recognizing entrepreneurs in the co-construction of identity

Entrepreneurs and their associations participate in the co-construction of ecosystem identity. Through the storytelling of their entrepreneurial journeys, their participation in collective events, and their involvement in knowledge transmission, they strengthen mutual recognition and contribute to a more inclusive, representative, and sustainable identity.

Key takeaways

The study highlights a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem that is still in an emergent phase. This early stage reflects strong potential while also emphasising the need for better coordination among public, private, and academic actors.

Entrepreneurial ecosystem identity appears to be under construction, shaped by collective identity work, which stabilises shared reference points, and identity play, which encourages exploration and experimentation. This dynamic strengthens the ecosystem's capacity for learning and adaptation.

Finally, this identity proves to be multidimensional, combining territorial, sectoral, social, and entrepreneurial community dimensions. The balance between these dimensions conditions the coherence and vitality of the Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is simultaneously seeking greater structuring while remaining open to new developments.

References

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The authors would like to thank the actors of the Mauritian entrepreneurial ecosystem who participated in the study.

Please cite this article as follows:

Messeghem, K., E. M. Laviolette, & B. Ramasawmy (2026). Exploration of Ecosystem Entrepreneurial Identity: A Journey into the Heart of the Mauritian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. *EE Lab Publications*, #7.

