

ICRIOS SEMINAR

The Spatial Ecology of Entrepreneurship

10 JUNE 2026

4:30 – 6:00 pm

Bocconi University
Deutsche Bank Room
(AS02)

Via Röntgen 1

SPEAKER

Olav Sorenson

Joseph Jacobs Chair in Entrepreneurial Studies and Professor of Sociology and Strategy, UCLA

A discussion by **Nico Valenti Gatto**, Operating Director at B4i – Bocconi for innovation, will follow.

REGISTRATION REQUIRED.
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ABSTRACT

Why do some places repeatedly produce successful startups while others struggle to generate entrepreneurial activity, even when they appear to have similar talent, capital, and institutions? This book argues that the answer lies in the spatial ecology of organizations. Entrepreneurship is not simply the product of individual ambition, regional culture, or a checklist of ecosystem ingredients. It grows out of local organizational environments that train future founders, shape what opportunities they can see, and determine which resources they can access. Using unusually fine-grained data from Denmark, the book shows that existing firms matter not only as employers but also as breeding grounds for entrepreneurs, and that small firms play an especially important role because they expose workers to a broader range of roles and lower the costs of leaving to found a company. These processes also operate at a much smaller geographic scale than most research assumes: entrepreneurial ecosystems are often neighborhood phenomena rather than metropolitan ones. By explaining why industries cluster, why startup rates persist, and why entrepreneurial regions rise and decline, the book offers a new account of the local origins of economic dynamism.

Olav Sorenson is the Joseph Jacobs Chair in Entrepreneurial Studies and Professor of Sociology and Strategy. He had been a faculty member at UCLA from 1999-2005 and returned in 2020. In between, he held the Frederick Frank '54 and Mary C. Tanner Professorship at Yale, the Jeffrey S. Skoll Chair in Technical Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Toronto, and a professorship in Strategic and International Management at London Business School. Olav's primary stream of research pertains to economic geography, focusing on how entrepreneurship influences the growth and competitiveness of regions, and on why some regions have more successful entrepreneurs than others. In particular, he has called attention to some of the unexpected consequences of the fact that social capital plays an important role in entrepreneurial success. He also has secondary research streams on how social relationships influence economic transactions and on the sociology of science and innovation.



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