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Embedded entrepreneurship in the creative *re*-construction of place

Abstract

Key words:

1. Introduction

We are interested in how entrepreneurship can be understood at the level of the community. Taking a broad view of entrepreneurship, encompassing social value creation (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011) as well as economic value processes, we look beyond entrepreneurship in context to envisage entrepreneurship by context, as place and community. We employ two entrepreneurial concepts, Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness and Barth's (1996) transfer of values across spheres as our theoretical lens. Our conceptual point of departure is that entrepreneurship arises in places, is socially situated and extends beyond the economic domain, but involves some novel recombining of resources. Embeddedness infers how resources are socially construed to frame and contextualise actions, whilst effectuation shows how available bricolages of resources (Johannison and Olaison, 2007; Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey, 2012) are deployed. Thus entrepreneurial embeddedness becomes the condition from which new entrepreneurial combinations emanate. But conditions are static and entrepreneurship is action. The appeal of the entrepreneurial promise, that tomorrow will be better than today, is predicated on envisaging and enacting a future. Accordingly we believe that conceptualising entrepreneurial embeddedness as a dynamic condition will allow us to better see and better understand entrepreneurial process in the social.

We ethnographically engage with our data because we want to know what questions we ought to be asking (Bruton and Ahlstrom 2003). Broad issues of what, how and why inform our enquiry. Moreover, to identify processes requires a qualitative lens to see what is going on and an inductive analysis to understand these actions. Our literature review provides, as

pre-understanding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), a conceptual tool kit to begin to know what sort of data we should look for and thus to shape our research questions. Our unit for analysis are two communities straddling Counties Derry and Donegal in Northwest Ireland, 'Inisgrianan' and 'Blighsland'. These places were tired from the troubles, passed over in post industrial modernity, had exhausted their resources and seemed to have lost their identity and purpose and acquired dependency. They can be described as depleted communities (Gaddefors and Cronsell, 2009; Johnstone and Lionias, 2004). Whilst some places experience economic growth, others experience economic stagnation or decline and a host of associated social problems. As a purposeful sample, these places offered a data rich environment of what Schumpeter conceived as the *Socialokonomik* (Swedeberg, 1991), recognising the social embeddedness of enterprise to explore entrepreneurially wrought change. Our research questions are what is the nature of entrepreneurial engagement with place and community? And, how can we explain it? Hence, they are open questions, allowing us to employ our method to generate a grounded understanding about "what is going on here?" Our objective is thus to better understand a less well explored manifestation of entrepreneurship.

This paper contributes to developing an appreciation of aspects of enterprise that, while less well studied, are recognised to be critical (Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989; Lyons et al, 2012). We theoretically extend existing concepts of embeddedness to argue how such entrepreneurial anchoring in places may involve more than configuring process, but can become a critical part of the process itself. We show how social resources can be understood in similar terms to material resources and how the Schumpertian energetic recombination of these social resources can be conceived as an entrepreneurial process. Our conceptualisations, argument, data and analysis provide a more socialised explanation of entrepreneurship. At the very least, this frees up entrepreneurship accounts from an econometric ghetto and provides a human (Polanyi, 1957) and spatial dimension (Steyaert and Katz, 2004). Most importantly, our study demonstrates how entrepreneurship through the community has the ability to recreate, renew and reify a purposeful identity for places.

Our theoretical ambitions are high, but we also recognise the modesty of our post positivistic method. Our data were collected ethnographically, so were not "facts" but socially constructed narratives. Our purposeful sample is probably unique and certainly not amenable to generalisation. The analysis is similarly interpretative and suffers from the same hermeneutic weaknesses. However our enquiry is not much concerned with measuring, but

on describing and explaining. Nonetheless, the uniqueness of case and the specifics of our enquiry may also describe aspects of entrepreneurially processes more generally. Certainly one strength is the depth of detail and the extent of our own analytical engagement with that detail. This enhances the conceptual generalisability of our explanatory accounts.

2. Literature Overview, finding the questions?

While entrepreneurship is traditionally related to economic conceptions of profit-oriented growth, development and transformation (Baumol, 1996; Davidsson, Delmar, and Wiklund, (2006), a growing body of work (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson, 2007) now views entrepreneurship as socialised process. As Downing (2005: 196) puts it, ‘entrepreneurship, like the rest of social life, is a collaborative social achievement’. This relationship between the entrepreneurial self and society is explained by the concept of embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985; Uzzi, 1997, Jack and Anderson, 2002). Embeddedness explains how context and community influence perceived possibilities in particular situations (Welter, 2011; McKeever, Jack and Anderson, 2013). Operating as a social structure, embeddedness may enable or constrain entrepreneurial activity (Johnstone and Lionais, 2006) yet also create local opportunities; ones which are aligned with the needs and capabilities of particular communities (Korsching and Allen, 2004; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). This notion of embeddedness is grounded in Polyani’s (1957) challenge to the assumptions of classical economics that there is a clearly delimited, socially disembodied sphere of economic relations with a tendency toward general equilibrium. It asserts that change is not driven by purely economically rational individuals with stable preference functions, but instead recognises different and changing, social norms and values. More broadly, embeddedness captures the ideas of Adam Smith (1937), that economic actors re-entangle economic relations in a nexus of social relations. These views thus emphasise the interwoven interdependencies of the economic and social spheres, the crucial interplay between social, economic and local institutional contexts (Kloosterman, van der Leun, and Rath,1999).

As metaphor and method, embeddedness enables understanding of how membership of social groups influences and shapes actions (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Embeddedness represents the nature, depth, and extent of an individual’s ties into the environment and is perceived to be a configuring element of general business process (Whittington, 1992; Uzzi, 1997; Dacin et al., 1999). Embedding is the mechanism whereby the entrepreneur becomes part of the social context through systems of social relations, networks, bonds and local ties

(Granovetter, 1985; Hite, 2003; Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986; Larson and Starr, 1993; Oinas, 1997; Murdoch, 2000; Jack and Anderson, 2002; Kalantaridis and Bika, 2006). It is within and through these persistent social structures that entrepreneurs create and extract value from their environment (Hansen, 1995). Embeddedness shows entrepreneurs extending their immediate capabilities and generating strategic options through accessing what can be understood as 'socialised reservoirs' of knowledge, experience and other localised, useful resources (Jack, Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson 2008). Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) explained that embeddedness is an important mechanism for identifying opportunities and for understanding the protocols through which resources are distributed, shared and put to use. This is because embeddedness provides shared values, within-group trust, historical reciprocity and bounded solidarity which are privileged aspects of local belonging (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). Embeddedness also offers standards of behaviour, moral obligations, and awareness of the benefits and responsibilities of membership (Anderson and Miller, 2003).

Accordingly, embeddedness emphasises the importance of the social in shaping entrepreneurial practices. Hjalager (1989) argued that by focusing on situated roles and relationships, and how these influence action, a more holistic and situated view of entrepreneurship can be generated. But as Uzzi (1997) insightfully notes, even Granovetter's accounts lack detail of how and in what ways embeddedness integrates with enterprise. This seems to signal an opportunity to explore one social relationship, entrepreneurial social ties to place. As Johannisson puts it (1990: 61) 'all human endeavour manifests itself locally'. Places are not simply sites of production and consumption, but areas of meaningful social life where people live and learn. Places are complex system of social relations and material objects (Hudson 2001) and places give meaning and identity (Anderson, 2000a). Certainly attachment to place is well recognised in terms of the locating of business. Dahl and Sorenson (2009) found that social factors are more than four times more influential than economic factors in entrepreneurs' location decisions. As Johnstone and Lionias (2004;219) argue, place is a construct of relations of social life. Places may thus be the location of, and a fulcrum for leveraging, social capital - local ties. For entrepreneurs, the community in which they are embedded represents a fertile arena, a rich maze of economic, political and social relations. Moreover, Korsching and Allen (2004) found that, especially within deprived and depleted communities, the wider activities of entrepreneurs offers great potential for improving social and economic vitality.

Lyons et al (2012) feel that the time is now right to focus on the relationships between entrepreneurs and the communities where they live and do business. Johannisson and Nilsson (1989) described communities - places - as geographically collective, self-defining and organising contexts; and in the spirit of Geertz (1973), a rich context through which to examine embeddedness in entrepreneurial practices. Hjalager (1989) argued that by focusing on situated roles and relationships, and how these influence action, a more holistic and situated view of entrepreneurship can be generated. These arguments provided a focus for our research questions, what is the nature of entrepreneurial engagement with place and community? And, how can we explain it? We are examining enterprising in the wider social or community milieu. Thus we are concerned with the community as context (Anderson, 1999; Anderson and McAuley, 1999), but also as content and with the forms of engagement and connecting that take place (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd and Jack, 2012).

Barth (1962) notes how entrepreneurial acts impact locally (Greenfield and Strickon,(1981). Moreover, because localised entrepreneurs understand social structures and the specifics of their local environment they can credibly link and co-ordinate locality oriented actions that serve both public and private interests (Korsching and Allen, 2004). In this sense, entrepreneurs are involved in envisioning, articulating and managing loosely coupled processes (Lyons et al, 2012) that engage their credibility to facilitate brokerage, commitment and the mobilisation of resources (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). This brokering role, entrepreneurial acting as a conduit between spheres of influence to re-combine resources, is central to Barth's (1963) thesis. Barthian agency (Dana, 1996) draws on a local identity to create or transfer values. Thus "authentic" entrepreneurs, those seen as legitimate (Anderson and Smith, 2007) are able, licensed even, to tap into community resources. Stewart, (1990) describes this as dialectic between moral and instrumental authority. In other words, they can draw down on the legitimacy accorded to them as entrepreneurs to act in other spheres.

At the centre of Barth's (1962) argument was the importance of the entrepreneur's identity, which he saw as being influenced in large part by their community origin and background. Barth (1969, p.15) found that within relatively homogenous communities, members shared a fundamental understanding that they were "playing the same game." This focus on shared identity and taking sides along social and cultural lines complements and adds scope to

Granovetter's view of embeddedness as a way of bringing together social and economic concerns and perspectives. While Barth (1996) was focused on the interaction between the community and the entrepreneur, Granovetter's (1985) concern was more about the way social embeddedness enables and constrains behaviour and organisation. In drawing upon both perspectives, we see an opportunity to comprehend relationships of individuals, community and entrepreneurial practices

We propose that if entrepreneurs are embedded in, and thus committed to the welfare of their community, then the developments which emerge are more likely to fit with the needs and capabilities of both. This becomes particularly poignant for entrepreneurs operating in depleted communities, contexts which are most often defined in terms of their social and economic problems as well as the relative underachievement of their residents. This then is the topic we want to explore.

3. Methodology

Lyons et al, (2012) believe the relationship between the entrepreneur and the community is the next frontier of entrepreneurship research; but the topic is relatively underexplored and not yet well theorised. This, coupled with our research objectives, indicated a qualitative approach that located the issues conceptually and empirically in our context, the two communities, 'Inisgrianan' and 'Blighsland'. These places have a long history of small scale farming, manufacture and processing of textiles, auto parts and foodstuffs. More recently, between 1987 and 2000, the communities had almost full employment after an American clothing manufacturer's \$200 million investment created 3000 jobs. However, between 2000 and 2008 over 6000 semi-skilled jobs were lost as branch plants relocated and the construction sector went into decline. These depleted communities are small, socially and geographically self-defined; thus offering easier observations and some transparency of social processes and influences (Koestler, 1964). Considering the changes these communities have undergone, they can also be considered to be distressed and "in distressed communities, where capitalistic relations are less robust, the entrepreneurial process can, and from time to

time does, adapt and follow a different approach. These innovatory entrepreneurial actions use knowledge of local conditions to respond in creative ways to the unique circumstances of the host community” (Johnstone, 2013: 2).

3.1 Data Collection

We argued earlier that an ethnographic, qualitative approach best addressed our research objectives. Consequently, we employed participant observation in the research site, long narrative interviews with purposefully selected respondents and constant comparative analysis to analyse these data. Throughout the study, emergent data were iteratively compared with the literature, what Anderson, Jack and Dodd (2012a) call the constant dance between theory and data. Thus we were able to satisfy Leitch, Hill and Harrison’s (2010;69) insistence that “interpretivism is based on a life-world ontology which argued that all observation is theory-and-value-laden and that investigation of the social world”. Our approach reflects the growing acceptance of the value of qualitative techniques for organisational, management and entrepreneurship research (Papineu, 1978; Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Curran et al, 1995; Gill and Johnson, 1997; Hoang and Antoncic, 2003). Qualitative techniques were appropriate because we were dealing with soft and complex issues and elements of process over a period of time (Curran and Blackburn, 2001; Oinas, 1999). Moreover, we sought understanding, rather than measurement (Oinas, 1999).

Our participant observation and field work was conducted by one member of the research team who was very familiar with the places. Although he no longer lived there, past experiences had developed considerable local knowledge. His return as a researcher after 8 years involved a major shift in his role to one better described as observer than participant. Nonetheless, his own identity served well as an introduction to local people and local processes. He was able to “speak the same language” and being networked into the community made people willing to engage in conversations that were frank, honest and extensive. As a researcher, he was theoretically sensitised with the skills and awareness required for carrying out qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) but tried to remain neutral and non-judgemental in interviewing and reporting (Blackburn and Ram, 2006). Through a genuine interest in how people lived their daily lives,

he was quickly able to establish rapport. Respondents saw him as part of their world and as a result were more open than they might have been, he was seen to be from “their world”.

These data served as background and provided useful information about the history and background of each respondent, their activities in the community from non-entrepreneurial sources (Denzin, 1979). Informal interviews, as well as observation, allowed a general picture of what was going on here; a rounder understanding of respondents and the communities, along with an appreciation of how respondents acted and operated (Steyaert and Bouwen, 1997). These “conversations” took place wherever and whenever possible. These data also allowed comparisons with the entrepreneurial narratives.

Our ten principal respondents were selected purposefully from diverse fields; property development, hospitality, medical practice and distribution and are described in Table 1 This theoretical sample (Eisenhardt, 1989: 537; Pettigrew, 2003) comprised active entrepreneurs who were known to be actively engaged in change practices. Some were identified from experience, but continued presence in the research site allowed snowball sampling of additional respondents. The choice of new respondents was driven primarily by what they might contribute to the emerging theory (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). The sample is not representative of the population as a whole, but characterised as entrepreneurs active as Barthian change agents. We used the long interview technique (McCracken, 1988) to be taken on a narrative ‘grand tour’ of their experiences. Follow up interviews took place some six months later after our preliminary analysis of the first data. The course of the initial dialogues were largely set by respondents, but responded to broad questions (Thompson et al, 1989). The repeat interviews enabled us to revisit emergent themes for fuller explanations (Bryman, 2001). The interviews lasted between one and three hours and were carried out at the respondent’s premises, recorded and later transcribed. We stopped interviewing when we were fairly confident that we had sufficient useful data to address our questions. We could claim this to be theoretical saturation, but in hindsight, this had more to do with the sheer quantity of interesting material, rather than confidence about having exhausted theoretical possibilities.

Insert table 1 about here

3.2 Data Analysis

We employed the constant comparative method, a technique similar to the analytical element of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Silverman, 2000, Jack, Moul, Anderson and Dodd, 2010). This involved reading and re-reading interview material, revisiting notes and material generated through the data collection process, summarizing, categorising and searching for patterns (Halinen and Tornroos, 2005). So, the process was iterative and inductive rather than linear and deductive (Ram and Trehan, 2009). In essence, the raw data are preliminarily sorted into largely descriptive categories (Eisenhardt, 1989) and potential themes- “what is going on here”. Incidents and experiences, observations and responses were continually compared with others within emerging categories. These descriptive themes were then considered more conceptually and sorted into explanatory themes (Wolcott, 1990). Throughout the analysis, emergent ideas were constantly held up against the literature. Thus our process was inductive (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Bryman, 2001) and heavily reliant upon our interpretations of both data and theory. A strength is that it enables the inductive emergence of novel concepts and categories, but grounded in existing theory and empirically informed (Finch, 2002). A weakness is that the process is very time consuming, involves considerable trial and error and does not always work smoothly. However, when it does work, we can have confidence in our interpretations.

4. Discussion

Having set out to explore how entrepreneurship can be understood at the level of the community, our findings use embedded experiences and participatory practices to demonstrate what is going on and how this can be explained. This provides the basis for discussing how entrepreneurship can be understood at the level of the community and the relevance and impact of the social as a resource.

4.1 The Entrepreneurs in Social Context

In Table 1 the backgrounds of the respondents, their activities and their relationship with the community in which they were located were presented. This shows that while careers, activities and previous experience varied, respondents all held a strong affinity to the area and the local community. Each had spent considerable time living in that community. From the locals’ perspectives, all were considered established members, even pillars, of the community and had all grown “local” ventures. They also had immediate and extended families living and working locally. This raised the importance of location and place. Phrases like “trapped on the edge” (Raymond) and “stuck up in the corner” (John) were used to convey a sense of

geographic isolation and peripherality, but also a sense of shared reality. Respondents described a region gripped by deep recession; and “transition”, “adjustment” and “settling” were used to describe the realities confronting these communities and the on-going process of de-industrialisation and branch plant closure. While all could have moved and lived elsewhere, personal motives influenced them to stay. These motives related to family, community and a commitment to place. In spite of the structural limitations associated with running businesses in depleted communities (Johnstone and Lionais, 2006), respondents chose to stay. Yet, “staying” contradicted any idea of profit maximisation associated with entrepreneurship. Instead it represented an attempt to recreate a new set of benefits. Fundamentally, these aspects related to the community and the actual place. Influencing this was the fact that each respondent throughout their lifetime had chosen to maintain strong bonds with the local context. And, these bonds to the community had influenced the way each respondent carried out their entrepreneurial endeavours. It was clear that they had impacted at some level to the extent that each respondent became engaged in managing aspects of community development. And, this went beyond the boundaries of the core venture and its activities.

4.2 Entrepreneurs in Business

Although each venture was different and involved a variety of issues and risks, what was clear was the relevance of locality – both community and place - was important to the entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, respondents attributed the community as being factors in their personal success; “it’s the secret” (Brian). Significantly in spite of the recent decline and difficulties these communities had faced, the majority of respondents had never considered moving away. In fact, Paddy had actually returned to the area from England. Respondents discussed this community “secret” in terms of support; “we employ a lot of locals” (Eugene); “I’ve never felt that I couldn’t go into the boiler house and have a cup of tea” (John); “they are very loyal” (Hugh); “they treat it like their own” (Eugene). This mutuality was demonstrated on walking into Brian’s hotel kitchen and placing an order for “two steaks, one rare, one with peas” the chef replied, “is that Charlie O’ Kane?” (a local resident). Brian felt that this type of connection demonstrated at oneness with Inisgrianan and that “you can’t operate here like you would in a city.” This intimacy with the local community extended to sourcing goods and services locally; “Our fish man is local. We get our vegetables locally. I try to deal with those who employ in the town” (Hugh); “I try to work in concentric circles” (John); “It’s like a bush telegraph” (Raymond). This demonstrated willingness, even a moral

preference for dealing locally and supporting as much local industry as possible. In this sense all respondents had a high degree of affiliation and loyalty to their communities. But, perhaps what is more interesting is that we found this extended to participating in activities aimed at improving the vitality and survival of the wider community.

4.3 Entrepreneurs in their Community

Beyond running their own business we found participation in a range of development activities including what Johannisson and Nilsson (1989) see as community entrepreneurship; inspiring and assisting individuals and communities to start their own businesses and take control of their own destiny. Table 2 illustrates the diversity of the “other” things in which our respondents saw themselves as being involved. These ranged from the profoundly social – like organising dances and attending the local debating society – to participating in trade and political activities – to founding and managing a range of community businesses. Examples included a community owned and run museum, golf club, creche and shopping centre.

Insert table 2 about here

From table 2 it is clear that respondents were actively involved in founding and supporting community organisations. When probed about why they were doing these things, a range of issues closely related to their embeddedness were raised. For example unemployment; “We need more jobs” (Raymond); employability; “I’ve seen people at their best and worst. Many don’t have qualifications. They never seem to leave” (Brian); and emigration; “If they are qualified they go away” (Eugene). There was also recognition of services which were not available in the community; “It doesn’t have a pub, or a bank or a chemist” (Brian); “It’s only just got an ATM” (John). Ryan told us about becoming annoyed whenever some local described the locality as “a hole.” These views pointed to concern that the social fabric of the community was gradually being eroded as the most talented moved away (Florida, 2002). Decline in the composite demographics of the area, including shifts in ethnic composition, wealth, education levels, employment rate and regional values were of concern (Putnam, 2000). The majority linked this to the purpose and quality of life in the area; “It’s really a search for new meaning, a new identity, people can’t see a way out yet” (Town Clerk; Inisgrianan). It was organising around these issues which seemed to be important for respondents.

We found the activities of Paddy and Brian particularly informative. Paddy worked in England for 10 years but made the decision to return “home”. Having established his own building company, he was concerned about the high levels of youth unemployment in Blighsland. At a local community development conference a professor from Dublin asked about what he did; “I said I build. He said what? I said houses. He said why don’t you build people as well?” It was this connection which led to the establishment of ‘Inner City’; “I took a walk around and wrote up the story of what could happen and took it to a man in the civil service....I took this old building and took on about 150 young people off the dole and gave them work under a government scheme.... We started from scratch and all the experience went to young people.” On a trip to the US, Paddy persuaded Irish-Americans in three cities to sponsor the purchase of three run-down buildings; “We named them Philadelphia, Boston and Pittsburgh House.” He described this as “an entrepreneurial streak”, but one from which he had not profited personally. He went on to later develop a hotel, shopping arcade and sheltered housing complex under the auspices of the Inner City Trust.

In Brian’s case, he had just sold his hotel and built a self-catering holiday complex in Inisgrianan. He and a group of fellow golfers recognised the golfing potential of a parcel of disused community dune land. A local meeting was arranged where it was decided to make a proposal to the government tourism body and county enterprise board who supported the capital costs of the projects. At the same time the co-ordinator post for the local employability scheme became vacant which Brian applied for and got; “We then had 10 men, 5 working one week and 5 working the next.” With the golf course complete, attention then turned to improving the physical infrastructure of the community including painting the houses of elderly residents and supporting them to stay in their homes.

Insert table 3 about here

Table 3 demonstrates the entrepreneurial enactment of community values and resources; but note how the involvement and engagement of the community changed. These processes show community embeddedness at work, and the range of social and professional participants involved. Individuals initiated and joined these activities because they were socially connected. But John argued that this was not simply about helping his own business. In fact he explained that his private business did not benefit much from locals. This indicates that for

the likes of John, Brian and Paddy, they were not “extracting” i.e. mining the local community for self-serving purposes. It seemed to be more of a building process, where they were enabling the community to enact a wider environment and solve a range of social and economic issues through entrepreneurship. John described this in terms of “having done well and not just materially, it’s just a way of giving something back, making a difference and maybe creating the basis for our collective future”.

4.4 Outcomes

Table 3 shows that the main benefit was local employment; over 170 jobs were created and sustained in the 10 cases outlined. Yet many of the jobs were filled by those who came through the training schemes run by Paddy and Brian. In the activities detailed here, ‘the jobs’ and ‘the training’ were seen as the major impacts; “it [the golf course] now employs 17 full time green keepers and men out working on the course. They employ a manager, three in the office and probably 8 or 10 bar and catering staff. So there is a lot more employment now.” Even the jobs serving in the bar and restaurant were seen in a positive light. The manager explained how these service jobs were; “great for social skills and confidence. They can interview very well after they leave here.” This rise in self-confidence often led to the hatching of small business ideas during break times in the staff canteen; “All the schemes are raised. What could you make money at? We had a guy who went off and started his own transport business, another went into making videos. It all started from there, a few of them took the initiative” (Brian). Based on this success the board of the golf club; “are now trying to encourage all the local businesses to form a chamber of commerce, and maybe get a Christmas tree and lights, a place for us to come together”. This shows clearly that the input to - and output from - the process was the social resource. It also shows how the social not only shaped and influenced the activities of that place but also added to the very fabric of community, making it more entrepreneurial and aspiring - a stronger, more positive sense of self and purpose.

Through Paddy’s work some specialist crafts, such as stonemasonry and stained glass had been introduced; “There must be 40 people who learned to make stained glass windows and export them all over the world.” One of these individuals had recently been commissioned to recreate the stained glass dome for a new Titanic exhibit in Belfast. So Brian and Paddy were using their businesses and life skills to informally coach and mentor would be entrepreneurs. These types of experiences support the view of Anderson (2000) that additional new

businesses are often able to build upon an existing base no matter how limited it might be. Interestingly we found that most new businesses were vocational and achieved through apprenticeship rather than formal education. These were the “ordinary people from the dole” (Paddy). In this way respondents “fitted” with and built on the limited capabilities of the communities.

This same enactment created community physical assets, which in Paddy’s case were substantial; “We now have £14 million worth of property on our books, and we have trained and employed thousands of people.” So as the unemployed youth were being trained in bricklaying, carpentry and plumbing, they were also contributing to the value of the trust’s property portfolio. In each of the cases a management board drawn from the community managed the organisation’s affairs. However, the most profound impact was on the confidence of community itself. This reassertion of confidence was vividly evident in our informal conversations. People not only were starting to believe in themselves but also in the community and place as a location to live. John told us; “The lifeboat is run by people [volunteers] who come from every walk of life in the community. They then take those connections with them into other spheres.” He went on to explain that Brian’s use of the employment scheme to decorate the houses of Inisgrianan’s elderly residents was “running to the very core of the social fabric. People are becoming more social and the values of community are making a comeback”. Through ‘joining in’ and ‘taking part’ in community initiatives, respondents commented on how; “people’s energy has been redirected” (John); “they are happier in themselves and have more time for each other” (Gerald); “people might actually be relieved at having regained some of their quality of life” (Ryan). John and Ryan used the term “converting” to capture what they saw as the understood but unarticulated needs of the community into both formal and informal organisational solutions.

5. Interpretation and analysis: Entrepreneurship by context

These entrepreneurs were very aware of being embedded in place and through the social bonds developed by being a part of the community. Individuals did not see themselves as separate and distinct but as being immersed in a community; “I have never seen myself as any better or any different” and that socialising in the community represented “a very much open and even forum” (John). Entrepreneurs were intent on justifying the way they lived “a life” in the community. However, this was a life very much based on socialised appreciation and understanding of the nature and habits of their place. Yet, the outcomes and process in

which they were immersed demonstrate considerations much broader than economic profit. The desire was to be “a person of the community” and to be respected “for more than you have in your bank balance” (John). Eugene explained how working on community initiatives meant “not losing the run of yourself”, being mindful of membership role and status. But, this could only be achieved through familiarity with the social context and the rules of engagement, the protocols and etiquettes associated with time and place. The outcome of these activities was not prestige in an economic or individual sense, but at the level of community and place in that it was about changing the fabric of a community and raising it to another level. Yet all this was achieved through entrepreneurial endeavours. Entrepreneurs understood this relationship in terms of reciprocity, mutuality and common purpose but this could only be identified and realised working in partnership with the community. So we see how community looms large in both entrepreneurial content and process; we see how being embedded means being enmeshed, entangled and engaged with the meanings, the purposes and identities of place.

The actions did not happen accidentally or in isolation, but were within communities and across institutional boundaries. They extended outwards to attract people like; “the mayor, two bishops, a Presbyterian clergyman, an accountant and an architect”, entrepreneurs were working with “the town” in a way “which would satisfy the government” (Paddy). In constructing and supporting these credible developmental nuclei, people like John and Ryan, as members of the enterprise board understood implicitly “who these people were”, and could vouch for their credibility. These politically active entrepreneurs understood the local vision through their own community belonging. They saw their role as unlocking resources through convincing their political peers that their social opportunities were lucrative, sustainable and worthwhile. John described it as “overcoming intransigence” by providing an informed translation of local ambitions and possibilities into language of government. Drawing the link between his distribution of milk to the county, being a county councillor and chair of the community radio station, Ryan explained; “it might be for the benefit of the community, but the fundamentals of running any business are the same.” In the language of Barth (1967), entrepreneurs were crossing the boundary between business, community and politics, and drawing upon their embeddedness and social capital in these spheres to create new possibilities; “entrepreneurs effect new conversions between forms of goods that were previously not directly convertible. They thereby create new paths for the circulation of goods, often crossing barriers between formerly discrete spheres of circulation” (p.89).

Apart from the jobs and self-employment opportunities described, there was a sense that what was being collectively achieved was a gradual redefinition of community and economy. In the sense intended by Anderson (2000), communities were being brought together through entrepreneurial purpose. However it was the entrepreneurs understanding of “business fundamentals” and a wide range of contacts which took ideas to fruition. But the developments were in a form which involved and developed the capacity of the local community to engage in further developments. Brian explained; “We are looking for more funds and get five or six more businesses. But the emphasis will be that the businesses would be for the people, not corporate or anything.” So entrepreneurial embeddedness helped them understand the market place, the labour market, political priorities and business opportunities which would work for the community. They knew both the limitations of available resources and the local potential. This knowledge empowered the community to become involved.

While social bonds enable entrepreneurs to more effectively exploit economic opportunity, what we demonstrate here is how this can work for a community. We also show that the opportunities already existed, but it was only through entrepreneurial action that these opportunities were made manifest (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Yet, this was only achieved through understanding, caring about and cherishing the actual and sense of community in which individuals were embedded.

What these entrepreneurs demonstrate is that by utilizing entrepreneurial skills, they can work to build, sustain and develop communities with the intention of making them collectively more entrepreneurial. The use of entrepreneurial skills enabled the alleviation of problems to overcome the resource and attitudinal limitations. Our findings show how entrepreneurs adjust their orientation to use the tools and techniques accumulated in Schumpeter’s (1934) economic sphere to address issues in the communities of which they are a part. What is evident is that the entrepreneurs sought to bring about social transformation and improvement – looking at the longer game - in a way closely linked to their relationship with the community. In this sense the activities only made sense through a lens of unified action, informed by embeddedness that made sense in the reality of the local and to those embedded within it (Johannisson and Monsted, 1997).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to enhance understanding about entrepreneurship at the level of community. The questions explored were “what is the nature of entrepreneurial engagement with place and community? And, how can we explain it?” We found that communities can be shaped by entrepreneurship, but community also shape and form entrepreneurial outcomes. This is explained in terms of the relationship between the entrepreneur and their community which our findings demonstrate to be a critical factor in entrepreneurial processes. Moreover, we also demonstrate that to fully understand these relationships, concepts and methods are needed that allow us to observe and describe the events of development and change (Barth, 1969). Employing the ideas of Granovetter (1985) and Barth (1992; 1969) and using an ethnographic approach allowed us to look more deeply at these events and processes as entrepreneurially wrought change.

The contribution of this work is two-fold. First, it not only shows the relevance and importance of social resources, but also how the recombination of these resources deployed with entrepreneurial skills can influence entrepreneurial endeavours to shape and change a community as well as a venture. Second, this study shows how through social bonds and an affinity to community and place, entrepreneurship recreates, renews and reifies the identity of a place but also its understanding and purpose. However, this was achieved by working in partnership. Indeed, mutual dependency seems key and a critical element of the process involved. And, while some might argue that one can exist without the other, it is the combination of both that brought about effective change and here-in lies a key strength. Therefore, this study shows that entrepreneurship has a social value that is real to the communities in which it takes place, revitalising communities, offering opportunities and experiences that go beyond economic rationality through focusing on social needs. When combined with economic outcomes, beneficial change can come about, changing the fabric of a community and in doing so taking communities to a different level. This extends Barth’s (1969) interpretation of the entrepreneur by demonstrating how such individuals can bring about social change by being engaged and working with the community in which the entrepreneur is embedded (Swedberg, 2006). It is interesting to reflect how this concept of being embedded means that entrepreneurs both *use* and *are used* by the local community.

In terms of research approach, we would argue that it is only by using a qualitative lens and inductive analysis the interesting processes, actions and dynamics like those considered here can be explored. Our ethnographic approach was critical for generating understanding of the

realities entrepreneurs and communities face, allowing us to explain the “what” and the “how”. So although social theorizing may tell us much about macro changes, it is only by analysing the actions of the entrepreneurs, their realities and social context, that we can further understanding of the breadth of the entrepreneurial process.

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Table 1: Respondents

Respondent	Business	Time in Community	Background, Experience and Career
John	Textile Manufacture and Brewing	40 years	Marketing qualification; experience in the family business; joined a brewery consortium after exit; wife teaches in a local school
Brian	Hotel/Hospitality & Public Sector	55 years	No formal qualifications; took over the family B&B at 15 when his parents became ill; developed it into a hotel; developed a self-catering business with his wife
Patrick	Builder	65 years	A joiner by trade; worked in Britain, West Indies and Africa; Returned home to get married and became a builder/ community development worker
Des	Baker	50 years	Qualification in philosophy; experience in and took over the family bakery; ran this with his wife; developed a number of properties
Ryan	Milk Distributor	25 years	Qualification in business and economics; took over a milk distribution route; developed a range of commercial and private construction developments
Raymond	Doctor	42 years	Qualification in medicine; chief medical officer with a multinational company; left to establish a private medical practice
Eugene	Builder	55 years	Qualification in joinery; established a subcontract joinery business; developed a range of property both commercial and domestic
Joe	Business Consultant	45 years	Qualification in accountancy and finance; worked in a regional economic development

			agency; Established his own business due to redundancy
Philip	Farmer	48 years	Qualified as a digger driver; works as a local contractor; Has worked on a range of private and state funded housing, road building and internet cabling projects
Hugh	Restaurateur	55 years	No formal qualifications; Developed a run-down pub/ restaurant; breeds and races horses

Table 2: Roles held by entrepreneurs in the wider community

Respondent	Community Involvement
John	Community museum founder; Life boat station founder; Enterprise board member; Peace School Director; Informal business mentor
Brian	Community golf club founder; Employability scheme manager; Chamber of commerce member; Hotel federation member; Informal business mentor
Patrick	Community trust founder; Employability panel member; Debating society member; Housing action member; Informal business advisor
Des	Community childcare founder; School board member; Church custodian; Choir member; Community centre board
Ryan	Community radio board; Football club board; County Councillor; County enterprise board; Informal business mentor
Raymond	Health centre founder; Mayor; Boxing board member; Football club physician; Health forum chair
Eugene	Retirement village founder; Housing committee member; Housing charity trustee
Joe	Community shopping centre founder; City centre committee; Small business panel member; Informal business mentor
Philip	Community wind farm founder; Community dance founder; Community centre board; Community draughts league
Hugh	Football club director; Vintners association chair; Town centre committee

Table 3: Entrepreneurial process: opportunities, viability and resourcing

Name	Opportunity	Location	Employs	Resourcing
John	Museum	Inisgrianan	10	Site purchased privately. Managed by a volunteer board. Developed with EU grant; Operations covered by entrance fee, gift and coffee shop
Brian	Golf Course	Inisgrianan	28	Site claimed in trust for the community. Managed by a volunteer board. Developed through capital grant from Irish government. Operations covered by membership and clubhouse sales.
Patrick	Hotel Retail	Blighsland	55	Sites purchased and developed through EU and UK grants and privately gifted. Managed by a volunteer board. Operations covered by anchor tenants and residential rents. Now has a CEO..
Des	Childcare	Blighsland	10	Building gifted in trust to the community. Managed by a volunteer board. Developed through a government grant. Customer revenue funds operating costs.
Ryan	Radio Station	Inisgrianan	12	Bid for a licence to operate on behalf of UK government. Managed by a volunteer board. Funded by grant and advertising revenue.
Raymond	General Practice	Blighsland	8	Bought practice and developed privately. Capital development through EU. Services funded by UK NHS
Eugene	Retirement Association	Blighsland	6	Site purchased and developed privately. Partnership with local

				social housing body. Rents paid privately and through housing benefit.
Joe	Shopping Centre	Blighsland	10	Disused factory site taken over on a nominal rent. Developed through UK and EU capital grants. Managed by a volunteer board. Rented to a mix of private retail and community service providers. Supported by Big Lottery
Philip	Wind farm	Inisgrianan	2	Energy company provide the technology and maintenance. Community provide land, access and planning permission. Managed by a co-operative of members. Revenue from Ireland's national grid is divided between both parties.
Hugh	Football Club	Blighsland	30	Local council own and maintain the stadium. Main shareholders are local business leaders and supporters clubs. Managed by a volunteer board. Operational revenue from gate receipts, Irish Football and player sales