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14. Understanding entrepreneurship in residential neighbourhoods and communities of place

Darja Reuschke, Reinout Kleinhans, Stephen Syrett, Maarten van Ham and Colin Mason

14.1 Introduction

This volume has explored the under-researched interconnections between entrepreneurship and enterprise with neighbourhoods and communities of place. The key concern was to contribute to knowledge about how residential areas where people live (neighbourhoods) and interact with co-residents and social actors (spatial communities) are simultaneously shaping entrepreneurship and enterprise and being shaped by entrepreneurs and enterprise. Few studies have considered the impact of residential neighbourhoods on the functioning of businesses or on entrepreneurial activity. Economic studies have usually focused on the locations of firms and on inter-firm relations rather than individual economic actors and their residential (private) relationships. Neighbourhood and housing studies have linked neighbourhoods to a variety of socio-economic outcomes but rarely in relation to entrepreneurship and enterprise.

Contributions in this volume come from different disciplines including entrepreneurship studies, geography, sociology and planning. Thus it is not surprising that various different relationships have emerged and different perspectives and concepts have been applied which reveal multiple ways through which neighbourhoods and communities can be related to entrepreneurship and enterprise. While some chapters have the neighbourhood or spatial community as their lens through which they explore entrepreneurial and enterprising activities, others have a certain economic activity or type of entrepreneur as their focus and scrutinize how these might relate to neighbourhood or community. This diversity of approaches and perspectives is a particular strength of this volume as this allows us to study the extent and nature of the relationship between a great variety of entrepreneurial and economic activity and residential neighbourhoods, and what the role of local (spatial) communities is for

entrepreneurship.

With these concluding remarks we seek to synthesise the different narratives and findings presented in this volume and to connect these to the previous literature in order to provide answers to the question: how can neighbourhoods and local (spatial) communities be entrepreneurial? This objective relates to the wider issues underlying this volume: why should entrepreneurship studies incorporate the local community and the neighbourhood, but also: why do neighbourhood studies need to consider entrepreneurship and enterprise? For this purpose, we will proceed with identifying types of entrepreneurs, neighbourhoods and local communities that featured in the chapters and with highlighting concepts that contributors engaged with that help us to understand the relations between entrepreneurship with neighbourhoods and communities of place.

14.2 Who is entrepreneurial in neighbourhoods and communities?

Given the focus of this volume on residential neighbourhoods in relation to entrepreneurship and enterprise, the type of entrepreneur who featured most in the contributions are residents. While this finding may be logical and is what one would expect, this is a key finding of this volume that contrasts with mainstream narratives of entrepreneurs and business owners who are regarded in the existing literature as innovators, managers, employer, firm collaborators or suppliers, disconnected from their domestic lives (Shane, 2009; Gartner, 1989). The entrepreneur as resident is a novel way of thinking about entrepreneurship and how entrepreneurial activity is shaped and thus can be influenced by the residential environment of the entrepreneur.

The entrepreneur as resident is a diverse concept in terms of visibility/invisibility, formality/informality, organisation and institutionalisation, use of local social networks and resources, and the role for the local community. In essence, people might become entrepreneurs because of social interactions with co-residents and certain local circumstances. However, the opposite might also be true. Even though people might invent new things in their homes and garages, their entrepreneurial activity might not be related to the place where they live. While the first case can be labelled as an 'embedded residential entrepreneur' there is evidence too of the

‘residentially disembodied entrepreneur’ (chapters 4 and 5).

Contributions that explored informal entrepreneurs found ‘hidden’ entrepreneurs, in terms of being unregistered (though legitimate) businesses, but which were often highly visible within their residential neighbourhood. For example, Williams and Williams (chapter 2) found that off-the-books work was openly mentioned by interviewees in their study of informal entrepreneurship in the UK thus not kept ‘hidden’ in the vicinity of the neighbourhood. Lendrum and Swider (chapter 7) show for a neighbourhood in Detroit how hairstyling has moved from shop fronts into the back spaces of women’s homes and is retained and performed there through local social networks amongst female residents. While these businesses might be hidden from government and formal institutions and invisible in business registers, they are not hidden from residents who know about them through local networks. Hackers, in contrast, as reviewed by Capdevila (chapter 5) do seek to remain hidden in residential spaces. Being invisible is an inherent aspect of how hacker spaces work.

Informality often overlaps with the home as place for the business. Lendrum and Swider’s women entrepreneurs run hairdressing salons in their homes. These ‘kitchen salons’ used to be visible in storefronts in the neighbourhood but were moved into homes. De Beer and Schutjens (chapter 3) used a sample of entrepreneurs who work within a ten minute walking distance from their home and found that a high proportion of these businesses – what they call ‘neighbourhood enterprises’ – are based in the owner’s home.

Entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood are not only individuals but are also groups of people, formally or informally organised, who act entrepreneurially because they live in a certain place. This type of entrepreneur is well represented in this book through contributions on community enterprise in its broader sense. According to Peredo and Chrisman (chapter 8), community-based entrepreneurship is an unconventional form of entrepreneurship. ‘Unconventional’ in that it is based upon regarding collective and individual interests as fundamentally complementary, and considering communal values and the notion of the common good as essential elements in venture creation. For this reason, they state that community entrepreneurship represents an alternative and promising model for development of local communities and neighbourhoods, particularly but not exclusively in impoverished communities.

Community enterprise is a form of agency of a local community to change the

social, economic or environmental situation in the local area. Hence, being visible as an entrepreneurial group is a crucial means to make local change happen. In this sense, it is vital for community enterprise to connect residents with each other but also with other local actors such as colleges and hospitals to achieve community aims (chapter 9). Several contributions have shown that this can be a difficult task, for example lack of collaboration of local institutions with community enterprises (CEs) can mean that CEs are kept in full uncertainty about the acquisition of assets, information or consent for various activities. Alternatively, institutional responses can create structural dependencies of CEs on local government agencies, because volunteers (community members) have to redirect their activities to the market to raise money for renting accommodation, instead of making community issues the most important determinant for the scope of their civic entrepreneurial action (chapters 12 and 13).

It is misleading to equate entrepreneurs in residential neighbourhoods with ‘necessity entrepreneurs’ – a term that has been popular in entrepreneurship studies (e.g. the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) for describing people who have started a business out of necessity and not because they saw the opportunity to create something new and make a profit. In practice, a simplified dichotomy between necessity and opportunity is difficult to retain. Necessity is relevant in many case studies presented in this volume. However, following the saying that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’, creative solutions, which recognise opportunities for action in challenging situations, for example, were found by women as a response to urban decline (chapter 7) and by residents to build houses and provide community facilities (chapter 9).

14.3 Shaping entrepreneurial activity: what types of neighbourhoods and communities?

Different types of neighbourhoods and local communities are likely to shape entrepreneurial action in significantly different ways. Highly diverse neighbourhoods are thought to help create the atmosphere or ‘buzz’ that helps foster creative entrepreneurs (Ho, 2009; Indergaard, 2009). Therefore, poor neighbourhoods and low-income communities are often thought to face barriers to entrepreneurship. Neighbourhoods literatures have tended to focus particularly on deprived

neighbourhoods, emphasising negative externalities, in particular: crime; limited networks and social capital; missing or poor role models; and poor public amenities and services (Wilson, 1987; Curley, 2009; Kearns and Parkinson, 2009).

Contributions in this volume consider a wide range of types of neighbourhoods and communities. A number of chapters focus on economically and socially deprived urban neighbourhoods (for example in Detroit, New York and in the UK). Others do not focus on one particular type of residential neighbourhood (chapters 3 and 6). Even though community enterprises are often related to a lack or withdrawal of public service provision and social deprivation linked with it, they are not uncommon in affluent neighbourhoods such as in the case of the UK (chapter 10). Local communities that venture into entrepreneurship also reveal differences. Especially in the UK, CEs are highly diverse in their origins, formation, objectives and in the basis of their viability. Examples in this volume have been formed to take advantage of a particular set of local opportunities and have developed a particular structure to respond to these opportunities while adapting to changing local circumstances.

Informal entrepreneurs, too, are not limited to deprived neighbourhoods as Williams and Williams argued (chapter 2). While they are numerically more relevant in deprived urban neighbourhoods, entrepreneurs who run unregistered businesses as sole proprietors also live in more affluent areas. In deprived areas informal residential entrepreneurs rather tend to trade in the informal economy, too, whereas in more affluent areas informal entrepreneurs tend to be better connected with the formal economy in terms of their trading partners.

In conclusion then, entrepreneurial neighbourhoods and communities of place are not limited to affluent areas and populations. Contributions in this volume showed that economically and socially deprived neighbourhoods and income-poor communities can be entrepreneurial too but more affluent entrepreneurial neighbourhoods and communities are more likely to have connections to the formal economy outside the neighbourhood or community.

In seeking to understand how different types of neighbourhoods and communities shape entrepreneurial action, the uneven distribution of different types and sources of capital available for entrepreneurial action across residential spaces is significant. This relates to human capital in the form of knowledge and skills, as well as finance capital, physical capital in the form of the housing stock and infrastructure

provision, as well as social capital, the glue or lubricant for social and economic relations, itself constituted within and through communities of place and interest. The concept of social capital was a particular focus of a number of contributions, not surprisingly as social networks and the (social and economic) benefits they bring is acknowledged both in neighbourhood studies and entrepreneurship studies. However, social capital is not the only important type of capital that is unevenly distributed and thus shapes entrepreneurial activities and organisations spatially.

Neighbourhood networks have been cast in previous literature as a form of local social capital, that can help organise and mobilise resources within the neighbourhood through ‘bonding’ but also provide ‘bridging’ to agents and opportunities beyond the neighbourhood (Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998; Granovetter, 1973). Socially deprived neighbourhoods are thought to provide strong ‘bonding’ social capital but weak ‘bridging’ social capital (Bailey, 2015; Putnam, 2000; Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999). Because of the lack of bridging social capital deprived neighbourhoods are also often regarded as lacking entrepreneurial potential (chapter 2). Peredo and Chrisman (chapter 8), however, found that community enterprises in impoverished areas are often vital due to networks with members of their community who moved to other places. While the authors selected ‘successful’ community enterprises and argue that a mix of bonding and bridging social capital is crucial for entrepreneurship, their cases studies clearly show that economically deprived neighbourhoods and income-poor communities do not necessarily lack social networks, and hence are not necessarily deprived in entrepreneurial potential and capacity (an argument put forward in the literature, see chapter 2 for a review).

For co-working spaces, communities of practice appear to be more relevant than communities of place. Co-working spaces largely depend on building a community of co-workers through interactions, sharing similar practices, motivations and interests. This is largely independent of the place where co-working space users live. However, the contributions in this volume also highlight the relevance of centrally located urban areas for co-working spaces (chapters 4 and 5). The need for social networking is here facilitated by transport connectivity not least because co-working spaces are not full-time working spaces of entrepreneurs but are visited on a temporary basis, often not in the same neighbourhood where the entrepreneur lives. In this respect, centrally located, poorer neighbourhoods might be able to attract human capital through co-working

spaces. Particularly here vacant properties might be available to provide relatively cheap work spaces. Spill-over effects can be targeted by the management of these spaces as described in Capdevila (chapter 5) through opening up the space to the local community via events encouraging interaction.

14.4 What makes an entrepreneurial neighbourhood or community?

Entrepreneurial neighbourhoods and local communities were found across this volume in differing social, geographic, economic and cultural settings. So it is not urban vibrancy or the social cohesion of rural communities per se that account for a certain degree of entrepreneurial potential. The neighbourhood generally is understood as a composite of: a social environment comprising networks/contacts, role models, image/status; an economic environment comprising property prices, property types, investment, land uses; and a physical environment comprising appearance, public space, etc. (Van Ham, 2012; Hunter, 1979, Downs, 1981). Contributions in this volume highlighted the relevance of these characteristics for entrepreneurship. The value these characteristics have for entrepreneurship lies in the access they facilitate to other benefits (Forrest, 2012), e.g. start-up infrastructure and help with setting up a business. What is relevant, in summary, are people, networks, institutions, amenities and local assets.

Entrepreneurial neighbourhoods and local communities possess a good network of internal and external links. Local networks help setting up community enterprises or home-based businesses ('kitchen salons'). External networks are not limited to close-by areas or the municipality but can link distant community members with the area where they once lived. They also often have 'institutional capacity' (Fondation *et al.*, 1999). This explains why so many book chapters focus on community enterprises as an institutionalised form of community entrepreneurship. Residents and other institutions organise themselves to jointly produce and exchange goods or services (community enterprise) or to provide housing and other communal services. Peredo and Chrisman (chapter 8) theorise that CEs arise as a consequence of a combination of a lack of an acceptable equilibrium of (material) conditions, a history of collective experience and action, and a stock of social resources that is optimal to allow social organization to

become economic organization. Neighbourhood organisations such as CEs act as brokers to enable residents to access further resources and services (Small, 2006). CEs thus may also increase local social capital through stimulating more or a greater variety of entrepreneurial activities including family businesses. This is in line with recent thinking that has argued that neighbourhood organisations shape social relations rather than being simply derived from them (McQuarrie and Marwell, 2009).

Forming contacts with neighbours takes place not in the street or chance encounters, but in neighbourhood settings such as amenities and institutions (Van Eijk 2010). As a consequence, living in a neighbourhood on its own is not sufficient to develop networks and provide access to contacts and resources – residents must participate in organisations (Small, 2006). Accordingly, many contributions highlight that community facilities, community building and community organising are highly relevant for certain types of entrepreneurship (chapters 8 and 9). In similar vein, not all community enterprises are entrepreneurial if they happen to be organised from the top-down and trigger few entrepreneurial activities in the community or neighbourhood (chapter 13).

Entrepreneurial communities can be of different geographic size and either place-based or not place-based. Contributions raised the issues of ‘optimal’ size and whether a small geographic unit such as a neighbourhood is too small for understanding entrepreneurial activities (chapters 8 and 11). Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all approach or solution. If entrepreneurial activities of residents centre around an asset such as a building that is of value primarily for nearby residents such as in the case of community development trusts as described by Bailey (chapter 11), then neighbourhoods are often an appropriate functional and empirical unit. This notwithstanding, CEs are not necessarily organised locally but can have a wider geographic reach. The residential neighbourhood appears to be less relevant for entrepreneurial activity when mobile people or the sharing of different skills sets and experiences are targeted, such as in the case of co-working spaces. Here then contributors found the concept of community of practice (e.g. co-working community) useful as analytical concept.

Many CEs are formed to take advantage of particular sets of local opportunities, even though they often arise from a perceived deficiency in local services or facilities. The nature of the scope of these opportunities is highly relevant in relation to policy

changes. Bailey (chapter 11) emphasises that these changes often happen rapidly which can make it difficult for CEs to achieve their own long term viability and sustainability. In this respect, ‘entrepreneurial’ implies being able to respond quickly to new opportunities in relation to funding sources or assets to be acquired. By owning income-generating assets, CEs can ensure their own continuity and become more independent from a policy environment in constant flux (chapters 9 and 10).

Several contributions point out that the supportive political discourse towards civic entrepreneurial actions usually fails to acknowledge the fact that not all citizens and community groups are able to self-organise successfully without any support (see also Uitermark, 2015). There is a clear need for capacity building to deal with the challenges of self-organisation, volunteering, co-ordinating and managing community enterprise, especially if this approach is to be adopted more widely.

14.4 Directions for further research

Neighbourhood and community do not seem to be contrary but rather complementary concepts for understanding local entrepreneurship. They are both highly relevant for entrepreneurship as shown in this volume. Spatial mobility appears to be relevant as this often leads to extended networks. High levels of mobility can decrease bonding social capital and levels of social cohesion and therefore lower the potential for community building. Conversely, high mobility brings new people into neighbourhoods with the potential to increase local bridging and linking social capital. Moreover, people who moved away can provide resources (e.g. financial resources, information, networks, ideas) for their places of origin.

Residential entrepreneurs are of great importance for local economic development. They can operate in the formal/informal economy, be home-based or in commercial premises and their potential for local economic development is widely untapped and unknown. This volume has revealed that in taking the residential neighbourhood as a starting point for the analysis of entrepreneurial activity, there is a need for further systematic research across the range that extends from the ‘residentially embedded’ to the ‘residentially disembedded’ entrepreneur. For the ‘residentially embedded entrepreneur’ – whether seen or unseen, formal or informal, individualistic or

community rooted – entrepreneurial activity tends to be strongly related to local market conditions, needs and communities. At the opposite extreme is the ‘residentially disembedded entrepreneur’, that is the rapidly growing number of home-based businesses or self-employed workers who operate from residential houses but have little or no connection through their business practice with the local economy, neighbourhood and local place-based community.

Community enterprises have been studied in this volume from the perspective of entrepreneurship studies and neighbourhood studies. The view from entrepreneurship studies seems slightly more optimistic than in neighbourhood studies where CEs were identified, such as community centres, that do not (cannot) act entrepreneurially in terms of profit seeking and innovation (chapter 13). These different views should encourage more interdisciplinary work that investigates varying sectors where community enterprises have emerged to identify more general bottlenecks and potentials.

Several directions for further research have emerged in this volume with respect to community enterprises. First, impact and success of CEs are very difficult to assess because they operate in differing fields (e.g. housing, health, community centre), on different timescales, and deliver various social, economic and environmental benefits, in particular in the context of neighbourhood revitalization. The lack of information on changes in social indicators (such as empowerment) also makes it difficult to reveal impacts, with housing production by CEs as a clear exception (chapter 10). More fundamentally, the notion of ‘success’ is difficult to define as it goes beyond the extent to which CEs achieve their social objectives. In fact, ‘successful’ CEs have to balance the (sometimes competing) priorities of innovation, financial stability, accountability to a wider public, and long-term sustainability. Most existing research on CEs is of a cross-sectional design and thus not able to identify changes over time. More longitudinal research is needed to understand the relative performance of CEs and their social, economic and environmental impacts (see also Bailey, 2012, p. 33). Such research can also incorporate entrepreneurial ‘cycles’. Just as any entrepreneurial start-up or activity, CEs may fail, whether or not they have been successful in the short or long run. What are the main limitations on growth? Are certain priorities lost if expansion happens too quickly (see chapter 11)? A longitudinal approach towards the

study of community entrepreneurship, especially in urban areas, will surely advance our knowledge in this field.

Secondly, social capital is relevant for entrepreneurship and community enterprises (alongside other forms of capital). Several contributions endorse the viewpoint that both the 'consumption' and 'production' of social capital are still not well-understood for CEs (Somerville and McElwee, 2011, p. 323). A relevant investigation would be the nature of and balance among different forms of social capital as those are related to region, size and specific character of the community and to effectiveness and sustainability. In particular, knowledge is needed about how CEs can harness social capital in local communities (including those experiencing gentrification or becoming immigrant enclaves) and how social capital can be used (more effectively) to achieve positive outcomes through mobilizing volunteers and board members.

A third strand of future research lies in the governance of CEs. The relationship with active citizenship and forms of local governance that prevail in different locations is worth studying in connection to the productivity and sustainability of CEs. Several contributions have revealed the complexity of CE co-operation with local authorities and other institutions. There is a need to further examine the governance and collaborative arrangements which lead to the organisation, delivery and management of innovative projects by CEs.

In conclusion, understanding the differences in the nature and scope of the relationships between the entrepreneur or entrepreneurial organisation, the residential neighbourhood and communities of place and practice is important, as they have very different implications for social and economic practice and policy thinking. The precise constitution of these relationships within particular urban neighbourhoods suggests the appropriateness of very different types of strategies to promote local economic development and community and neighbourhood development, particularly in poorer areas or those undergoing large scale economic restructuring, and require us to think again about how we plan and design residential urban areas.

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