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*INVISIBLE CHANGEMAKERS IN INVISIBLE
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PLACE AND “EVERYDAY ENTREPRENEURS” IN
THE REINVENTION OF SMALL RURAL TOWNS*

SARAH JANE GREEN

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**INVISIBLE CHANGEMAKERS IN INVISIBLE COMMUNITIES – THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN
PLACE AND “EVERYDAY ENTREPRENEURS” IN THE REINVENTION OF SMALL RURAL TOWNS**

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Durham University for the
degree of Doctor in Philosophy at Durham University Business School, Department of
Management and Marketing**

by

Sarah Earnshaw Green

September 2025

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INVISIBLE CHANGEMAKERS IN INVISIBLE COMMUNITIES – THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PLACE AND EVERYDAY ENTREPRENEURS IN THE REINVENTION OF SMALL RURAL TOWNS

Sarah Earnshaw Green

Abstract

Whilst historic entrepreneurship studies have focused on heroic, high growth businesses, there is increasing interest in the small business entrepreneurs we encounter in our daily lives (Welter et al., 2017). This phenomenon has been referred to as “everyday entrepreneurship” and is prevalent in all communities creating social as well as economic impact. There is an evident gap in knowledge as whilst entrepreneurship has been recognised as creating change (Gedeon, 2010), it has not been historically considered as a key contributor to community development (Lyons et al., 2012).

With the decline of agricultural employment and the pressures of globalisation, rural places are facing significant change (OECD, 2006) and are often characterised as “left behind places” (Martin et al., 2021) and invisibilised. Despite operating in the periphery (Anderson, 2000), the small towns researched are defying the rationale of their spatial position and do not fall foul to the cycle of depletion (McKeever et al., 2014).

If community reinvention is the outcome of collective action, the questions within this thesis are what role everyday entrepreneurship plays in this process and how the context of place and policy supports and develops entrepreneurship.

This thesis identifies the specific practices of entrepreneurs that animate the community – providing support and care. It considers the importance of context, demonstrating the interplay between the materiality, meaning and practices of place (Cresswell, 2009) and the resources available to entrepreneurs. It demonstrates the disconnect between universal national government policy and the place-based needs of local communities and illustrates how the meso level of local government facilitate neo-endogenous development.

Finally, it demonstrates that everyday entrepreneurship is important, has societal impact and suggests why policymakers, academics and communities should reconsider how they define and encourage entrepreneurship as it can be a powerful tool for change.

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Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Everyday Entrepreneurship

Small businesses are drivers of economic growth (Forsman, 2011; McKeever, Anderson and Jack, 2014; Riberio-Sorano, 2017) with policymakers recognising the impact of entrepreneurship on issues such as job creation, innovation, economic development and poverty reduction (Battilana and Cacioppe, 2012; Willis, 2011; Fuelhart and Glasmeier, 2003). However, this collection of papers follows the more recent research phenomenon which seeks to challenge the principle that entrepreneurship is solely or predominantly an economic exercise, explained by economic theory and managerial logic but instead to consider entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). This work seeks to explore the social impact of entrepreneurship following the proposition of Steyaert and Katz (2004) that entrepreneurship takes place in multiple sites and spaces and therefore is therefore embedded and agentic within communities. In doing this, it requires a re-imagining of the classic image of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

The actors studied within this research are often not financially driven, ambitious, bank backed, young risk takers with high tech, high growth innovative business ideas (Autio et al., 2014; Acs et al., 2016) living in major cities in a cluster of the like-minded but instead represent the vast majority of businesses that are small and choose to remain small (Anderson and Ullah, 2014). These business owners are often people who have retired from their major career or part-time entrepreneurs or people choosing to run a small business to fit in around an existing family or caring commitment. They are “everyday entrepreneurs” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) practicing entrepreneurship within their communities and contributing to their communities.

This research seeks to understand entrepreneurship as a phenomenon that happens every day in all different sorts of places as part of normal daily life. From the shopkeeper that delivers the morning newspaper, the barber that cuts our hair, the garage where we fill our cars with petrol or the butcher that provides our meat – we all interact with many small entrepreneurs as part of our daily routines. The research adds to the growing school of European researchers that seek to broaden the definition of entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2017) and explores the implications of recognising this much broader phenomenon on policy makers and communities. It seeks to challenge why the field of entrepreneurship has chosen to focus on a minority group, rather than embracing diversity and plurality.

Entrepreneurship is a contested term (Prince et al., 2021) but most definitions include an element of uncertainty; business creation; innovation; opportunity and value creation. Each of the individual small business owners within this research have set up or bought and developed a business through making opportunities, in arguably, a resource constrained environment; faced significant uncertainty within their small communities risking their own time and capital and are creating local value. As the first paper in this research aims to illustrate, the value created is often far greater than the contracted for good or service, but involves a real relationship and care. They innovate often with new products and services aimed at their local customer base for example: new sausage recipes; home delivery service for the elderly; introducing surfing to Northumberland or IT packages helping farmers fill in online regulatory returns. These innovations may not change the world but they nudge their community forward.

This research considers the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in the context of small rural market towns who are working hard to reinvent themselves and remain relevant against

significant changes within their rural communities and considers how these everyday entrepreneurs can support this process. (Welter et al., 2017).

1.2. The increasing importance of context in entrepreneurship research

These everyday entrepreneurs, particularly in small rural towns, are not anonymous businesses but are part of our communities, they are not just a newsagent, mechanic or hairdresser, they are “our hairdresser”, “my mechanic” or “the newsagent” (Bosworth, 2012). Often, they live and breathe the communities they both live and work in, they know your family, what makes you happy and why you may be sad as well as the idiosyncrasies of your old car, your personal magazine preferences or what side you style your hair. Yet despite providing significant “social glue” in rural communities and for many rural residents providing a critical community service enabling them to live in the periphery, historically both academic research and government policy fails to recognise their wider social contribution or to consider their impact on the communities in which they operate.

Entrepreneurship arises in physical places (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) and is socially situated (McKeever, Jack and Anderson, 2015) often creating shared spaces that enable communities to meet, embedding people and meaning in place, creating brands and redefining identity to create destinations – places people want to live in or visit. The business is drawn from the context and becomes part of that context (Gartner, 1985). Using the principle of duality (Giddens, 1979) if the entrepreneur is impacted by the context, then the context must be impacted by the entrepreneur.

Researching the context within entrepreneurship studies is recognised as of increased importance (Zahra et al., 2014; Welter, 2011). Previous research has argued the need for

qualitative studies of localised entrepreneurial processes, to gain a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship in context (Trettin and Welter, 2011; Redhead and Bika, 2022). A place-based approach (Cresswell, 2013) provides an exploratory lens for entrepreneurship research (Zahra et al., 2014; Kibler et al., 2015) as places create a unique set of resources for entrepreneurs which exist beyond the natural and built environment including location and proximity (Boschma, 2005) with social constructions created from collective assets and memory (Muller and Korsgaard, 2018; Munoz and Kimmitt, 2019).

1.3 The changing nature of rural communities

A story of everyday entrepreneurship is therefore a story of change. Change within place and to place. Entrepreneurship is recognised as a key mechanism for creating change or a handy disturber of order (Hjorth, 2004) as change is “both the milieu and medium for entrepreneurship” (Anderson et al. 2012 p960). The rural places that provide the context for this study are facing significant change. With the globalisation and intensification of food production less people are employed in agriculture within these communities, requiring these communities to diversify, reskill, find new industries and employment opportunities moving from a mono-sector and heavily agriculturally dependent community to a diverse, multi-sector economy with a range of small businesses (OECD 2006). Some of these businesses provide local services and are dependent on the local market, however, with the advent of technologies such as the internet others provide niche services globally from remote rural locations choosing their place of employment on the attractiveness of the physical environment as a place to live and work. The phenomenon of counter-urbanisation (Bosworth, 2010) with people moving out of urban centres means that these rural communities are often increasingly seen as great retirement options, potential commuter

communities or work from home opportunities. The once steady local population is facing demographic changes with young people moving out and older people moving in as well as significant new numbers of “incomers” who do not have long relationships or connections with place (Bosworth and Atterton, 2012). This can again challenge and change the local practices of place with new ideas, new connections and different expectations running in parallel with long established customs, relationships and embedded behaviours.

The English countryside and the classic English village are a key part of the current and historical perception of England and play a key role in our national identity (Mischi, 2009). However, if we want to maintain our countryside, it needs to be looked after, rural communities act as stewards of the countryside. To make this happen, rural communities need to be viable and resilient. Whilst Government (House of Lords, 2021, p1) stated that “the countryside is one of our greatest assets” and “rural areas are at the heart of our levelling up agenda” (DLUHC, 2022 quoted in Rural Services Network, 2022), the type of rural towns in this research appear invisible to policymakers.

Furthermore, politically these areas are changing with political power moving centrally from the local by the creation of unitary authorities from many district authorities and then further devolution of national powers through the creation of Mayoral Combined Authorities (Newman and Kenny, 2023). Through a process of continuing devolution these Mayors are establishing more local powers, securing additional funding from Westminster through a set of individually negotiated devolution deals meaning that each region has a different cocktail of funding and power increasing the heterogeneity of place and creating complex multi-level governance systems. With UK government recognising the long-term impact of unequal regional development in the form of the Levelling Up agenda (DHLUC

2022), the debate continues about how best to tackle this challenge and the relationship between bottom up or top-down regional development. However, despite the realities of rural areas as places of sectoral, technological, demographic and political change, rural places are often presented as places of tradition and stability, defined in comparison with urban areas using a language of deficit. This “rural myopia” means that the dynamic nature of rural places and the dramatic changes and paradigm shift they face is under-researched and not reflected in policy.

2. Gaps and the underlying theoretical challenge

Welter et al. (2017) asked in their special edition of *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* focused on everyday entrepreneurship whether researchers were “looking for entrepreneurship in all the wrong places?” This research seeks to demonstrate that we do not need to look for entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship is embedded in our lives; in our local places and spaces (Anderson et al., 2019) and entrepreneurship as a dynamic process (Johannisson, 2009) shapes and creates change that impacts us all. However, as indicated in the title of this thesis, for too long, this phenomenon has been invisible or ignored by policymakers or academia. This research considers not dramatic revolutionary change, but long-term evolutionary change brought about through many small-scale actions over extended periods of time creating new practices which redefine the meaning of place. It is both a story of global forces and local empowerment. It is both reactive and pro-active change recognising the push and pull of context.

Whilst regional development studies and consequently more recent entrepreneurship studies have focused on “left behind places” (Martin et al., 2021; Johnstone and Lionais, 2004) and depleted communities (McKeever et al., 2014) which are characterised by economic disadvantage, this research focuses on “invisible places” those communities rarely referenced by policy makers but who are quietly forging new futures. The places identified in this study are described as “invisible” as these towns appear unconsidered by government policy, too small to be part of the towns funding (DLUHC, 2021) but are important service hubs for local communities and demonstrate many of the positive outcomes described in the Levelling Up approach (DLUHC, 2022).

Whilst for many, these towns appear at first glance unremarkable, if we compare these towns with many across the UK, the Levelling Up White Paper (DLUHC, 2022) would suggest these communities are not the norm. These towns are succeeding in maintaining thriving high streets, there is a strong sense of community with thriving local groups and a continual trickle of new people and new small businesses investing in the towns. Despite significant structural change including the reduction of agricultural, forestry and fishing employment and the closure of mines, these communities have survived, developed new sectoral clusters and have reinvented. Whilst globalisation has had major implications for many High Streets, these towns are characterised by their independent local small businesses with very few national retail chains visible within these communities. Despite competition from the world wide web enabling rural residents to order online and receive their goods within 24 hours, the residents of these communities continue to support their local businesses, preferring to deal face to face with a trusted advisor. For many of the businesses, they have embraced technology to improve stock control and service for their customers as well as providing opportunities for them to trade globally from their rural location providing new audiences and access to new markets and increased revenue streams.

These businesses help create distinctiveness meaning that villages five miles apart can have unique identities which over time reinforces the heterogeneity of place. They also deliver on government agenda's creating local services, rejuvenating high streets, creating pride in place and helping tackle spatial inequalities by creating employment and relevance (DLUHC, 2022). Despite this Lyons et al. (2012) recognised that entrepreneurship seldom features in community development literature and this research seeks to explore this relationship suggesting that whilst the structure of communities may be a critical antecedent

to creating an eco-system to support entrepreneurial action (Julien, 2007), potentially entrepreneurship is key to community development (Fortunato and Alter, 2015).

Whilst one thesis can never seek to explain 98% of entrepreneurship, a phenomenon representing over 5 million businesses in the UK, this research does seek to demonstrate the heterogeneity of small businesses. This research is not focused on the capital markets or the riches of high value “unicorns’ or high growth “gazelles” but is focused on local market towns and the richness of community. Furthermore, it recognises that context for these small businesses is not a descriptor but is agentic, changing their activity, defining available resources and creating their markets supporting the call to understand more about entrepreneurship in context.

This research seeks to examine both the commonalities and the differences in entrepreneurship in rural communities – the heterogeneity of place – each with its own history, geography, geology, culture, customs and resources and the heterogeneity of each small business – in diverse sectors with a variety of products or services, led by an owner with distinct motivations, often not financial, with varying skills, investment and family commitments which all impact the nature of the business. As stated in Welter’s introduction to the special edition of *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*:

“There is no one type of entrepreneurship. No one best way. No ideal context. No ideal type of entrepreneur. Differences matter, and, if we believe this, then, we need to be looking for where, when, and why those differences matter most.” (Welter et al., 2016, p318).

This research seeks to consider these differences and why they matter, whilst also capturing commonality.

3. The Research Methodology

3.1 The Research Objectives and Questions

At a thesis level the research seeks to understand the relationship between place, entrepreneurship and policy. It considers this relationship with policy in multiple dimensions – micro local, meso regional/county and national government levels recognising the increasing complexity of policy making in a devolved policy landscape. It considers how places develop over time and how place is not simply a material concept but evolves in time due to meaning and practice. In doing this, it recognises the agentic relationship between these factors – good policy can support entrepreneurship and placemaking, entrepreneurship can support the development of place and places contribute to the resource and ecosystems for entrepreneurial activity.

The research is focused on understanding how entrepreneurship happens every day in all different sorts of places as part of daily normal life, reimagining the classic image of entrepreneurs and exploring how entrepreneurship is embedded in place and is agentic for place animating communities and helping rural places remain relevant. It seeks to recognise the role businesses play within communities which impacts far behind their economic contribution.

Paper 1 considers how rural entrepreneurship animates and helps keep small communities relevant and vibrant.

In doing so it considers:

- Who are the everyday entrepreneurs?

- What do they do within their community to animate and create change?
- How could these practices of change be categorised?
- What is the impact of the businesses on the communities?
- How does rural enterprise support peripheral small towns to defy the rationale of their position and remain attractive places to live with vibrant high streets and community pride?

Paper 2 studies the aspect of place in rural entrepreneurship using historic case studies.

In doing so, it considers:

- What is the role of local small businesses in regeneration and creating and recreating place?
- How do towns operating within the same rural county, with the same policy considerations develop differently? Can history and historic practices within place explain these developmental differences?
- How does the materiality, meaning and practices of place create opportunities or limitations for businesses shaping the type of businesses within the area and the entrepreneurial environment in which these businesses operate?

Paper 3 explores the role of policy in supporting rural entrepreneurship.

In doing so it considers:

- What are the challenges in applying national policy to support small local businesses in rural communities?
- Why universal policy is disconnected from the real lived experience of everyday entrepreneurs in rural communities?
- In light of devolution, how the different layers of government work to overcome these disconnects?

3.2 Methodology

This focus on empirical qualitative data was chosen because in-depth qualitative research allows researchers to investigate phenomenon in context (Yin, 2009). Qualitative research supports the constructionist stance of the researcher as it tends to operate on the assumption that realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts, nor can they be fragmented for separate study of their parts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p39). The objectives of the research were related to understanding rather than measuring and since the researcher was looking for the meanings that lie behind actions, the very nature of the issues being dealt with were not amenable to quantification (Hammersley, 1992). There is also a recognition that more qualitative studies are required in entrepreneurship as historically the focus has been on the entrepreneur rather than the broader context. (Grant and Perren, 2002; Welter, 2011; Zahra, 2007).

It is recognized that the approach used has some inherent limitations. The use of qualitative research allows the researcher to generalise a theoretical understanding of phenomenon being examined but does not allow empirical inference across the whole population. However, the value of this research design lies in its capacity to provide insights, rich detail and thick description (Geertz, 2008).

3.3 Choosing the area of study

Northumberland was chosen as the area of study as is characterised by its rurality and sparse population with no cities within the County. It is an area undergoing multi-governance change with new regional democratic structures, first with the introduction of the North of Tyne Mayoral Authority incorporating three local authorities and now with the North East Mayoral

Authority incorporating seven local authorities. These devolution deals include a national pilot on rural growth putting Northumberland at the forefront of English devolved regional rural policy (DLUHC, 2022) and due to its position on the border of Scotland and England any further devolution of policy in Scotland could have a significant impact on Northumberland.

Market towns were chosen as the unit of analysis. Northumberland is a county of market towns. These market towns are often important service hubs for wider rural populations and therefore their sustainability and resilience have wide implications for the County. Due to the decline of retail impacting the high street and changes in agriculture resulting in many market towns losing their traditional markets, they are also places in flux with complex regeneration needs requiring a long-term approach that does not match the project based competitive bidding funding currently available from national government. Furthermore, due to the size of the market towns in Northumberland, none are classified as Towns under the Towns Deal (DLUHC, 2021). A number of market towns were considered in order to choose the final three case study areas.

Table 1 – Comparison of Northumberland Wards using 2011 electoral data (ONS 2011)

Ward	Alnwic k	Amble	Amble West	Bambu rgh	Belling ham	Longh ought on	Norha m & Islands	Rothb ury	Woole r
Population	9835	4946	4172	4673	4074	4712	4323	4996	4266
No of people per sq m	111	300	101	35	5	20	16	8	9
Median age	47	43	51	53	48	44	51	51	51
% with no qualifications	23	30	19	26	21	17	23	20	26
% Level 4 & above	28	17	32	25	28	34	29	36	25
% professional occupation	16	10	18	11	13	16	13	18	11
% Mgrs, Dirs & Senior Officials	11	8	13	15	12	17	13	12	12
Economically Active	69	67	63	64	72	71	66	68	68
Self Employed %	11	8	11	17	20	15	18	18	17
Self -Empl(Actual)	752	282	348	596	604	527	597	658	549
Working from home	7	4	8	11	16	11	15	15	14
Key sectors	Retail 15%	Health & SW 17%	Health & Social Work 13%	Accom & Food service s 17%	Ag, Fishing & Food 12%	Public Admin & Defenc e 25%	Retail 15% Ag F& F 13%	Health & SW 13% Ag, F & F 11%	Ag F & F 15%

Key – Yellow highlight – highest, Green highlight – lowest. Shaded columns – areas that were dismissed

Following this exercise, areas were dismissed for a number of reasons. It was important for the purposes of comparison to have relatively similar sized wards and therefore Alnwick was dismissed for being substantially larger in terms of population. Longhoughton ward was dismissed as this is where the researcher lives and as this is not ethnographic research, the researcher was concerned about exhibiting bias and having significantly greater prior knowledge making the comparison process more difficult. Norham and Islands was dismissed due to dispersed geographic centres which exhibited very different characteristics. For example: Holy Island with a growing number of micro-businesses based around seasonal tourism and Lowick with a very sparse rural agricultural community with significantly less

tourism potential. As data sets were only available at ward level, it was difficult to disaggregate these different localities and their specific context.

Three market towns were chosen which have the following in common to ensure an ability to make comparisons: they fall within the government's definition of rural (Bibby and Brindley, 2016); are based in the local authority district of Northumberland; are defined as local authority wards within 2011 census and are too small to be classified within the Towns Deal (DHLUC, 2021). The three case studies do also demonstrate difference with Amble having the lowest percentage of residents with no qualifications (30%) and the lowest number of residents with level 4 qualifications (17%) and Rothbury having significantly less residents with no qualifications (20%) and significantly more with Level 4 qualifications (36%). Wooler is in the middle on both of these measures with 26% with no qualifications and 25% with Level 4 qualifications. Amble has low levels of self employment (282 people) with Wooler (549 people) and Rothbury (658 people) showing relatively high levels of self-employment. Arguably in the 2011 census Amble ward demonstrates significantly higher levels of deprivation than Rothbury and Wooler but the significant differences between the Amble constituency and the neighbouring Amble West constituency demonstrates that Amble has easy access to more skilled workers and more residents classified as professional.

All three of these towns appear to the visitor to have thriving high streets, active local communities and a clear pride in place (DHLUC, 2022). This can be witnessed in the range and diversity of shops on the high street and the relative lack of empty unit or the quality and care taken for the public realm with pleasant and well used public areas decorated with flower beds. Online searches for community groups and shop windows within each of the towns demonstrate the strength of community activity with community buildings and facilities,

regular meetings, clubs and local activities. All three have been recognised recently by the national media as being desirable places to live or to move to (Dyhckhoff, 2016; Dyckhoff, 2017; Northumberland Gazette. 2016; Northumberland Gazette, 2019; Northumberland Gazette, 2023). Furthermore, Amble has been recognised for its thriving High Street winning the Best Coastal High Street at the National High Street Awards 2015.

Often awards and recognition indicate a change in perception in the area which can impact on wider regeneration and a change in the socio-economic status of the community. All three of these communities are changing which can be evidenced by considering the changes in the skills census data from 2011 to 2021. All three wards show a significant decrease in number of residents with no qualifications and a significant increase in number of residents with Level 4 qualifications with an 8 % decrease in the number of residents with no qualifications in Amble and almost 6% increase in the number of Level 4 qualifications in Wooler and Amble.

Table 2 - Comparison of skills levels between 2011 and 2021 Census

Ward	Amble 2011	Amble 2021	Rothbury 2011	Rothbury 2021	Wooler 2011	Wooler 2021
% with no qualifications	30	22	20	14	26	18
% Level 4 & above	17	22.9	36	38.5	25	30.9

Researching three different types of rural settlement aims to answer the challenge set by Haartsen et al (2003) and Strijker et al. (2020) for rural researchers to consider diverse representations and perceptions of rural and fits with the objective of the research which is to explore breadth and difference. As well as demonstrating some commonality the three settlements chosen also represent different types of rural as set out in the rural typology

developed by Lowe and Ward (2009). Rothbury is a market town which represents Type 1 in the typology – a dynamic commuter area with well-connected residents. Wooler was chosen as Type 4 – a deep rural traditional farming community looking to diversify into community. Amble is a Type 6 -historically depressed coastal area which has undertaken significant regeneration and could now be argued to be showing characteristics of Type 5 now – a retirement retreat.

3.4 Developing the Interview Guide

There were two distinct sets of interviews undertaken as part of this research. The first were with 24 businesses situated across the three towns chosen. The second set of interviews were with people involved with policy within the towns, the County Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Combined Authority.

An interview guide provided at Schedule 3 was developed to support the business interviews. The guide was designed as a prompt for the interviewer rather than a script. The aim was to create a free flowing dialogue allowing the participant to direct the conversation to areas that they wished to speak about. The guide which is included at Schedule 1 started with general questions capturing information about the business and the participant. This aimed to understand more about who is an “everyday entrepreneur”. The questions then focused on what the businesses did within the community and their relationship with the community to understand the practices of the businesses and their interactions with place.

The interviews with the policy makers used bespoke questions and were individually prepared as each of the policy makers had a specific role and area of expertise. Some generic questions were included in each of the interviews relating to how they saw their role in

policymaking and their views on the national government role in rural enterprise development.

3.5 Ethics

All the participants who take part in the interviews were provided with an information form provided at Schedule 1 and asked to sign an ethical consent form prior to taking part which is included at Schedule 2. This included permission to record the interview. It also outlined how the data will be used including how the data would be anonymised. Quotes will only be directly ascribed with permission of the owner.

4. Papers within this research

The three papers consider entrepreneurship in a rural community context and together form a multi-level analysis. The first paper recognises the agentic role of the entrepreneur and considers how the small businesses within these rural market towns play their part animating and sustaining their community. This paper applies the theory of the ethic of care to understand the processes by which the small businesses operate. The second paper addresses entrepreneurship in context, examining the three market towns through historical case studies which are then considered in tandem with empirical evidence from the businesses and key stakeholders to understand the relationship between place and entrepreneurship over time. The final paper is in two parts including a literature review of the macro environment which identifies a set of disconnects between national policy and local need. Empirical research is then used to consider how the meso level of government overcomes these disconnects translating national government policy on entrepreneurship and the rural economy into relevant support for local communities to create endogenous change.

4.1 Paper 1 - Rural Entrepreneurship and the Animation of Invisible Communities

This first paper focuses on understanding the embedded agency of the everyday entrepreneurs to change their communities (Fortunato and Alter 2015). In particular, the research considers the impact of the indirect consequences of entrepreneurship and how the entrepreneur enables, facilitates and stimulates the creation of value by others which is termed animateurship (McElwee et al., 2017; 2018). Animateurship means literally to

breathe life into something and is explained by McElwee et al. (2017; 2018) as enabling, facilitating and stimulating the creation of value by others. This research seeks to understand the micro-practices of the entrepreneur that contribute and create animateurship. In order, to explore these practices, the research applies the feminist theory of the ethic of care (Tronto, 2003) to consider the role the businesses are performing within the community.

Using both inductive and deductive analysis, three categories of practice were identified – Connecting, Enabling and Enhancing – all of which involved an element of caring for the community. The final stage cross-correlated the processes against the phases within Tronto’s analysis of the ethic of care (1993, 2003). Connecting impact is an endogenous activity within the community helping bond the community together. This process mirrors Tronto’s phase of “caring about” and is a pre-cursor to the other two practices identified, creating the conditions that create acceptance and amplification for enabling and enhancing impact. Enabling and enhancing practices predominantly use skills or resources from outside the community and the positive actions create a mutually reinforcing loop of regenerative activity. Enabling practices are about “care giving” and enhancing processes are about “caring for” the wider environment of the community.

The focus on the micro-practices of care that result in change in both the care giver and receiver but as importantly the wider community help explain the role played by small businesses in regional development; nudging things forward; creating quiet evolution; ensuring the community remains sustainable and relevant. They show the value of the small businesses beyond their economic contribution. However, this activity is synergistic with all parties having agency and therefore it also helps sustain their marketplace, attracting new audiences which in turn helps the sustainability of these small businesses. The application of

the relational, context specific approach of ethic of care adds to the growing body of research that seeks to understand entrepreneurship in context (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2017) giving a new lens and vocabulary to explain the relational and processual nature of entrepreneurship.

The paper has relevance to policy makers as it illustrates how small businesses can help tackle social issues in rural communities such as loneliness, suggesting encouraging everyday entrepreneurship as part of a solution to help mitigate some of the challenges of public service cuts in provision. This would require government to recognise small businesses as social agents of change rather than simply economic players.

4.2 Paper 2 – Place in Rural Entrepreneurship – a historic case study

This paper addresses entrepreneurship in context and explores the under-researched spatial context considering how place impacts entrepreneurship. Through analysing historic case studies of the three rural market towns the research considers how Cresswell's (2009) constituents of place – materiality, meaning and practice – have impacted the development of entrepreneurship within these communities and entrepreneurship has supported or hindered the development of the place.

Whilst on paper, all three towns are governed by the same administrative authorities, are categorised as rural and are subjected to the same enterprise policy, the lived experience of entrepreneur within these communities is quite different demonstrating the complex interplay between place, space and entrepreneurship (Korsgaard et al.,2015). The physical environment has historically dictated the development of the settlements and provides resource that entrepreneurs use to create opportunities. However, even materiality is

suggested to be a social construct as different aspects of materiality were perceived as important during different points in history. This is indicated by the changing wealth of the towns with all three at some point being hugely significant in the UK and now appearing as small and relatively unknown. The materiality is used by the businesses and place to create meaning. Meaning becomes a resource that can then be used by the businesses to attract new customers; signify trust or to evoke nostalgia. Changing the meaning of place is demonstrated to be a slow, non-linear and messy process that involves the actions of multiple actors including entrepreneurs over decades, rather than years. This meaning however is critically important to the place remaining relevant as they need to adjust to exogenous conditions over time. The relationship between exogenous and endogenous forces is explored within the research with each of the towns' fortunes being impacted by global external forces. Whilst the globalisation of rural is often positioned as a recent phenomenon (OECD, 2006), the historic research shows how global forces have shaped these towns and their entrepreneurial opportunities over the past two hundred years since the industrial revolution.

The paper contributes to entrepreneurship theory by exploring further place as a context. It shows how everyday entrepreneurs use available resource, in this case packaging elements of the physical environment and nostalgic perceptions of "rurality" and "seaside" to sell products. The paper has practical implications for policy makers as it demonstrates the complexity of applying universal entrepreneurship policy due to the heterogeneity of place. It also demonstrates the agentic nature of context and entrepreneurship by indicating that different places produce different types of entrepreneurship and reinforces the importance

of long-term policy recognising that historic activity can continue to impact the entrepreneurial appetite and culture of communities for many generations.

4.3 Paper 3 – Bridging the Policy Gap – The role of meso institutions in supporting rural everyday entrepreneurship

This leads to the final paper focused at a macro level on how government supports or hinders this type of rural everyday entrepreneurship. Although successive governments have acknowledged the role which small businesses can play in regional and community development, national policy too often focuses on macro-outcomes which are more easily measured and delivered in larger businesses such as jobs, productivity and growth. Whilst community development research focuses on the importance of place-based policy which is developed endogenously within the community, there is also an acknowledgement that different communities have differing capacity to deliver on this objective. This research therefore considers how national policy is converted into meaningful outcomes at a rural community level seeking to explain the relationship between exogenous national government policy and endogenous community activity. It considers the role of the meso level of local government in bridging this gap.

This qualitative study applies the theory of translation with the aim of explaining the process of converting national policy into meaningful community action. Ultimately this translation supports transactional projects become transformational programmes and deliver sustainable and resilient communities. It contributes to the study of entrepreneurship in context by considering the policy environment in which these businesses interact with their communities, in particular recognising that whilst historically economic development has

been the role of national governments this responsibility is increasingly complex with devolution creating new levels of regional governance (Pike et al., 2015). However, with the demographic and social changes linked to the decline in agriculture in rural areas, it is recognised that delivering competitive rural economies requires a more sophisticated approach to policy development moving away from a top down national government framework to include the integration of bottom up local level policies with regional and national approaches (OECD, 2006).

The research explores the relative interplay between the increasingly complex levels of government and new models of governance (Spigel, 2016) and seeks to answer Peck & Theodore (2015) calls for more investigation into the mutually constitutive work of macro-political and economic processes and patterns of local and regional development. It aims to give greater clarity on the roles of different actors and to meet Pike et al.'s (2010; 2016) call for fresh thinking about the relation and interaction of exogenous and endogenous factors. The research illustrates how the local government meso level uses its role to negotiate and renegotiate its relationship and its influence with both local communities and national government whilst learning and developing its own institutional capacity and capability.

The research uses the theory of translation to demonstrate how local government redefine local community problems to meet national government's funding streams altering the frame of national policy by breaking it into smaller projects applicable to the rural environment whilst encouraging and supporting local communities to reframe their local needs in the language of government to meet the fixed criteria of funding. There is evidence of how the local authority is doing more than transmitting policy from the national to the local; it is actively negotiating between different actors, assigning roles, building capacity and

mobilising actors to act and deliver. Fundamentally, it is acting as a change agent, developing local capacity, influencing national policy whilst continually evolving its own role to meet the needs of a multi-level governance framework.

5. Conclusions

The thesis explores the complex interplay between small rural communities and everyday entrepreneurship. It demonstrates the social and community impact of everyday entrepreneurship and how the phenomenon is influenced by its context and how it equally influences its context. In particular, the thesis meets an identified gap in entrepreneurial studies focused on place as context and the link between community development and entrepreneurship demonstrating how everyday entrepreneurs can play a critical institutional role in “thin rural regions” (Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020, p 45).

The three market towns explained through the case studies exemplify the complex and nuanced reality of contemporary rural places challenging the historic rhetoric that rural places are “either left behind” or “rural idylls”. The case studies indicate how spatial inequalities develop over long periods of time due to the interplay between global and local factors (Bryden and Munro, 2001) and that entrepreneurship impacts how places develop reinforcing the meaning of place through ongoing practices and utilising the meaning and materiality of place as resources to support entrepreneurship develop (Korsgaard et al., 2015).

These market towns adapt to the pressures of the external environment, in part due to the ongoing practices of the entrepreneurs, both directly through their economic contribution and the provision of local services but also through the indirect ways the businesses animate the local community (McElwee et al., 2018). Three distinct animatorship practices are identified in the research – enabling, enhancing and connecting that show how entrepreneurship practices benefit the community.

The research evidences the processual embedded nature of entrepreneurship demonstrating how entrepreneurs are agents of change. It also supports the call to broaden the definition of entrepreneurship from the historic heroic, high growth, urban based technology businesses to understand more about “everyday entrepreneurship” that happens in all communities. By using the ethic of care (Tronto, 1993) as a lens to understand how entrepreneurship interacts with its community context it moves entrepreneurship practice from being seen through an objective financially focused masculine perspectives to a feminist subjective social perspective and focuses on community outcomes rather than economic outputs.

The research contributes to policy as it demonstrates five sources of disconnect between universal national government policy and the needs of local rural communities including a structural disconnect where rural communities are seen as synonymous with agricultural policy despite evidence that employment in agriculture is in dramatic decline; a resource and continuity disconnect with ever changing institutional arrangements; a definitional disconnect which means that entrepreneurship policy fails to support the majority of businesses that are small, socially orientated and do not focus on profit; a temporal disconnect that does not recognise the need to create long term consistent policy to build capacity; and a scale disconnect that means government prioritises larger businesses or settlements rather than micro-interventions as larger interventions are perceived as more efficient. The research illustrates how UK devolution can work for rural communities demonstrating how the meso level of government can play a critical role translating between the highly differentiated bottom up needs of local communities and the universal policy of national government supporting neo-endogenous development.

Finally, the research normalises the term entrepreneurship examining it as a broad phenomenon which everyone experiences within their everyday lives. This approach increases the potential application and field of entrepreneurship studies creating a richer, more diverse study field with societal impact in all walks of life.

6. Schedule 1 - Participant Information Sheet

Evaluating the social impact of SMEs in rural communities Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This research project aims to investigate the social impact of small businesses in their local communities by interviewing SMEs and understanding how they interact with the communities they operate in and also by interviewing policy makers and local leaders to understand how the context and policy helps or hinders their activity. The research will be undertaken in three case study areas, all which are defined by the UK government as being rural wards.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because [you are the owner of a small business within a case study area and therefore the research is interested in how you interact with your local community/ you are a policymaker and therefore the research is interested in your perception of how policy supports or hinders small businesses impact within your local community]

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement in the consent form. You can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to meet for a one on one interview at a time and place of your choice. The interview will take no longer than one hour and if you agree will be recorded to ensure the researcher captures all your remarks.

What are the possible benefits or risks of taking part?

This work will help clarify how SMEs are viewed within their communities and could be used to support rural enterprise policy development supporting rural enterprise and community development. Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort.

What if you are unhappy about the research process?

If you have any complaints about the project in the first instance please speak to Sarah Green, the researcher. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction you can contact []

Will taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications. Your organisation will also not be identified or identifiable.

What type of information will be sought and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

The questionnaire will ask you [about how your business and its interactions with the local community/about your community and how it interacts with local businesses]. Your views and experience are just what the project is interested in exploring.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Results of the research will be used as part of a PHD thesis and may be published within academic journals and policy papers. You will not be identified in any report or publication. Your institution will not be identified in any report or publication. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask us to put you on our circulation list.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The project is funded via a PHD scholarship from Durham University Business School

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved by Durham Business School's ethics review procedure. Durham University Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Contacts for further information

Sarah Green

Sarah.J.Green@Durham.ac.uk

T 07984 596074

Thank you for taking part in this research.

7. Schedule 2 - Interview Consent Form

I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

I understand that taking part in the research will include being interviewed and audio recorded.

I have been given adequate opportunity to consider my decision and I agree to participate in the research.

I understand that personal details such as my name will not be revealed to people outside the project.

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs but my name will not be used.

I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any material related to the research to Sarah Green.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part.

Name of Participant Date

Researcher Signature Date

8.Schedule 3 – Interview Guide

Background of Business – Tell me about your business

Name of Business

Location

Number of employees

Turnover

Age of business

Sector/type of activity

Who are the businesses key customers and suppliers? [Testing what makes it a rural business – location, who it serves, assets it uses?]

Name of interview participant – Tell me about you, your role in the business and your relationship with the local community

How would you describe yourself? (entrepreneur, self employed, small business owner etc)

And your role within the business?

Age of participant

Gender

Did you found the business?

Is this the only business you lead?

Premises/Assets [physical capital]

What type of business premises?

Owned or leased?

Do you share these premises or any key assets with others?

Are the premises a community asset? i.e do they create perceived value on a high street/offer a village amenity

Community Connections [testing embeddedness/social capital]

Describe what you perceive to be your local community

Are you resident in the local community?

If so, how long have you been resident?

Do you have family or other connections within the community?

What is really important to this community?

Is there a particular reason as to why the business is based here?

Would you describe yourself as involved in the local community?

If so, how?

Do you have any official positions within the community or participate in local governance?

Who are your key networks and how do you and the business interact within these networks?

Do your social networks impact your business networks and vice versa? Which leads and which follows?

Social Impact

What impact do you think that your business has on the local community?

What evidence do you have for this?

Did you have a strategy to create an impact?

Do you or your staff use the skills you have learnt in the business within the community?

Is the impact an outcome of normal business activity?

Do you feel the community supports your business? In what way?

Employees

Tell me about your employees?

Are your employees from the local community?

How do you support your employees?

Are you involved in community initiatives?

Cultural Identity and Knowledge Exchange

Does the business enhance the identity of the village? Either physically through an attractive or useful building, from a perception perspective Eg, adding to perception of the rural idyll, through reputation acting as a magnet, symbolically as a symbol of regeneration

Does it create a community space for transfer of knowledge?

Does the business bring goods, knowledge or people from outside networks into contact with the local community?

Does the business serve a local service need? Without the business how would that service need be met?

Does the business support a broader sector or industry or provide a critical part of a supply or value chain?

Does the business help create and support the local natural or built environment?

Other businesses

Are you part of any business networks?

Do you work with any other businesses within the community?

Government/political/other support

What help and support do you get in your business from others? Have you received any govt support? Grants, training etc

Barriers to involvement

Are there any barriers to getting more involved in the local community? If those barriers did not exist what more would you do?

Motivations to engage

When you do get involved, why do you do it? What response do you get? How does that make you feel? Does your involvement help the business?

Closure or move

What do you think the impact would be if your business closed or moved out of this community?

Ambitions/Aspirations

What are your ambitions for the business?

What will the business look like in 10 years?

What will the community look like in 10 years?

Any barriers/enablers to change

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Chapter 2 - RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE ANIMATION OF INVISIBLE COMMUNITIES

Abstract

This paper aims to understand how entrepreneurs create change in small rural communities and support their continual reinvention and survival. The qualitative research explores the actions of rural entrepreneurs in three peripheral market towns in Northumberland (UK) and identifies and elaborates on three practices– connecting, enabling and enhancing– through which entrepreneurs support the continued reconstruction of the towns. These practices are then considered alongside the theory of the ethic of care (Tronto, 2003) to illustrate the processes of entrepreneurship and animateurship within a rural community development setting. The research contributes to the literature on rural entrepreneurship, showing distinct practices, so far overlooked by mainstream literature. The work has implications for policymakers as it extends current thinking on “everyday entrepreneurship” demonstrating the non-economic impact that entrepreneurs create in communities through entrepreneurship and animateurship processes.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is often seen as an engine of economic and social development. Recognising the changing nature of rural areas, due to globalisation, demographic changes and the decline of jobs in agriculture, entrepreneurship and its ability to create change may be of increasing relevance to the development of rural and isolated communities. These places are often characterised as economically disadvantaged as they have less access to skills, labour or finance but are also invisibilised and treated as “left behind places” (Martin et al., 2021) and depleted communities (McKeever et al., 2014). Indeed, they are rarely referenced by policy makers. However, despite this, many are quietly forging new futures.

When it comes to entrepreneurship, these communities are assumed to be passive containers of action and mere beneficiaries of the outcomes of risk-taking individuals. Anecdotal evidence, however, seems to be pointing in a different direction, as the actions of entrepreneurial individuals are less economically heroic, and the role of hosting communities is much more active than originally thought. Despite being ignored by national policy makers for being too small (DLUHC, 2021) and not urban (Therstein et al., 2008), these invisible communities continually reinvent and demonstrate key indicators of success including busy high streets, new business openings and a clear pride in place (DLUHC, 2022). Despite operating in the periphery (Anderson, 2000) some small rural communities defy the rationale of their spatial position and do not fall foul to the cycle of depletion (McKeever et al., 2014), a vicious circle created over time and driven by distance.

There is an evident gap in knowledge here, as the role entrepreneurs play in these invisible communities may go far beyond the assumed economic outputs they produce. If

reinvention is the outcome of collective action, the question under consideration is what role entrepreneurs play in this process. This resonates with Berglund et al's (2016) call to better understand at a granular level what is happening and to discover "the fine-grained details of regional development processes" (p78). Indeed, Lyons et al (2012) recognised that entrepreneurship seldom features in community development literature, noting that a greater understanding of the interaction between the role of community development and its relationship with entrepreneurship was the "next line of inquiry".

To explore the role entrepreneurs play in the animation of invisible communities, this research adopts a place-based lens (Cresswell, 2013) to consider the under-represented micro-spatial context (Zahra, 2014) for rural entrepreneurship considering both location and proximity (Boschma, 2005) and the social material and symbolic dynamics of entrepreneurship in place (Muller and Korsgaard, 2018), in particular considering the non-financial outcomes of entrepreneurial activity (Rawhouser et al., 2019).

The research was undertaken in three market towns in Northumberland and focuses on rural enterprises, which Gaddefors and Anderson (2018) define as those smaller and thinner rural entities that provide the services to sustain and improve local livelihoods. Northumberland is England's northernmost County, stretching from the Scottish Border in the north, Cumbria, the Cheviots and North Pennines to the west and by the North Sea to the east. Since 2009, Northumberland has been a unitary authority and since 2019 became part of North of Tyne Combined Authority. Following a further devolution bill and mayoral election in 2024 it will become part of the North East Combined Authority. The County is the largest unitary authority by geographic coverage and is also the most sparsely populated in England being home to around 320,000 people with a population density of circa 163 persons per

square mile (ONS, 2021). The county has no cities with the nearest city being Newcastle Upon Tyne and is dominated by market towns.

Within three of these rural market towns, twenty-four qualitative interviews were conducted with small businesses. The data was analysed abductively drawing from the literature on “entrepreneurship as a process of change” (Anderson, 2007; Anderson et al., 2012) and “community development” (Lyons, 2015; Lyons et al., 2012; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). From the analyses, three underlying practices were discovered – connecting, enabling and enhancing – through which entrepreneurs support the continued reconstruction of the towns. As key themes emerging from the empirical evidence linked to empathy, care and connecting, the researcher sought to explain the phenomena further by examining the practices through the lens of the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993). Connecting practices develop relationships by embedding all parties in a shared eco-system and this practice is an example of how within the phases of the ethic of care the entrepreneur demonstrates attentiveness, a wider duty to connect and “cares about” their community (Tronto, 1993). Enabling is the practice of supporting others to make changes using your skills and expertise and closely aligns with the “care giving” phase of the ethic of care. Enhancing is the practice of making tangible change that make the community more attractive. This practice reflects the collective “caring for” phase within Tronto’s ethic of care model.

This research makes several contributions to literature and theory. First, the research helps clarify how entrepreneurs support rural community development demonstrating that their role is far greater than the economic contribution attributed by policymakers. In doing so, the research identifies three distinct processes contributing to the literature on the

relationship between entrepreneurship and community development. The research demonstrates that peripheral towns do not need to be “left behind” but can use endogenous entrepreneurial resource to “animate the community” and continue to reinvent and reinvigorate local resources and reignite community spirit. The exploration of the relationship between ethic of care and entrepreneurship offers a unique lens to explore the processes of the entrepreneurs in animating their communities by considering entrepreneurship through this feminist lens, it enables a greater focus on the context and the social impact of the phenomena, rather than the traditional masculine focus which results in a focus on the heroic entrepreneur and economic growth. The research shows how entrepreneurs and communities can use proximity to develop trust, pride and commitment that are enablers for self-reinforcing evolutionary change which helps keep these communities relevant. The research illustrates how these entrepreneurship and animateurship practices create change and support community development contributing to entrepreneurship and community development theory.

The work has implications for policy makers as it considers the value of the 98% of businesses that are not high growth and extends current thinking on “everyday entrepreneurship” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) demonstrating the non-economic positive impact that entrepreneurs create in communities and their potential contribution to solving current policy challenges including the pride in place themes referenced in Levelling Up (DHLUC, 2022).

2. Literature review

As this research seeks to understand the role entrepreneurship plays as a change agent in the context of rural communities, the literature focuses on understanding entrepreneurship as a process, understanding rural communities as the context and an introduction to the ethic of care.

2.1 Restoring rural communities and tackling geographical inequalities

The UK government (DLUHC, 2022, p1) has committed “to restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging” to “end the geographical inequalities that have become a striking feature of the UK” with regions and local economies demonstrating marked variations in their capacities to respond and adapt to change (Martin et al., 2021). This becomes a vicious circle with market forces reinforcing stronger areas and divesting from areas showing signs of decline. Problems of concentrated disadvantage are worsened by the erosion of public services, community life and social capital; for example: the decline of town high streets has been found to have a strong negative effect on local perceptions of well-being and pride of place (Kenny and Kelsey, 2021). It is often perceived that rural and peripheral areas suffer from decline in comparison to urban areas due to a process of gravitation that drains higher order services from periphery areas to the core. Anderson (2000) challenged this deterministic model in his entrepreneurship work in the Scottish Highlands suggesting entrepreneurs interpret their own version of the environment commodifying available assets such as tradition to create entrepreneurial value.

Whilst urban development has been a key area of government focus and recently industrial towns have been the focus of new policy and funding (DLUHC, 2021), the small rural

market towns identified in this study are described as “invisible” as these towns appear unconsidered by government policy, too small to be part of the towns funding (DLUHC, 2021) but are important service hub for local communities which demonstrate many of the positive outcomes described in the Levelling Up approach (DLUHC, 2022). The dominant discourse of rurality presents rural place as a “rural idyll” for selective elites (Shucksmith, 2018) or as places that are left behind, technologically, culturally and economically and thus unable to compete (Murdoch et al., 2003) – these market towns do not fall into either of these categories.

As rural is a contested term (Woods, 2012) and there is not a clearly accepted definition of entrepreneurship, it is not surprising that the concept of rural entrepreneurship is challenged and debated. Early academic definitions of rural and policy definitions of rural focus on distinguishing rural from non-rural administrative units according to population or density thresholds (Gkartzios, Gallent and Scott, 2021), however it is argued that rural is a social construct and is more complex and contested than these statistical classifications (Woods, 2012).

Policymakers question whether rural businesses require any special attention or face the same issues as all small businesses. Academics have distinguished between businesses that happen to be in a rural locality often termed enterprises in the rural and those that utilise “rural capital” termed within this research as rural enterprises (Bosworth and Turner, 2018). Research on small rural businesses emphasises how they embed in their local communities, to address some of the characteristics of their spatial context as well as to comply with local cultures (Kofler and Marcher, 2018). Often, they demonstrate increased perceived responsibility for their community (Korsgaard, Muller et al., 2015) or a focus on serving local

customers (Ni Fhlatharta and Farrell, 2017). The objective of these SMEs is not just to create value for the business and the owner but to contribute to the wider socio-economic development of the region (Berglund, Gaddefors and Lindgren, 2016; Burcher, 2017). If restoring a sense of community is a key priority and entrepreneurship is recognised as socially situated within communities and a driver of change and development, it is somewhat surprising that the relationship between entrepreneurship and community development remains under-explored (Lyons et al., 2012).

Communities have been described as fishbowls – working spaces where people live and make a living (Bourdieu, 1986) with a focus on moral dimensions of trust, identity and collective participation (Putnam, 2002). Moore (2001, p73 quoted in Lyons et al, 2012) explains community exists when people who are interdependent struggle with the traditions that bound them and the interests that separate them so that they can realise a future that is an improvement on the past. Perhaps because of an increasing trend towards individualism (Lyons et al., 2012) there is a renewed interest in the role of communities as Moore explains “we need others to find ourselves. It is through community – the meaningful interaction with others – that we make sense of our own lives.” (2001, p73). As community is built and reconstructed on conflict (Moore, 2001, p71) shared spaces play an important role in creating invisible glue which helps communities’ function well (Skerratt and Steiner, 2013) consequently this research will focus on communities of place, recognising that there are many other different forms of community. This research recognises the impact of private sector small businesses within rural communities and aims to look within these “fishbowls” to understand the processes of the businesses that keeps these “invisible” places alive.

Just as the structure of communities may be a critical antecedent to creating an ecosystem to support entrepreneurial action (Julien, 2007), potentially entrepreneurship is key to community development (Fortunato and Alter, 2015). However, as both the terms community and entrepreneurship are contested and have been described as “discordant, messy, evolving and multi-faceted” (Fortunato and Alter, 2015, p446), the relationship between entrepreneurship and community development is not straight-forward. Entrepreneurs are a diverse group (Davidsson, 2009; Gartner, 2009) and communities are equally heterogenous. However, recognising the relationship between entrepreneurs and context has been an increasing area of research focus (Zahra et al., 2014; Welter, 2011) and there have been several calls for qualitative studies of localised entrepreneurial processes to gain this deeper understanding of entrepreneurship in context (Trettin and Welter, 2011; Redhead and Bika, 2022).

2.2 Entrepreneurship – a change process in rural communities

Entrepreneurship appears to play an important role in the transformation of rural communities. The appreciation of its role largely depends on the lens used to observe and assess entrepreneurial activity and outcomes. In this vein, it has been recognised that “entrepreneurship means different things to different people” (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008, p222). Morris (1998) provided 77 different definitions. It is recognised that the definition adopted of entrepreneurship heavily influences the parameters of the study (McKay, Phillimore, and Teasdale, 2010) and therefore Gartner (1990) suggests building on Low and MacMillan (1988) approach stating scholars should be more explicit about what definition of entrepreneurship they are using. Entrepreneurship is defined broadly within this research as “creating or extracting value” (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Alvarez and

Busenitz, 2001; DiOchon and Anderson, 2011) and is considered as a processual activity with the focus on the doing, i.e., the practices of entrepreneurship or entrepreneuring (Johannisson, 2009), rather than a focus on the actor or “entrepreneur”. Entrepreneurship is recognised as a key mechanism for creating change or a handy disturber of order (Hjorth, 2004), as change is both “the milieu and medium for entrepreneurship” (Anderson, 2012, p 960). Entrepreneurship is an evolutionary process that captures change, employs change and creates change as it forms new order. As Anderson (2012, p960) states:

“This is how the entrepreneurial promise that tomorrow will be better than today is achieved. The micro of entrepreneurial endeavours becomes agglomerated into the macro of social and economic progress. But what beguiles us is that we cannot know the details of these micro processes.”

This research seeks to understand how the micro-practices of entrepreneurship create change.

This research is considering a form of entrepreneurship that is socially situated and shapes and is shaped by society (Steyaert and Katz, 2004.) This school of thought builds on Polyani (1957) and later Granovetter’s (1992) challenges that economic action is socially situated and cannot be explained by individual motives alone (Anderson, 2015) and that entrepreneurship is embedded in networks of personal relations (Jack et al., 2008). It builds on the idea that entrepreneurship works by making new connections; sometimes technologies; sometimes ideas; sometimes places and products but it considers not how the connections benefit the business but how they benefit the community (Anderson, 2012). Arguably we should not talk of entrepreneurship but use it as a verb “entrepreneuring” (Steyaert, 2007; Johannison, 2011; Verduyn, 2015). This research recognises the processual nature of entrepreneurship (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008) acknowledging that

entrepreneurship is a process of creating, not a thing and being an entrepreneur is an ephemeral event – i.e., you can only do entrepreneurship temporarily, when creating or changing a business.

This research builds on Steyaert and Katz's studies (2004) of everyday entrepreneurship and the suggestion that entrepreneurship study has given privilege and focused on certain groups of actors, namely high growth, high tech entrepreneurs (e.g., Autio et al, 2014; Acs et al., 2016), sometimes referred to as the "Silicon Valley" model of entrepreneurship. This research recognises that most businesses are small and choose to remain small (Anderson and Ullah, 2014) and seeks to address the call that "entrepreneurship cannot be limited to a select group but can be seen in the everydayness of life, in social interactions and in everyday practices" (Steyaert and Katz, 2004, p182).

As this form of everyday entrepreneurship is socially situated, it is important to understand the impact of the entrepreneur within this societal context. Whilst entrepreneurial studies have historically focused on the economic impact of entrepreneurship, this study seeks to understand the social impact of the entrepreneur's activity. In particular, the research considers the impact of the indirect consequences of the entrepreneur and how the entrepreneur enables, facilitates and stimulates the creation of value by others, which McElwee et al (2018) call animateurship. McElwee is clear that whilst animateurship is separate to entrepreneurship, it is possible for entrepreneurs to also practice animateurship. Alternatively, the term community entrepreneur has been used to describe people who act as catalysts (Johannison and Nilson, 1989) and Johnstone and Lionais (2014) in their research on three depleted communities identify "community business entrepreneurs". These community business entrepreneurs use business to drive community

goals. They are differentiated from social entrepreneurs as social enterprises have specific governance and engagement structures which formally engage the community from the outset. Johansson and Nilsson (1989) launched the concept of the community entrepreneur as someone who works as a catalyst in helping others to pursue opportunities. Lindgren and Packendorff (2006, p230) quoted in McElwee et al (2018) described community entrepreneurship as “an eternal balancing act between deviation and belonging”, following the norms of the community but also breaking them. Berglund et al. (2016b) use the concept of identity to explain micro-processes. This research differs from these papers as it does not focus on individual entrepreneurs but looks collectively at how the activity of multiple entrepreneurs within the community create impact.

It is clear from the literature that the related definitions of entrepreneurship and animateurship are evolving. Whilst animateurship is less studied than entrepreneurship both share several characteristics. They are processual i.e., they are practiced by people and are verbs, i.e., involve doing. They are socially constructed, both animateurship and entrepreneurship can only exist in relation to a community network. They are also about creating value – however the animateur does not seek to create to create value for themselves but for the wider community. It is however likely that the animateur does create a form of personal value in terms of psychological satisfaction or sense of wellbeing, but this is not their primary goal. Whilst the value of entrepreneurial activity is captured (to some extent) as a monetary transaction and is measured by policymakers and others at a macro-level as revenue or jobs, the value derived from animateurship appears invisible to policymakers. Whilst the current body of research identifies “animateurs” and the concept of

animateurship, there is little granular understanding of the micro-practices of the entrepreneur that contribute and create animateurship.

2.3 Ethic of Care

The ethic of care is a moral feminist theory that emphasizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and relationships in ethical decision-making (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993; Gastmans, 2006). Tronto and Bernice Fischer (1990, p36) defined care as:

“a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment.”

The ethic of care has been applied in various fields including healthcare (Benner and Wrubel, 1989; Sorrell and Coyle, 2002) , education (Noddings, 1984) and social work (Tronto 1993) where the focus is on relationships and empathy. In healthcare, the theory has become central in nursing and medical practices focusing on not just addressing the physical health of patients but also considering their emotional and psychological needs. In education, the approach focuses on recognising the inherent dignity and worth of students, guiding them with empathy rather than simply focusing on academic success. In social work, the theory has been used to consider the needs of vulnerable individuals or communities while considering their emotional, social and psychological wellbeing. The ethic of care challenges traditional rule based moral frameworks like deontology or utilitarianism which prioritise justice and impartiality as it emphasises the importance of context, relationships and responsibilities to those we care about. Carol Gilligan's work (1982) on the theory, has been key to understanding how care and empathy function as key moral values.

Ethic of care is about both thought and action which bring about change (Van Hooft, 1995). Care arises out of the fact that not all humans or others or objects in the world are equally able, always, to take care of themselves. It recognises and seeks to address marginalisation and the application of the ethic of care leads to an evolutionary change, no great revolution but a slow, plodding journey to transformation (Robinson, 2015). The ethic of care theory recognises that the object of care will be affected by the care it receives (Tronto, 1993) recognising the role of agency. Tronto identified several phases to the ethic of care including caring about which means noticing the need to care in the first place. "Taking care of" which means assuming responsibility for care; "care giving" which is the actual work of care that needs to be done and "care receiving", the response of that which cared for to the care.

3. Methodology

To explore the practices of rural entrepreneurship and amateurship and its impact on community development, the research focused on three market towns in the rural county of Northumberland. Northumberland is one of the most sparsely populated counties in the UK and is on the periphery of England, bordering Scotland. This geographic and social isolation provides bounded communities in which to observe the social interactions of people living together and getting things done (McKeever et al., 2014).

The initial research questions focused on understanding the relationship between entrepreneurship and community development through identifying the processes of entrepreneurship that animate the community. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the objectives were to understand the practices of entrepreneurship from the way people lived their lives rather than measuring “how many” (Gartner and Birley, 2002). This aligns with previous research that has argued the need for qualitative studies of local entrepreneurial processes to gain a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship and place (Hindle 2010; Trettin and Welter, 2011; Redhead and Bika, 2022). The objective is to do more than describe the phenomenon but to try and provide explanations of how the entrepreneurs contribute to community development.

The main source of data was 24 in-depth phenomenological interviews undertaken with small business owners. In line with phenomenological approaches, no specific theory or hypotheses were developed prior to interviewing the respondents but the researcher did consider the wider literature of entrepreneurship, amateurship and community development to develop appropriate research questions (Clarke, 2011; McKeever et al.,

2014). The phenomenological interview has been described as one of the most powerful means of understanding another person's experience (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989) and therefore seems of relevance for this research which aims to understand the lived experience of entrepreneurs' relationships with their community. Ethical concerns were addressed at the outset with each respondent receiving information about the research background, the objectives of the researcher and an explanation on how the interview material would be stored and used.

3.1. Context for Research Setting

In understanding socially situated entrepreneurship, it is important to describe the context (McKeever et al., 2014). The research is undertaken in Northumberland, the most northerly and most sparsely populated English county which borders Scotland. This county has been chosen as it is dominated by SME employment with very few large businesses. There is clear evidence of change within the local community with employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing declining over 17% in the past decade and tourism growing 18% during the same period (Northumberland County Council, 2015). Council spending per head will drop by twice the national average meaning a real imperative to consider how communities can be self-sufficient and reduce dependency on public sector involvement (Hill, 2016).

A large part of south and central Northumberland lies within the strong influence of the main regional centres of the city of Newcastle and the Metrocentre, the second largest shopping mall in Europe based in the neighbouring authority of Gateshead. The Local Plan recognises that Northumberland's centres will always be positioned below these strategic hubs in terms of importance and influence. However, a key challenge is to avoid the County's

centres dropping further behind. The Local Plan states centres of Northumberland's market towns may need to “run in order to stay still” (Northumberland County Council, 2022, p102). This research specifically focuses on three market towns where they have retained a strong high street, a thriving small business base and an active community to try and understand the reasons for these towns’ relative success. It is proposed that the “smaller fishbowl” of these rural market towns means that the processes of entrepreneurs and SMEs may be more visible than they would be in urban spaces (Martin, McNeill and Warren-Smith, 2015).

Several wards within Northumberland were researched and considered using data from the 2011 census. Three rural (Bibby and Brindley, 2013) market towns were chosen. Koestler’s (1964) view is that the smallness of an area should make social patterns easier to analyse which in other places may be confused by density and diluted by size (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Keever et al., 2014).

3.2 Data Collection

The small businesses were selected from these towns according to a sequential sampling strategy (Flick, 1998). In practice, the researcher started by identifying small businesses using the government’s definition of a small business (BEIS,2023) with accessible email or telephone details in the first town. The key selection criterion was that the businesses are privately owned independents as this implies a stronger emotional tie between the entrepreneurs, the ventures and most importantly place (Bryne and Shepherd, 2015). Further businesses were identified by the researcher spending significant time in the community and identifying further businesses. Theoretical sampling continued like this, moving back and forth between sampling, data collection and analysis until the researcher reached data

saturation. After 10 interviews in Town A, the researcher felt that she had developed a strong understanding of this community and moved onto the second area. Concentrating on entrepreneurship within a small town can contribute to theory appreciating how micro-level processes form, adapt and continuously develop whilst weaved in the conditions of place (Redhead and Bika, 2022). It is not claimed that this sample is representative of the diversity of individuals participating in entrepreneurship in these rural Northumberland towns, however as this research is about everyday entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) it is felt that enough variety was included to understand more about the processes of entrepreneurship and amateurship as can be seen in the “everydayness of life” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004, p182).

The interviews were conducted on site and observations were noted on context which were triangulated with secondary research from publicly available media sources, Companies House and marketing materials such as websites. The interviews took between 30 – 90 minutes and used an interview guide to help prompt discussion but equally allowing for natural, flowing conversations (Redhead and Bika, 2022; Charmaz, 2006) and allowing the entrepreneurs to decide what was pertinent to them (Bryne and Shepherd, 2015; Cope, 2011).

The first interviews identified some broad topics such as “caring for customers”, “community involvement” and “making an attractive place to visit”. Whilst phenomenological inquiry advises letting the respondent lead the interview, time and resource dictated that these types of broad topics were developed and picked up in later interviews enabling greater focus on these topics (Clarke, 2011; McKeever et al., 2014). Recording the interviews allowed the researcher to focus on the direction of the conversation

and to think about the meaning behind the respondent's answers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). The primary material was complemented and triangulated with local media and internet sources plus information from Companies House and local newsletters and noticeboards. This multi-source evidence serves to increase the validity of the data (Korsgaard, Ferguson and Gaddefors, 2015) as it provides a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the nature of entrepreneurial processes in place.

Table 1 below captures the data on all the participants and evidences the breadth of participants who represent a cross section of the community. As can be seen for example at A1, A5, A6, B10, B11, B12 or C19, C20 or C22 most of the businesses created had no relationship to the prior jobs of the business owners but represented a "new start" or "different chapter". Examples include A1 who was a travel manager working in a contact centre who returned to the family hardware business after he was made redundant or A6 an investment banker who inherited his father's estate in Northumberland and set up a high-end drinks production business in large part motivated by a desire to work with his childhood chef friend and maintain a social circle in London. Other examples include C19 an accountant who ran a factory and could not contemplate "traditional" retirement so bought a grocer's shop to enable him to do something within the community, speaking to people every day or B12 a care worker who loved surfing and set up Northumberland's first surf school to share his passion. Many of these new starts were later life participants, with over half including A4, A5 or A6 starting their first business over forty and a third of the participants such as B16, the coffee manufacturer or A3 the Art Gallery owner aged over 60. This illustrates that entrepreneurship is not just for the young. Fifteen of the twenty- four participants as can be

seen in Table 1 are female or are a couple working on a joint business like A7, the farm B&B and property development or C22, the sweet shop.

Table 1 - The Entrepreneurs

Reference & business description	Background of business owner	Age of Owner	Local or Incomer
A1 - Hardware shop	Travel Centre Manager	30 - 40	Local but commutes from Newcastle
A2 - Computer Shop	Supermarket worker	30-40	Moved from SE
A3 – Art Gallery	Pottery graduate	60 - 70	Husband born locally but mainly lived in S Africa
A4 - Butcher	Butcher Manager	40 - 50	No, from Scotland
A5 – Accommodation Developer	Nurse, multiple entrepreneur	50 - 60	Local to area, not this town
A6 – Drinks Manufacturer	Investment Banking, London	40 - 50	Inherited Father’s estate & returned from London
A7 - Property Developers,	Debt Collection Business	40 - 50	Family-owned local farm, returned from London
A8 - Decorative Retailer	Mother	40 -50	Moved to rural new estate from urban core
B9 – Gift Producer/ Retailer	Management Consultant	60 - 70	Moved recently to area
B10 – Interior Design	Chef	50 - 60	Parents moved to business
B11 – Water sports shop	IT desk support	40 - 50	Moved from Tyneside
B12 – Surf school	Care worker	30 - 40	Local
B13 – Coffee manufacturer	Supermarket manager	60 - 70	Moved to area
B14 – Food Producer	Dressmaker	50 - 60	Moved for business premises
B15 -Artist	Mother	60 - 70	Local
B16 - Beautician	Beautician	50 - 60	Moved locally 20 years ago
B17 – Card retailer	Florist	60 - 70	Local
C18 - Gift Shop	Teacher	60 - 70	Moved to area
C19 - Grocer	Accountant/Factory Manager	60 - 70	Moved to area
C20 - Craft Shop	Social Worker	60 -70	Moved to area
C21- Homeware	Art graduate	20 - 30	Local
C22 - Sweet shop	Postman	50 - 60	Moved to area

C23- Accom Provider	Draughtsman	40 - 50	Local
C24 - Graphic Designer	Graphic Designer	40 - 50	Moved to area

This analysis of who are the entrepreneurs is important as it challenges many of the academic assumptions on entrepreneurship, particularly linked to the “Silicon Valley” model of entrepreneurship.

Table 2 considers the type of business including whether it is legally incorporated, how it is financed or whether it has a business plan or website and whether it receives business support or participates in business networks. This data was captured to establish the formality of the business but also to understand the visibility of these businesses to policymakers and other bodies that undertake research such as the formal banking institutions. Table 2 demonstrates that these businesses are not easily quantitatively researched as only the minority such as A5 and B13 had external funding, nine of the businesses were unincorporated and therefore were not formally listed at Companies House, all used the Small Company accounts exemption to limit their filing at Companies House, none had received business support and therefore would not appear in regional business support research or entrepreneurial training so were not visible to Universities and only six had written business plans. These factors limit the visibility to policy makers; however, these businesses represent a diverse group who practice entrepreneurship “in the everydayness of life” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004).

Table 2 – Business profiles

Ref.	Business status	Website	Business Plan	Support	No of staff	Finance
A1	Ltd co	yes	No	Accountants	2	Family
A2	Sole Trader	Yes	No	No	0	Family
A3	Sole Trader	Yes	No	Family	0	Saving
A4	Sole Trader	Yes	No	Guild of butchers	2 FT/20 PT	Savings
A5	Ltd co	Yes	No	No	6	Bank
A6	Ltd co	Yes	Yes	Food networks	2	Inheritance
A7	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Bank	0	Inheritance
A8	Sole Trader	No	No	No	0	Savings
B9	Sole Trader	Yes	Yes	Harbour Village	0	Savings
B10	Ltd Co	Yes	No	Family support	6	Inherited business
B11	Ltd co	Yes	No	Water sport Assoc	2	Redundancy
B12	Sole Trader	Yes	No	No	0	Savings/casual work
B13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bank	4	Pension/savings
B14	Sole Trader	Yes	No	Dev Trust	0	Inherited deposit
B15	Ltd co	Yes -	yes	Harbour Village	0	Household income
B16	Sole Trader	Yes	No		2 PT	Savings
B17	Sole Trader	No	No	Business club	2	Savings
C18	Sole Trader	No	No	Business Club	2	Pension
C19	Ltd co	No	No	No	0	Redundancy/pension
C20	Sole Trader	Yes	No	No	0	Savings
C21-	Sole Trader	Yes,	No	Dev Trust	0	Student loan
C22	Partnership	No	No	No	0	Savings plus work
C23-	Ltd co	Yes	Yes	Dev Trust	0	Sold house
C24	Sole Trader	Yes	No	Dev Trust	0	Family/Airbnb income

4. Data Analysis - Constructing practice categories

By analysing the raw data, key quotes were identified and given initial codes. These initial coded quotes were then reviewed through a process of secondary coding and then grouped. These groups of coded quotes were then analysed and become the three process categories.

Figure 1 below shows using a sample of the raw data how the coding approach led to the development of the first category of practice “connecting”. The quotes in the illustrative data are from a range of different businesses who discussed their relationship with their customers which involved primary codes of listening, empathy, trust, community and connecting with people. At secondary coding level, there were groupings of activity around listening, trust and community.

The practice was named “connecting” as it connected the business to the customer but also connected the business into the community and the customer into the community.

Illustrative Data	Initial Coding	Secondary Coding
"I mean you soon realise that after me, they have nobody else to speak to so there's a chair out the back and people talk and I listen." C19	Caring Listening Loneliness	Listening
"We often act as community workers because people never just buy a card, they want to talk and we are here for them" B17	Listening Empathy	
"I deliver two chicken breasts every Friday to an old lady... When I get there she always has a job for me such as replacing a light bulb and I will never get away without stopping for a cup of tea" A4	Listening Supporting	
"People spend a pound on a treat and share a bit of a community. Being behind the counter, people tell you things whether you like it or not, bits of their private life and we give advice if relevant or helpful.." C22	Listening Advice	
"We have farmers who have been forced to get a computer due to regulation and they will get that computer through me as they trust me But often the family end up using the computer.. so the whole family become more computer literate." A2	Trust Family Upskilling	Trust
"They know they may be able to get it cheaper on the internet but they don't want the stress of setting up an account, not knowing who to order from , getting an inferior good or ordering the wrong thing. My customers trust me and would rather come and tell me what they want" A1	Trust Internet Premium	
"If you've got a problem, I will come out. I could go through the troubleshooting on the phone but it's nice just to go and see the customer. I like going for a walk, they give me a tea and biscuit and we'll have a little chat and I'll sort out the problem there and then and they will be satisfied and so will I." A2	Trust Listening	
"I am principally a craft shop but I have underwear and knitwear for sale at the back as lots of the locals aren't very mobile. If they pull up outside in their mobility scooters I'll take out what they need." C20	Community Flexibility Customer-centric	Community
"I just crave conversation with people. Because with a job like this you just learn so much speaking to people. I would hate to go back to my old life. I don't have a retirement plan. " C19	Talking Connecting	
"We know lots of people through the Pod. That's part of it. People come back and show us what they've done with what they have bought. It's part of a community." B9	Community Feedback	

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Figure 1 – Data structure for the ‘connecting’ practices

The second category of practice developed was called enabling. This practice focused less on a transaction between the customer and the business owner and more on how the businesses indirectly supported wider activity. In this sense it is more closely aligned to the practice of amateurship (McEwee et al., 2018).

Figure 2 summarises the journey from illustrative data to creating this category of practice. The primary coding indicated a grouping of activity around reciprocity, responsibility, community, collective action and supporting. These become secondary themes around duty, support and creating value not linked to the core business. This category of practice was named “enabling” as it was supporting or underpinning other activity which helped the wider resilience of the community.

Illustrative Data

“I know I am a toff. I am very conscious of it and I try to play my part in the community, speaking at WI etc . I do it as I know its important. Our product is not cheap and many local businesses have stocked it to support us” A6

Initial Coding

Community
Reciprocity
Support

Secondary Coding

Duty

“Last week I bought a bucket from the ironmongers, I know I can get it much cheaper online but I like supporting them..., they always have what I need , they are really helpful and its well stocked. Since taking over this business I realise how important local businesses are.” A2

Duty
Local
Support

“I cannot afford to pay myself a living wage.I am conscious I am performing a local service – if we lost the opticians that would be huge for the town”C20

Local
Service
Duty

“We feel we’ve got a responsibility to keep the shop going as locals like it. And we’re grateful for the support we get.” C22

Responsibility

“We used to do evening dinners but then I realised we could support other businesses in the town so we only do bread and breakfast and send people out for dinner to support locally.” A5

Collective
Community

Mutual
Support

“I’ll get calls at night saying the pub has run out of bacon and I’ll pop downstairs and reopen the shop and cut the bacon and deliver it. It’s about being part of the community, you help each other out.” A4

Community
Mutual
support

“I think it’s important we open on a Sunday: I provide unofficial tourist information as tourist info is not open. I think it’s important that I give back to the town” C18

Community
Duty
Tourism

More
than a
business

“ We’ve been selling off our fabric ends in bags, it doesn’t make much money but it promotes reuse and encourages the crafting community to come into the shop.” B10

Environment
Community

“It’s my livelihood, not just a business. We are always being asked for raffle prizes for the hall, the over60s etc If I can give I will, I don’t drink or smoke so the business and Rothbury is everything.” A4

Gifting
Charity
Community

“One of the lads is a retained firefighter, I give him flexibility so that he can just run out of the shop if he gets a call.” A4

Community
Public Service
Flexibility

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Figure 2 – Data structure for “enabling” practices

The final cluster of coded data focused in mobilising others as part of a collective promotional effort to promote the community. The initial coding included independent, visitors, media, regeneration and destination. This was distilled down to secondary themes of creating a destination and collective promotion. Enhancing was chosen as this practice made existing activity better by creating scale and reach. It enhanced shopper's experiences and quality of life but longer term it became self-reinforcing enhancing the overall attractiveness of the place and its sustainability.

Illustrative Data

“Rothbury is like a department store , just with each department being owned independently- shoppers like visiting – they just don’t come for one shop but because the whole experience is attractive.” – A3

Initial Coding

Destination
Independence

Secondary Coding

Destination
for visitors

“We’ve had a massive increase in tourism without formal marketing. I think it was driven by Robson Green and villagers that are really good at engaging the press and once the media know who they are they come back to you a hundred times.”
A5

Tourism
Media
Destination

“We have repeat customers who come back every year on holiday. They live in cities and they have big supermarkets but they want something special and they know we will stock it.” A1

Holidays
Visitors
Unique

“We need to open on a Sunday to support the Farmer’s Market. Some traders thought it was competition but it’s important we get people to understand that activity helps us all” C18

Collective
brand/identity
Collaboration

Collective
Promotion

“ I see us as an anchor business so we attract people or other businesses like a magnet to our site. And that’s the economic regeneration which sits alongside the physical regeneration” A7

Magnet
Regeneration
Cluster

“Since I started making nice window displays, the other businesses that have opened do the same which I think makes Rothbury look much nicer than it did 10 years ago” A3

Pride
Attractiveness
Influence

“in 2014 I read about a sausage competition in a trade magazine and we entered and won and then I sent some to Belgium, so we can now claim to be internationally award winning. It’s good for us but it’s good for Rothbury as it puts the village on the map.” A4

Promotion
Destination
Awards

“I’ve just finished a photo shoot for the Northumberland Food Collective, the publicity will not help our brand but if by participating it helps other businesses than that’s great.” A6

Collective
Promotion
Destination

“There’s a local lady - she’s created a committee of shopkeepers, we all talk and create Christmas nights and things together, it makes it a real street thing” C21

Collective
Destination
Community

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Figure 3 – Data structure for ‘Enhancing’ practices

5. Findings

In this section, a discussion of the data and findings from the study are presented focused on the three practices underlying the creation of community change: connecting, enabling and enhancing.

5.1 Connecting

Connecting impact is the practice of connecting and reconnecting local people, ideas and resources within the community through creating places to meet, share knowledge and engage people in community activities. This connecting can be pro-active in terms of reaching out, organising an activity or spending time understanding an individual or group within the community. Many of the business owners spoke of the personal nature of their relationship with their customers including significant knowledge of the lives of these individuals, pieced together through a mass of regular, micro-conversations over long periods of time. Alternatively, the involvement of the business can be relatively passive, for example the role a shared space such as a café plays in enabling people to connect. Many of the business premises, in particular, the retail shops, provided quasi-public space, a place where people met and socialised, read noticeboards creating and reinforcing community networks and disseminating local knowledge.

Connecting practices develop relationships by embedding all parties in a shared ecosystem. This often focuses on a love of place or a sense of belonging. The impact of the business creating connectivity and community was not only felt by customers but also embedded the business owner in the community. Creating a sense of belonging may mean making changes to the business and understanding the needs of the local customers

recognising that you are mutually interdependent as evidenced in the quote below from a Grocer who through talking to locals who do not use his shop realises that he needs to stock a lower price range and sell products in small quantities to make the business accessible to all:

“I talked to a lot of staff in the factory, and I said none of you come to the shop and they said no, it’s a posh people’s shop. And I thought we’re going to kill that image. This is for everybody, no matter who you are. This shop is for anyone to come in and it doesn’t matter how big or small your purchase is, you matter. At the end of the day, if we have no you, we have no us.”

C19 – Grocer

The idea that this shop is for everyone, makes it a quasi-public space rather than the private domain of the shop owner reinforcing the idea of shared community space where people connect.

By its nature, connecting is a reciprocal activity. Other respondents highlighted the importance of connecting with customers even if it was not profitable for the business. The quote below from a butcher who spends all Friday delivering small parcels of food to customers in the surrounding hills demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between the customer and respondent with both enjoying the interaction which is much greater than the delivery of food.

“I deliver two chicken breasts every Friday to an old lady at the top of the valley. When I get there, she always has a job for me to do such as replacing a light bulb and I never get out without stopping for a cup of tea. It probably takes an hour out of my day, but I look forward to getting out on Fridays.”

A4 – Butcher

This slowness of life, the ability to stop and converse could be seen as an inhibitor to the growth of the business, a lack of productivity but in the periphery, both the shopkeeper and the customer benefit from this interaction. The quote below is from a grocer who expanded his business by purchasing a second shop in a nearby village and then realised he'd lost the connection with the customers that made the business worthwhile, so he closed the second premise and chose to remain a smaller business.

“I did try expansion. There was a vacant retail premise in Glanton, and I thought that would work and give something back to that village. But I immediately became an area manager, not a branch manager. I lost touch with the customers, and I spent so much time moving stock around but not actually dealing day to day with customers. And one day I just thought I am finished with that.”

C19 – Grocer

This quote demonstrates how important the personal contact is to the business owner and how these exchanges benefit the shop keeper who values his psychological needs for being involved with people over the economic growth of his business. This quote also questions the dominant narrative that entrepreneurship is economically motivated and demonstrates that the reasons why businesses do not grow is not necessarily based on economic logics. This study demonstrates that through this practice, it creates communities of practice from communities of place. The quote below reinforces the importance of this community as a glue that holds things together and how mutual support structures define a sense of community and becomes self-regulating.

“I moved in 1991 temporary for the Co-op and never moved back. I just embraced village life as soon as I got here, I joined the local football team, you've got to throw yourself in. I'll tell you a story about when I got the butchers. I've got a twin brother and he works for MKM in Berwick, and I phoned him and said I need some sealant for the floor of the fridge can you get me some cheap. He said Morris, you're doing this all wrong, go across the road to the local hardware store and buy it there, you may

pay more but it will pay off.... And he was right. I always try to buy local and I'm always saying this to customers, if you don't use your high street, it will go... and that's what you read about all the time in the papers... but it's not happening here in Rothbury because it's an amazing community that supports one another..."

A4 – Butcher

The quote above indicates the mutual support that the businesses and residents embrace which has ensured the community remained resilient supporting the town's ability to bounce back from major incidents including flooding, a landslide, a largescale police search of national significance and large-scale storm damage. The respondent reflects that if local businesses want local support, they need to demonstrate the right values and behaviours in his business.

Connecting animates change by helping people feel embedded and part of a wider community. It enables living in the periphery by creating a feeling of belonging and a shared sense of purpose. Connecting potentially supports resilience and cushions the town against the challenges of the inevitable external changing environment, giving it the capacity to continue to renew and adapt. The quote below highlights how the private sector businesses in this town are providing support in the absence of public services. This shopkeeper offers people a place to discuss their issues, to connect with another human and to offload reducing pressure on local services such as the GP.

"The thing about this job is with some of the customers you get quite close to their lives. I mean, there are customers who come in here, and sometimes, you know, I've been made to realise that after me, they've nobody else to speak to. Because if I wasn't here, then you know, they would be sitting at home alone, or bothering the GP because for so many people, rural loneliness is a terrible problem. It really, really is. And, you know, it's something, you sort of think, oh, it's fantastic living out here in the countryside, but it can be pitifully lonely."

C19- Grocer

This role of acting as extra “eyes and ears” is seen as important in sparsely populated places with limited public services. The businesses such as the Florist in the quote below observed individuals and could act as an early warning for when additional care is needed.

“We had a lady who started buying a bunch of flowers a day, like every day, I knew something was not right because there was no way she was putting all these flowers in vases. I mentioned it to the local health worker when she came in. We’ve now all been trained in dementia awareness, so we know what to look out for, but we knew before the health workers in that situation.”

B17 – Florist and Card Retailer

This understanding of their role in the community had led to all the High Street stores undertaking dementia awareness training to make it one of the first dementia friendly certified High Streets and a further way the business owners provided support for the wider community, their customers and residents.

5.2 Enabling

Enabling impact is the practice of creating change through building trust and confidence and providing leadership and sharing skills. Business owners share their skills, contacts and resources often developed outside the community to perform a bridging role into the community. The process of enabling supports the adoption of new ideas, technologies or resources giving individuals the confidence and skills to adopt change. Enabling practices use the trust developed through the shared proximity of the businesses and the community members to create change. This proximity can be both physical and due to familiarity of culture developed through shared practices. The quote below from a computer shop owner who supports the local community with home-based visits demonstrates the importance of

spatial proximity in building trust initially between a local internet provider and an elderly resident and in so doing enables the elderly resident to trust technology and to use the internet to mitigate her spatial isolation from her family.

“I’ve one customer, an old lady, who wanted a computer just so she can talk to her relatives that live abroad. She was worried about internet scams ... so paying a little bit more was not a problem, she just wanted reassurance that if she has an issue she can pop to the shop or call me, and I can pop around. It’s made a huge difference to her that despite living on her own in rural Northumberland that with a little bit of help we have got her connected to her family overseas.”

A2 – Computer Shop Owner

The quote above demonstrates how through his expertise and experience the shop owner develops trust. This is significantly enhanced through physical proximity and personal contact. In return, the residents are prepared to pay more as this transaction is not about the transfer of services but is about the transfer of trust, giving the residents the confidence to use the internet which in turn supports people to adapt to the specific challenges of peripheral living, helping tackle loneliness and isolation.

The creation of trust is by nature reciprocal. Whilst the community members receive new skills, new ideas or processes, the trust developed and the process of transfer results in the business owner becoming more embedded within the community. This reciprocity also operates business to business. The quote below from a local butcher demonstrates how the businesses within the town support one another, sometimes providing support and sometimes being supported.

“I sometimes get calls at 9 at night saying the pub had run out of bacon and could I pop it in now, so they had some for breakfast and I’d go downstairs and re-open the shop and cut the bacon and deliver it to the pub. It’s about being part of the community you help each other out.”

A4 – Butcher

The final sentence demonstrates the expectation of reciprocity and how it is pitched as a responsibility of being part of the community, rather than as part of a transaction.

Some of the entrepreneurs felt this community responsibility had compelled them into taking on the business but whilst entrepreneurship is traditionally perceived as being about making money, the motives behind this entrepreneur were saving services for the community.

“I cannot afford to pay myself a living wage. I am conscious I am performing a local service – if we lost the opticians that would be huge for the town” C20

This craft shop entrepreneur evidenced how a key element in her decision to commit to taking on the craft shop business was to ensure that the village continued to have access to optician services as a mobile optician used her storeroom to run a monthly practice. This business was entirely ancillary to her main craft business, but she recognised the vital importance to the elderly population and actively supported it, by providing the space for rent, enabling residents to try on frames between appointments and supporting the admin including appointments process for the monthly optician. She did not question this work but saw it as a duty to continue to support this key service even though she sacrificed earning a living wage in order to enable this to h

Sometimes the boundaries between the business and support for the community became blurred and this creates challenges for the respondents to run their business commercially. The quote below from the Computer Shop owner demonstrates how he struggles to charge commercial rates for his advice as it is perceived advice by the community that advice should be given free.

“The hardest part is that you are expected to be a helpdesk and you feel you can’t charge. I have loads of knowledge so I can fix stuff really fast now but the first time I did it, it took me ages to work it out and customers don’t see that, and I don’t feel I can charge. There is an expectation in the community.”

A2 – Computer Shop Owner

The repeated use of feelings demonstrates that the respondent feels personally obliged to the villagers, rather than seeing this as part of a business transaction demonstrating some of the challenges of the proximity of relationships and the blurring of the boundaries between good community citizen and business owner.

The creation of trust and the transfer of skills or expertise support residents to adapt to change. In the example below the computer shop owner supported farmers to adhere to new government agricultural regulations helping modernise the local farming sector, increasing the viability of these agricultural businesses and improving the lifestyles of these farming families.

“I’ve got a number of farmers that I support who needed the internet to get their EU farm payments but had limited technology experience. I helped them choose kit and supported them to use it and now they can do lots of their business online but perhaps even more importantly they and their families use their computers to access other stuff....”

A2 – Computer Shop Owner

The access to the internet for the family has enabled better connectivity and as more services are available primarily online, this upskilling is important to ensure people can access key support, particularly with local authority cuts to “in person” services. This demonstrates the holistic nature of progress, benefitting individuals and businesses, creating social and economic impact.

5.3 Enhancing

The practice of enhancing is about improving the quality of the place or facilities available to the community which consequently attracts further investment and reinforces residents love of place.

Enhancing impact is about reinforcing pride in place through caring for physical assets. Examples of how businesses practiced enhancing include: investing in shop window displays creating an attractive and vibrant high street; modernising empty premises; or encouraging a town culture of longer opening hours including Sunday opening or Christmas shopping evening. These practices increased dwell time and footfall supporting a perception of a resilient, sustainable community. This reinforces pride in the community which is valued by residents, policy makers and businesses.

Enhancing creates reciprocity, as it impacts the place and space that the community shares and often as demonstrated improvements in the environment by one business owner impact and motivate others to act raising the quality threshold for the collective community, benefitting everyone. The quote below is from an antique dealer who formed a retail group to help organise the High Street to open longer hours and support the town's wider activity recognising that this clustering effect made the town more attractive to all.

“We need to open on a Sunday to support the Farmer's Market. Some traders thought it was competition but it's important we get people to understand that the activity helps us all.”

C18 – Antique Dealer

Whilst some of the activity was organised collaboration like above, sometimes just through one trader raising the quality and attractiveness of their offer it encouraged others to do so.

The quote below demonstrates how this business owner uses her family connections to keep her business on trend and how this has a knock-on effect on neighbouring businesses who respond to her activity.

“My daughter is an artist in Brighton, so she keeps me up to date with trends as they are normally a season ahead. I’ve noticed that since I’ve spent time dressing the shop windows, the sweet shop next door and the craft shop on the corner have both improved their windows. Residents comment how nice the street looks.”

A3 – Art Gallery

This quote demonstrates how this artist uses knowledge gained from outside the community to enhance the attractiveness of their High Street. Through her efforts, other retailers have taken increased pride in their shopfronts improving their collective offer. It is the incremental nature of the change created by the collective micro-actions of the small businesses which characterises the development of these communities. The quote below from a business respondent reinforces this approach.

“The word organic comes to mind but not in a farming sense. We have tried very hard for things to grow organically in terms of allowing things to happen slowly rather than pushing things with huge sums of money.”

A7 – Farming Property Developers

The businesses’ micro-changes enable the community to evolve. This gradual process of evolution and slow change helps ensure community acceptance. It is many players, making many small changes, reinforcing and amplifying each other’s innovations and therefore enabling further activity. The use of language such as organic reinforces the connectivity with the land and nature and a metaphor of “natural growth” rather than forced change. The reference to money in the quote highlights that economic capital is not always the key driver of change.

6. Findings - Entrepreneurial animation as community caring

In this section, we draw on the inductively derived findings to further elaborate on the meaning of the three categories of practice. The contribution of connecting, enabling and enhancing go far beyond traditional outcomes of entrepreneurship focused on economic outputs and wealth creation as do the drivers and process involved, changing the perspective from individuality to a collective relational responsibility.

As key themes emerging from the empirical evidence linked to empathy, care and connecting, the researcher looked at literature relating to the theory of the ethic of care to see whether this could be of relevance. Entrepreneurs do not see community animation as an obligation rather as a responsibility to consider others, which has parallels with the ethic of care (Tronto, 1993). The ethic of care is a moral feminist theory that emphasizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and relationships in ethical decision-making (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993; Gastmans, 2006). Tronto and Bernice Fischer (1990, p36) defined care as:

“a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment.”

The initial coding suggested it was of relevance to this study as the relational approach of this theory reflects the collective duty of care demonstrated by many of the business owners in relation to their communities.

Ethic of care is about both thought and action which bring about change (Van Hooft, 1995). Care arises out of the fact that not all humans or others or objects in the world are

equally able, always, to take care of themselves. It recognises and seeks to address marginalisation and the application of the ethic of care leads to an evolutionary change, no great revolution but a slow, plodding journey to transformation (Robinson, 2015). The ethic of care theory recognises that the object of care will be affected by the care it receives (Tronto, 1993) recognising the role of agency. Ethic of care contrasts with the historic approach of seeing people or in this context seeing businesses as typically separate, independently living, autonomous beings defined in their own terms to seeing humans (or organisations) in relation with others (Tronto, 1993). This is reflected in the language of the business owners as evidenced by statements such as “without you, there is no us.” The theory moves ethics from an obligation to a responsibility to consider others (Edwards, 2009) which is reflected in the quote below from a Grocer who sees empathy as a critical component of his role:

“You know, we’ve created a world where everybody's busy, too busy to stop and speak to people. And it's a poor job when you don't have time to speak to somebody better still listen to somebody. In different hands, somebody else may say I don't have time for this. But, you know, I think it's very important to sort of say, well, I've got the time, and I'm bothered. Because at the end of the day, you're just like me. And, you know, you do not have to pay me to speak to customers, because it's not about taking money. Sometimes, you have to realise that these are real people who have real problems, they have real concerns. And if I don't have the time nobody does. “

C19 – Grocer

Furthermore, it puts the interest of those in proximity above the interest of strangers, recognising that context can overrule the universal code of conduct this makes it a particularly interesting lens in small remote communities where the bounded nature of the community creates a more intense “goldfish bowl”. Some of the business owners felt that this personal relationship with the community meant that they were held to higher standards than

corporates or larger, less proximate businesses. The quote below from the local butcher states how he thinks that local businesses that have personal relationships with their customers are held to higher ethical standards than large corporates who he believes seek to mislead the public.

“Look at the horse meat scandal, if that had been local shops misleading the public and selling horsemeat as burgers we’d have been closed down. Often customers don’t understand. We try and educate them; we can give the heritage of all our produce. Tesco’s brand meat like it is from a specific farm, like your name’s Green so from green’s farm, but when you google it Green’s farm doesn’t exist. It’s misleading to the customers and it’s not right.”

A4 – Butcher

This suggests that the system of ethics may self-regulate the behaviour of local businesses without the need for further regulation, with the local community punishing any business which violates the collective duty of care and violates trust without the need for government intervention. Whilst for most of the respondents they accepted the obligations of the community willingly, the additional responsibility of this duty of care was not universally accepted. The respondent below found the lack of anonymity and the expectations of the community too onerous and post this interview, chose to close their business.

“I totally under-estimated the amount of involvement that this business would take – both from a business and community point of view. Because of Town A and the kind of community we are in people have expectations that you will lead things, that you will be visible at all times. And that you will help people and be seen as somebody that can stand up and support and speak for the community. And that’s not because of choice but because of community pressure.”

A5 – Accommodation Developer

The ethic of care is about both thought and action which bring about change (Van Hooft, 1995) and therefore can be used to understand the catalytic impact of the small businesses in creating change in the communities observed. It has relevance to these peripheral communities as it recognises and seeks to address marginalisation and the application of the ethic of care leads to an evolutionary change, no great revolution but a slow, plodding journey to transformation (Robinson, 2015) which is paralleled in the quiet, small changes observed in this study which collectively help keep the community alive. The agency of the context and the reciprocal benefits to the businesses are also recognised as the ethic of care theory recognises that the object of care will be affected by the care it receives (Tronto, 1993, p107) further reinforcing the relationship between the residents and businesses in the shared community. In the quote below, a respondent who set up a food manufacturing business indicated how starting the business saved her own emotional and physical wellbeing by giving her a reason to engage in the community positively.

“The business saved me. Before I used to go drinking every night in the Queen’s Head. I was lonely. I wanted company. I started up the business and I suddenly didn’t have the time to do anything other than make jam and get out, talking to people and sell it. And I was so much better for it. The business gave me a reason to live, to be part of the wider community and turned my life around.”

B14 – Food Manufacturer

This theory argues that emotions such as empathy, compassion, and sympathy are essential for moral understanding and action and this reflects the emotive language used by the business owners which focused on how their business activity made people feel and how this made them feel, rather than how much money they made. This is evidenced in the quote below in which the shop owner discussed that the simple purchase of a greeting card was often a significant interaction as it reflected a key moment in the life of the residents.

“When you sell cards and flowers, you are involved in people’s celebrations and also during some of their really tough times, we often act as community workers, because people never just buy a card, they often want to talk, and we are there for them.”

B17 - Florist and Card Retailer

The ethic of care’s feminist focus on feelings rather than rational transactions provides a strong counter-balance with the historic male perspective of entrepreneurship and parallels the changes in how entrepreneurship is studied moving from the principles of rational economic players who make decisions based on financial opportunity, to the complexities of studying micro-businesses, where the owners of the businesses make decisions based on their personal desires, which are often lifestyle orientated and the residents make decisions not based on price, but on trust and community values. The quote below from a Grocer sums up the mutual respect between the residents and the business which demonstrates that this relationship is not based on transactional economic value but is based upon an extended care system.

“Let’s be perfectly honest, we are privileged to survive, because there are many things that we sell, that you could go to Morrisons or Sainsburys and buy cheaper so it’s a privilege to have the customers we do.”

C19 – Grocer

Tronto identified several phases to the ethic of care including caring about which means noticing the need to care in the first place. “Taking care of” which means assuming responsibility for care; “care giving” which is the actual work of care that needs to be done and “care receiving”, the response of that which cared for to the care. The relationship between these phases and the empirical evidence and practices identified will be considered in the next section.

7. Discussion

Community Development Literature has not historically seen entrepreneurship as a key tool supporting community resilience. Whilst there is an increasing school of entrepreneurship that recognise entrepreneurship as a social, processual phenomena (Steyaert, 2007; Hjorth, 2015) including recognising that entrepreneurship can create indirect value for others through the practices of animateurship (McElwee et al., 2017), there has been little research that explain how this really happens.

Using the qualitative lived experiences of entrepreneurs and communities the research has identified three categories of practices demonstrating how entrepreneurs support and animate the communities they operate in. This qualitative research demonstrates the agentic relationship between entrepreneurship and community, recognising that within peripheral communities, the entrepreneurial process creates pride, trust and commitment which become valuable resources to enable evolutionary change. These practices foster relationships and reciprocity within the community which challenges the traditional view of business interactions as transactional economic exchanges of goods or services for money. The use of the feminist ethic of care as a theoretical lens to explore this phenomenon helps explain the decisions of the entrepreneurs not to follow historic masculine economic logic but to prioritise those proximate relationships seeing trust, friendship and acceptance by the community as alternative rewards for their efforts. As seen within the theory of the ethic of care, these entrepreneurs do not see caring as a choice but as a duty and this sense of duty is reinforced by how the community responds negatively to entrepreneurs who follow the economic model of entrepreneurship choosing short term profit over community commitment.

The practices and how they work are summarised in Table 3 below which explains the three categories of practices, how they work, how this fosters relationships and reciprocity within the community and the resulting changes. Finally, this section summarises how this relates to Tronto’s (1993; 2003) phases of care model.

Table 3 – Summary of the three practices of animateurship identified

	Connecting	Enabling	Enhancing
What it is	The practice of connecting people, ideas and resources through creating places to meet, share knowledge, provide empathy or engaging people in community activity.	The practice of supporting others to make changes through using your skills to develop trust and confidence. Often linked to skills sharing.	The practice of making tangible changes such as developing the high street that make the wider community more attractive. Often linked to place making.
How it works	By creating connections within the endogenous community, it creates understanding, empathy and shared practices.	By sharing skills learnt from outside the community, the business owners upskill the residents to adopt new ideas.	By making the place more attractive physically, it creates a collective sense of pride and belonging.
How it fosters relationships and enables reciprocity	Embeds people in place through shared practice Shared understanding, quasi-public spaces and collective activity support the creation of community which embeds and supports the businesses	Develops trust Businesses rewarded for trusted relationship with loyalty and increased support, both financial and emotional.	Develops pride The improved place attracts residents to use the assets and to contribute themselves to improving the assets.
How it creates commitment and change	Reinforces obligations between community members creating a collective sense of purpose making people more willing to support community initiatives and change.	Enables new ideas and innovations within peripheral community whilst mitigating risks for individuals Upskills community members collectively to enable adoption of innovation or ideas new to the community	Develops shared pride in place that encourages residents to embed further and to engage.

<p>How it is reflected in the ethic of care</p>	<p>This practice is about “caring about” or demonstrating attentiveness which is – a wide duty to connect, listen and understand which embeds people within the community.</p>	<p>This practice is about “care giving” with individual businesses sharing their skills and demonstrating their competence through direct action to support the collective adoption of new processes within the community.</p>	<p>This practice is about a collective “caring for” the wider physical space, demonstrating a responsibility to the community and creating a pride in place. Key to this is the businesses’ ability to recognise the needs of the community.</p>
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8. Research Contributions

8.1 Contribution to Literature

The research contributes to the body of work on entrepreneurship in context and demonstrates that peripheral towns do not need to be “left behind” (Martin et al., 2021) but can use endogenous entrepreneurial resource to “animate the community” (McElwee et al., 2018) and continue to reinvent and reinvigorate local resources and reignite community spirit. The research shows how entrepreneurs and communities can use proximity (Korsgaard et al., 2015) to develop trust, pride and commitment that are enablers for self-reinforcing evolutionary change which helps keep these communities relevant. In doing so, the research identifies three distinct practices contributing to the literature on the relationship between animateurship and community development- connecting, enabling and enhancing.

The application of the ethic of care adds to the growing body of research that seeks to understand entrepreneurship in context (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017) giving a new lens and vocabulary to explain the relational and processual nature of entrepreneurship. By considering entrepreneurship through this feminist lens, it enables a greater focus on the social impact of the phenomena, rather than the traditional masculine focus which results in a focus on the heroic entrepreneur and economic growth. Applying the ethic of care in an entrepreneurial community setting represents an original contribution as traditionally this concept has been used in nursing, social work and education settings. The concept helps explain the interdependency between the community players and the entrepreneurs and helps explain the motivation for the entrepreneur's decisions as profit is clearly not the motivating factor.

The focus in this research on the micro-practices of care that result in change in both the caregiver and receiver but even more critically on the overall community help explain the role played by small businesses in community development. They demonstrate how the small businesses animate the community, which is a practice that builds on but goes beyond their pure entrepreneurship role, however as this research highlights, this contribution to the wider community supports and underpins indirectly their entrepreneurial sustainability. The empirical research demonstrates that the process of care gives the businesses their legitimacy to operate and the support to enable their financial sustainability in peripheral markets. These local businesses acknowledge they may be charging more than other competitors who are not embedded within the locality and have greater economies of scale, yet their proximate caring relationship creates additional value for the customer, helping secure long-term loyalty and support. Whilst the increased costs and lack of economies of scale that are symptomatic of the periphery provide theoretically the greatest challenge for the businesses interviewed, it is the same proximity and the deeply embedded and interwoven relationships that are a consequence of the bounded peripheral geography that support the businesses survival.

The three practices underlying the animation process that are identified demonstrate how the businesses interact with the residents of the community and how these micro-practices help animate the community, nudging it forward and creating quiet evolution ensuring the meso community remains sustainable and relevant. Furthermore, this activity is synergistic, with all parties having agency. The businesses benefit from caring but are then cared for and consequently become more embedded in the community. The residents appreciate the care as it enables them to live in the periphery and reinvest in the sustainability

of the businesses helping them embed locally. The connectedness that comes from these relationships, shared spaces, practices and dialogue create a stronger meso-community which is then more attractive for new businesses and residents to join creating the ultimate virtuous circle.

8.2 Contributions to theory

Through the research, a theoretical model has been developed that explains how these amateurship practices create change and support community development contributing to entrepreneurship and community development theory. Figure 4 below seeks to explain the relationship between the three practices and how they relate to the ethic of care. Connecting impact is an endogenous activity happening entirely within the community. The skill of the entrepreneur in supporting connectivity or the resources used as a platform to aid connectivity may be from outside the community but are used to bond the community together. Connecting impact is a practice that mirrors Tronto's (1993; 2003) phase of "caring about". This phase of care focuses on attentiveness which requires the participants to notice the need to care. Connecting impact creates the conditions that creates acceptance and amplification for enabling and enhancing impact and provides the "glue" within the community.

Enabling practices are about "care giving" or "demonstrating competence to meet the needs" of the local community which is the actual work of care. Enhancing practices are about "caring for" or assuming responsibility for care and they particularly focused on the wider places and spaces of the community as a collective resource. Enabling and enhancing practices often use skills, networks or resources from outside the community to create new

momentum, energy and ultimately change. The entrepreneur acts as the bridge, finding the new ideas outside the community and bringing them back into the community using the social capital created through their connecting work to embed the ideas within the community. It is a careful balancing act for the entrepreneur as they need to play the role of both “insiders” and “outsiders”, both deviating from the community norms and belonging within these norms.

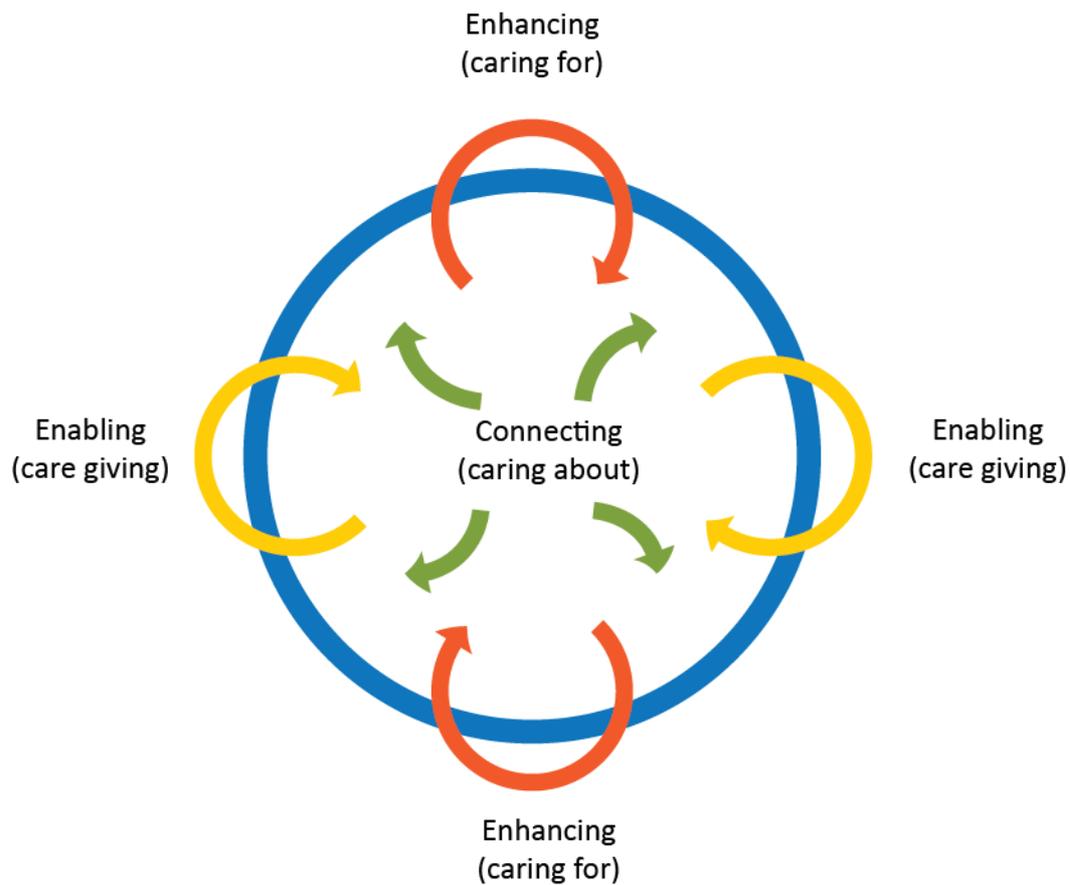
The result of this practice is incremental change – enough change to make a difference, not so much change that it is rejected by the community. The positive incremental impact of these small changes creates a mutually reinforcing loop of regenerative activity. Equally, if the level of enabling and enhancing activity started to decline, this would form a negatively reinforcing vicious circle creating a degenerating place and community. The blue circle within the diagram represents the bounded community – both physically constrained and often operating within social restrictions created by tight community cohesion. The shape of the community is not static but is constantly evolving as the entrepreneurs push the boundaries of the community through their introduction of new practices imported from outside the community. However, ultimately due to the skill of the entrepreneurs at embedding their innovation, the community’s strong desire to be cohesive and the choice taken by most community members to abide by the unwritten community rules, the community will be self-governing.

The impact of these entrepreneurial practices is that the communities remain relevant and resilient. This research illustrates through capturing the real lived experiences of everyday entrepreneurs in small rural communities how the micro entrepreneurial

endeavours discussed in Anderson's quote below (2012, p96) are enacted to create small but important community development activity.

“an evolutionary practice was how the entrepreneurial promise that tomorrow will be better than today is achieved. The micro of entrepreneurial endeavours become agglomerated into the macro of social and economic progress. But what beguiles us is that we cannot know the details of these practices.”

The diagram below shows how the micro activity works by keeping the community relevant and thereby contributing to the macro government goals. The theoretical contribution of this paper is to explain the details of the practices undertaken by the entrepreneurs.



The blue circle represents the constraints - physical and social - that maintain the “goldfish bowl” of the community.

Enhancing and enabling arrows go outside the community and bring in additional resource.

The connecting practices embeds people and businesses within the community.

Figure 4 – The practices of care undertaken by the entrepreneurs within the community (referencing Tronto’s phases of ethic of care 1993)

8.3 Contributions to Practice

Finally, the work has implications for policy makers as it considers the value of the 98% of businesses that are not high growth and extends current thinking on “everyday entrepreneurship” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) demonstrating the non-economic positive impact that entrepreneurs create in communities. Government policy relating to

entrepreneurship is focused on the growth of businesses and their financial contribution at a macro level to UK Plc. There is limited reference to private business in community development policy. The research suggests that a greater focus on encouraging this type of everyday entrepreneurship could support the government's Levelling up policy objectives (DLUHC, 2022) in particular restoring pride in place and supporting depleting community spirit. This research suggests that small businesses can step in to tackle wider social issues such as loneliness, in areas like Northumberland market towns, where public services are being cut due to financial challenges. Finally, the research illustrates and creates visibility for the micro practices of everyday entrepreneurs that often are invisible, particularly to policy makers, due to both the lack of interest in peripheral communities of this size and the lack of qualitative research on small micro businesses which seeks to explain rather than simply quantify their activity.

9. Limitations and Future Research

There is a recognition that this study sample is limited to 24 businesses within three small market towns in one country. However, as the intention was to explore in-depth situated practices and experiences of entrepreneurship in a community context, the methodology is justifiable, but it needs to be appreciated that communities and entrepreneurs are both heterogenous and therefore these practices may not always work in the way portrayed within the research. Further research could test these practices within different community contexts.

Further research could consider whether a focus on understanding how to encourage more entrepreneurs to start small businesses may have greater social impact in small communities than the current focus of growing existing businesses and whether a wider view of the contribution of small businesses could result in different policy approaches that increased their impact in these communities. Research could consider whether with the right policy environment, small businesses could be part of the solution in more depleted or left behind places, creating care networks, restoring pride and creating new community networks. By understanding and celebrating the contribution of these invisible assets, invisible communities may be become more visible.

The research highlights that if the businesses do not meet the duty of care expected by the community, they will quickly lose the community support that keeps them viable – financially and emotionally. It therefore suggests that the formal reporting, codes of conduct and ethical accreditations being developed for corporates such as B corp and Business in the Community are not required within these communities as proximity and context create the

parameters for holding behaviour to account. This line of enquiry could be developed further in future research. It is also clear from the research that the duty of care is not without cost – both in terms of time commitment, financial commitment and emotional commitment. On balance, the interviewed participants suggested that these costs were acceptable as they also received care in return from the community.

The businesses interviewed within these rural communities appeared comfortable with evolutionary change and in some instances sacrificing income for social capital, however a further research study could consider the impact of businesses that were more revolutionary in approach or short-term profit orientated and whether they could navigate the duty of care required. Future research could also consider circumstances in which the cost of care is disproportionate to the care received and the consequent impact on the carefully balanced eco-system.

Finally, this research, starts from a positivist stance and within the interviews captured the positive impacts of small businesses. Small businesses can however have a negative impact on communities creating issues such as environmental degradation (Lyons et al., 2012). Future research could test the ethic of care theory further by considering how the community and businesses mitigate and manage the negative externalities of doing business.

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Chapter 3 - UNDERSTANDING PLACE IN RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY

Abstract

This paper considers how place impacts entrepreneurship. Increasingly, entrepreneurship is understood as socially situated and impacted by context. Places are no longer seen as the benign holder of entrepreneurship but are understood as agentic, impacting and changing entrepreneurial capacity. Through analysing the historic case studies of three rural market towns in North Northumberland, the research considers how Cresswell's components of place – materiality, meaning and practice (2009) - have impacted the development of entrepreneurship within these communities. Whilst on paper, all three towns are governed by the same administrative authorities, are categorised as rural and have the same entrepreneurship policy, the lived experience of entrepreneurship within these communities is quite different.

This paper contributes to entrepreneurship theory by addressing the relationship between everyday entrepreneurs (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) and their spatial context (Korsgaard et al., 2015). The research demonstrates how the materiality of space provides resources (or inputs) that shape the trajectory of development and creates and limit opportunities for entrepreneurship, which are reinforced through history and become part of the narrative or meaning of place. This meaning of place, in particular aspects of rurality, are used by entrepreneurs as a resource to create value in a competitive market. However, as well as using the meaning of place as an input, the collective practices of entrepreneurs contribute to changing the meaning of place, potentially creating new place narratives. This research therefore illustrates the under-explored role entrepreneurs can play in community development (Lyons et al., 2012) and, in particular, in neo-endogenous development in places with thin institutional capacity, where potentially small business everyday entrepreneurs are some of the only available key actors.

The paper has practical implications for policy makers as it demonstrates the complexity of applying universal rural or enterprise policy due to the increasing heterogeneity of place and plurality of rural identities (Gkartzios et al., 2021) and raises the need to encourage everyday entrepreneurs as they are a key part of the institutional capacity available in small towns to create neo-endogenous change.

1. Introduction

Rural entrepreneurship is deeply rooted in the context of space and place (Korsgaard et al., 2015). Rural places are often presented either as a rural idyll for selective elites or as places that are “left behind” technologically, culturally and economically and therefore unable to compete globally (Murdoch et al., 2003). This approach, sometimes called a rural myopia (Gkartzios et al., 2022) fails to recognise the complex and nuanced reality of contemporary rural places. Hudson (2001) (quoted in Johnstone and Lionais, 2004, p218) defined space as “the economic evaluation of location based on its capacity for profit”. Space can therefore enable or constrain economic activity through the availability of resources. Place is however linked to real lived experiences and therefore is a set of material and social practices that enact a location (Cresswell, 2009; Hudson, 2001). Increasingly, entrepreneurship is recognised as a socially situated phenomena (Granovetter, 1985; Jack and Anderson, 2002) impacted by its context but with the agentic ability to also change its context.

With the decline of agriculture (OECD, 2006) rural places are facing significant change becoming more complex with diverse development trajectories (Murdoch 2003), impacted by both global geo-political forces and local structures such as land ownership (Bryden and Munro, 2000). This has an impact on approaches to regional development with an increasing focus in rural areas on neo-endogenous development (Atterton, 2011; Ward et al., 2005; Bosworth et al., 2015) which aims to deliver changes driven by local actors from the ground up but enabled and steered by policy actors from the top down helping communities remain relevant and resilient. The resilience of local communities including restoring local pride and supporting high streets has been identified as a key government policy priority (DLUHC, 2021).

Developing a dynamic and sustainable diverse business sector is critical to creating employment and maintaining services in rural communities (Flora, 1990; Bosworth, 2012). Rural areas already host higher proportions of self-employment and employment in small and micro-enterprises (Defra, 2022) and counter to dominant discourse recent research demonstrates that rural businesses perform as well as their urban counterparts (Phillipson et al., 2019). However, Korsgaard et al. (2015) note that there is very limited research on the role of place in entrepreneurship, despite entrepreneurship being recognised as a key mechanism for creating change (Hjorth, 2004) and research on rural entrepreneurship suggesting that there are unique defining features of rural business that create different types of value both to local economies and communities (Bosworth, 2012; Bosworth and Turner, 2018).

Through using a historic case study approach comparing three market towns in North Northumberland, the research seeks to understand how Cresswell's (2009) components of place - materiality, meaning and practice - change entrepreneurial opportunities and the practice of entrepreneurship changes place supporting development. By analysing historic case studies in the same administrative area, the macro-factors are consistent for all the three case study communities enabling a focus on the localised processes of place that impact entrepreneurship. The research contributes to understanding place as a context for entrepreneurship (Korsgaard et al., 2015) and entrepreneurship as a driver of community development (Lyons et al., 2012). Through the historic case study approach, it explores the exogenous and endogenous factors that contribute to the materiality, meaning and practice of place.

The research illustrates the heterogeneity of rural communities (Gkartzios et al., 2022) and shows how diverging development paths are created because of history, geography and community practice. The research shows this results in different entrepreneurial cultures, market opportunities and community leadership capacity within these three case study areas creating different types of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship as well as different community structures. The paper highlights several factors relating to both to the materiality and meaning of place that are associated with rural and demonstrates how enterprising business owners use these as resources, suggesting that rural businesses should not be characterised by the label of resource constrained but instead recognised as having access to different types of resource. The collective everyday practices of the entrepreneurs also over time change the meaning of the place and therefore the research recognises the role everyday entrepreneurs can play in neo-endogenous community development (Bosworth and Atterton, 2012), particularly in peripheral communities with “thin institutional” capacity (Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020).

The paper has practical implications for policy makers as it demonstrates the complexity of applying universal rural or enterprise policy due to the increasing heterogeneity of place and plurality of rural identities (Gkartzios et al., 2022) and raises the need to encourage “everyday entrepreneurs” as they are a key part of the institutional capacity available in small towns to create neo-endogenous change.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of place and how it has been conceptualised

Place has been a fundamental concept within human geography but is increasingly seen as inter-disciplinary. The materiality of place is the obvious starting point: places are physical constructs – a-built environment - but they are more than this - spaces become places because of interactions with them which give these spaces meaning (Tuan, 1975; Massey, 2005). As shown by Saxenian (1994) and Aoyama (2009), regions with similar resource bases can have vastly different cultural orientations, with some supporting the risk taking necessary for entrepreneurial development and others deprioritising these activities. These cultures develop over time in response to a region's economic history and are resistant to short term policy interventions (Wyrwich, 2012). Places are also practised. People do things in place (Cresswell, 2019). Places are negotiated containers of organisational life.

Dacin et al. (2024) use the metaphor of navigation to move from a fixed geographic depiction of place to a progressive sense of place based on how people experience it. Place is the intersection between a geographic location and a meaning structure. Halfacree (2006) defines place (in the context of rural places) as those of spatial practice, representations of space (formal representations of rural) and lived spaces (the everyday lives of the rural). According to Cresswell (2019, p119): “in any given place, we encounter a combination of materiality, meaning and practice” which are interwoven meaning that place is a mix of these factors.”

Places are important as the location, materiality and or symbolic meanings of place are shaped by and further shape people's everyday social life and interactions (Collins, 1981; Gieryn, 2000; Relph, 2013). Places manage to bridge the duality between continuity and transformation (Staggs, Wright and Jarvis, 2022) and the duality of constancy and fluctuation

(Nash, 2020). There is a recursive relationship between place and tradition (Dacin, Dacin and Kent, 2019). Places are a resource for the making of tradition and are simultaneously the outcome of the maintenance of local traditions by custodians.

Places are layered, are in flux and are political (Dacin et al., 2024). Places change and place making can be triggered by dramatic events (Farny, Kibler and Down, 2019); or historically situated events such as successive waves of immigration (Jones, Lee and Lee, 2019). Such changes can be positive or can lead to a place becoming stigmatised (Keene and Padilla, 2010). Places can lose their meaning potentially through globalisation and the monotony of modern places creating a feeling of placelessness or them becoming non places. Alternatively places can lose their material physical space through natural disaster also creating a sense of placelessness.

2.2 The Changing Nature of Rural Places

Early quantitative definitions of rural sought to distinguish rural from non-rural administrative units according to population or density thresholds or the profile of economic activity (Lowe et al., 1998; Woods, 2010). These approaches have been criticised for the way they generalise the idea of rural and reproduce outdated dichotomies (Gkartzios et al., 2022) masking the reality that increasingly different places have their own culturally contingent ideas of countryside (Woods, 2005).

Rural places are recognised as increasingly heterogenous. The external environment of rural regions is affected by both macro globalisation processes and local factors including their locality and proximity to urban jobs, their transport connectivity or digital connectivity (Terluin, 2003; Murdoch, 2003). This new rural paradigm (OECD, 2006) illustrates the

increasing challenge that there is no-one rurality and one size does not fit all (Ward and Brown, 2009) increasing the importance of understanding the local impact of place. Rural places are often presented either as a rural idyll for selective elites or as places that are “left behind” technologically, culturally, and economically and therefore unable to compete globally (Murdoch et al., 2003). This approach, sometimes called a rural myopia (Gkartzios et al., 2022) fails to recognise the complex and nuanced reality of contemporary rural places which is driven by an increasingly differentiated contextual environment. Despite fundamental changes in the rural economy, it is still viewed through the lens of agriculture resulting in the elevation of farming and preservation interests above everything else that co-exists in the countryside (Lapping, 2006, Lapping and Scott, 2019).

There is a long sociological tradition of ascribing key values to the countryside and to rural communities (Wirth, 1938), however more recent social constructionist approaches move away from fixed representations and embrace a new plurality of values and identities. (Gkartzios et al., 2022). Rural’s importance may increasingly be as a source of “identity” (Halfacree, 1993) explaining people’s own biographies. Bosworth and Willett (2011) argue that whilst perceptions based wholly on the quality of place can lead to preservationist attitudes as the place is perceived as a fixed image, perceptions based on the ever-changing practices of people can create a shared sense of identity which can be much more fluid enabling communities to adapt and progress.

Rural areas are now places of significant transformation, underpinned by forces such as counter urbanisation, moving people from urban to rural areas and by middle class nostalgia for countryside lifestyles (Halfacree, 1995). This journey from a positivist to dynamic and transformation conception of rural has enabled a recognition that rural places are ever-changing and shaped by the power and agency of multiple groups (Frouws, 1998; Donovan

and Gkartzios, 2014). In particular, the decline in agriculture has created an increasing need to encourage new rural employment from a diversity of sectors. Developing a dynamic and sustainable diverse business sector is critical to creating employment and maintaining services in rural communities (Flora, 1990; Bosworth, 2012). Clare Mitchell (1998) in her early work described this process of transformation from places of production to new representations of rural as a process of creative destruction taking traditional taskscapes represented by extractive industries and transforming them to heritage scapes (Mitchell and de Waal, 2005) and leisurescapes (Cartier, 1998; Law, 2001). Later work (Mitchell, 2013) enhanced this process of change as creative enhancement recognising that these productionist places were not creating a mono-economy but were developing as multifaceted, multi-sector mixed economies.

2.3 Rural Enterprise and Rural Development

Entrepreneurship has historically been conceptualised as a market phenomenon involving alert actors seeking to profit from economic exchanges with other market actors (Hebert and Link, 1988). The entrepreneurs studied were financially driven, ambitious, bank backed young risk takers with high tech, high growth innovative business ideas (Autio et al., 2014; Acs et al., 2016) and represent less than 1% of all businesses. However, there is a growing body of research that focuses on “everyday entrepreneurs” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) who are the small local businesses within all our communities that we encounter daily serving our newspapers, cutting our hairs, or cleaning our windows. The definition of “everyday entrepreneurs” considers businesses, as being socially embedded (Anderson, Warren and Bensemann, 2019; Granovetter, 1985; Jack and Anderson, 2002) Drakapolou, Dodd and Anderson, 2007; McKeever, Jack and Anderson, 2014; Polanyi, 1957) with businesses owners’

motivations extending beyond profitability (Steiner and Atterton, 2015; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Steinerowski et al., 2008; Baumol, 1996). These everyday entrepreneurs are by nature embedded within their context and are often also seen as “the community”, creating and defining aspects of community and place (Somerville, 2011). As entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial activities are embedded in social, institutional and spatial relations that significantly shape what entrepreneurs do (Dacin et al., 1999), entrepreneurship will differ as contexts vary (Zahra, 2007).

Context is therefore increasingly recognised as a key factor in explaining entrepreneurial processes (McKeever, Jack and Anderson, 2014 and is no longer seen as the background to research but is instead seen to be agentic. Entrepreneurship is changed by its context and the context is changed by the practice of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial agency develops and reconfigures contexts such as local and regional places, economies and institutions (Anderson, Warren and Benseman, 2018; Edward, Jack and Anderson, 2015). Several studies have shown the effects of context on entrepreneurship to be more pronounced in rural and depleted areas (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever, Anderson and Jack, 2014) and it has been argued that the rural context specifically shapes the activities and behaviour of rural business owners which means there are unique defining features of rural businesses that create different types of value both to local economies and communities (Bosworth, 2012) or a different type of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018).

Rural areas are often characterised by their small and independent business base as they host higher proportions of self-employment (3.7% for rural compared to 0.8% for urban firms) and employment in small (28.6% for rural and 19.2% for urban firms) and microenterprises (29.6% for rural and 24.8 for urban firms) (Defra, 2018 quoted in

Phillipson et al., 2019). There is an increasing acceptance that a “rural business” is not simply any business in a rural location (Bosworth, 2012; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Moyes et al., 2015; Bosworth and Turner, 2018) but that consideration should be around the use of rural capital (Bosworth and Turner, 2018). Often these rural businesses are characterised in research by their lack of resource but increasing it is recognised that embedded rural businesses find resource within their local environment using qualities such as tradition and under-development to create value (Benneworth, 2004).

Entrepreneurship is considered a key mechanism to counter the unequal regional development that characterises modern society (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Labrianidis, 2006; North and Smallbone, 2006; OECD, 2006) and it is increasingly recognised that private sector businesses have a critical role to play in delivering and enhancing the adaptive capacity of communities (Campbell, James & Kunkle, 2013) and creating change (Hjorth 2004). However, there is debate about how best to encourage entrepreneurship with tension between central national policies and local approaches (Peck and McGuiness, 2003; Benneworth, 2004). Rural development theory has oscillated from top-down exogenous models to exclusively bottom-up endogenous approaches and is now favouring a mixed approach labelled neo-endogenous (Terluin, 2003; Shucksmith, 2010; Bosworth et al., 2016). This mixed endogenous/exogenous approach features a multitude of networks in which resources are mobilised and in which the control of the process consists of an interplay between local and external forces (Bosworth et al., 2016). Ward et al., (2005, p5) stated that the:

“key to local development is building a local institutional capacity able both to mobilise internal resources and to cope with the external forces acting on a region. The means of achieving this objective is through participation of local actors in internal and external development processes.”

Within peripheral rural communities with limited institutional capacity, entrepreneurs are key local actors that have the potential to play this role and participate in community development (Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020).

3. Methodology

This research seeks to illustrate how place relates to entrepreneurship with the aim of understanding how the materiality, meaning and practices of place (Cresswell, 2009) create opportunities for entrepreneurs enabling them to take advantage of rural resources (both tangible and intangible) and support the development of place (Gkartzios et al., 2022). This is achieved through the presentation of illustrative historic cases that unpack the ways in which entrepreneurship interacts with the complexity of rural places. The goal is to show how the materiality, meaning and practice of place play out in different ways, generating a myriad of alternative relationships between entrepreneurship and rural place.

These cases are developed through the analysis of historic archival data sources. In parallel to collecting this archival data, 8 interviews were undertaken with key policy stakeholders and 24 interviews with local businesses. These interviews were designed to capture participant reflections on the relationship between entrepreneurship and place and how it has been moulded by its history and geography. The interviews were instrumental in providing clues that could be further explored in the archival search. They also provided a sense check on hunches on how historical events shaped contemporary approaches to rural enterprise. The approach of weaving backwards and forwards between empirical and conceptual sources and across time enriches the story and grounds the theory (Kipping et al., 2014)

This approach provides a level of detail unobtainable through more conventional research techniques, appreciating the extent to which the businesses are defined by aspects of place. Rural businesses tend to be researched either from an economic perspective, where

peripherality and disadvantage is the focus (e.g., Atherton and Hannon, 2006) or from an entrepreneurial skills perspective where individual personal characteristics are the focus of attention (e.g Alsos et al., 2011). The rural economy has many influences, both social and economic, which is hopefully illustrated through the style in which these case studies are presented.

3.1 Choosing the Market Towns

Three case study market towns were chosen as comparators based on purposive sampling techniques which entails the explicit use of conceptual criteria to define an area of homogeneity where cases become comparable (Rihoux and Ragin, 2009). All three were within the same Northumberland County Council administrative boundary and therefore faced similar meso level support. All three towns had been recognised within the media as good places to live or move to (Dyckhoff, 2017; Dyckhoff, 2016; The Times, 2023; Northumberland Gazette, 2019; Northumberland Gazette, 2016). On visiting the three towns all appeared to have vibrant high streets with a variety of small businesses and active local communities evidenced through sources such as local newsletters and noticeboards.

Furthermore, the three settlements chosen represented different aspects of the rural typology set out by Lowe and Ward (2009) and as used by Annibal et al. (2013) which is as follows:

1. dynamic commuter areas, with well-connected residents who do not always need services close by, due to their affluence and multi-car ownership.
2. settled commuter areas, generally on the edge of provincial conurbations and therefore with stronger infrastructure and service provision.

3. dynamic rural areas, with a high concentration of well-educated professionals near major transport hubs,
4. deep rural, traditional rural farming communities trying to develop rural tourism, but with poor infrastructure and services.
5. retirement retreats, along coastal areas and a need for health care, social services and leisure provision,
6. peripheral amenity areas, economically depressed coastal areas and
7. transient rural, merely coping with conditions of rurality.

Rothbury is a market town which represents Type 1 in the typology – a dynamic commuter area with well-connected residents. Wooler was chosen as Type 4 – a deep rural traditional farming community looking to diversify into community. Amble is a Type 6 -historically depressed coastal area which has undertaken significant regeneration and could now be argued to be showing characteristics of Type 5 now – a retirement retreat. Researching three different types of rural settlement aims to answer the challenge set by Haartsen et al. (2003) and Strijker et al. (2020) for rural researchers to consider diverse representations and perceptions of rural. Whilst this selection obviously does not represent all types of rural settlement set out above, it does enable some contrast and difference between the settlements. Contrasting three towns gives the ability to spot differences and similarities whilst also being practically manageable for the researcher. As the aim was to really understand the lived experiences within these towns, it was felt that researching any more than three towns would risk losing the richness of thick detail required.

3.2 Data collection

There is a limited number of historic documentary sources readily available for these small market towns and therefore any available historic sources were used. These were identified through internet searches, recommendations from local libraries, references in local history groups and county archive searches. More recent local policy documents were identified using the websites of Northumberland County Council, the respective Parish and Town Councils and the websites of the two Development Trusts in Amble and Wooler as well as recommendations from the policy stakeholder interviews.

Table 1 - Documentary review: Sources

Rothbury		
Map of Northumberland	Armstrong	1769
Ordnance Survey Map	ONS	1866
Comprehensive Guide to the County of Northumberland -	Tomlinson	1888
Vol 15 – History of Coquetdale	Dodds	1940
The Buildings of England: Northumberland,	Grundy	1992
Northumberland Placenames,	Beckensall	2004
Rothbury Northumberland Extensive Survey	Northumberland County Council	2009
Economic Futures & Employment Demand Study	Northumberland National Park	2018
Amble		
Map	Armstrong	1759
Map	Greenwood	1828
Amble plan – produced for Radcliffe Colliery	Sopwith & Scott	1840
Victoria County History: Northumberland, Volume 2,	Edward Bateson	1895
Amble and District	McAndrews	1912
A Story of Amble	Wilkinson & Morrison	1985
Medieval Castle, Towers, Peles & Bastles of Northumberland	Rowland,	1987
Ports and Harbours of Northumberland,	Linsley	2005
Amble – A Victorian boom town Janet Rice (2010)	Rice	2010
Amble Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Matter	Alnwick District Council	2008

Amble Coastal Community Economic Development Plan	Coastal Community Team	2018
Wooler		
Map of County of Wuller	Speed	1610
County Map	Armstrong	1769
Ordnance Survey Map	Cross	1860
History, Directory & Gazetteer of Durham and Northumberland	Parson & White	1827
Vol 14 – History of Northumberland	Dodds	1935
Vol 11 – County History of Northumberland	Vickers	1922
Wooler & Glendale, a brief history, Vol 1 - Wooler	C Collier and L A Stewart	1986
Wooler Needs Appraisal	Northumberland County Council	1996
Wooler Town Centre Health Check	Northumberland County Council	2009
Community Action Plan	Glendale Community Forum	2011
Stayin Alive in Glendale	Johnstone et al	2013

Within each case study geography 8 – 10 small businesses were identified through a sequential sampling strategy (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). Key selection criteria were that they met the UK government’s SME definition (Hutton, 2024) and were privately owned independents. Whilst it was not set as a key criterion, subsequent analysis demonstrated that all the businesses interviewed within the research met at least two of Bosworth’s rural enterprise criteria (Bosworth, 2012) suggesting that they were more likely to be embedded in the local rural community and therefore offered more potential value to the community. All were located within the rural community and most served rural customers. A few created rural products utilising aspects of the nature or heritage of the rural community, a form of rural capital, (Bosworth and Turner, 2018) to sell externally (often online) as well as within the locality.

Table 2 below lists the participants and illustrates the range of businesses engaged.

Data was collected on the background of the business owner including their age as a proxy for experience and whether they were local to the town to understand whether this impacted how embedded they were in community and institutional life.

Table 2 –Business Participants

Reference & business description	Background of business owner	Age range of Owner	Local or Incomer
A1 - Hardware shop	Travel Contact Centre Manager	30 - 40	Local but commutes from Newcastle
A2 - Computer Shop	Supermarket worker	30-40	Moved from SE
A3 – Art Gallery	Pottery graduate	60 - 70	Husband born locally but mainly lived in S Africa
A4 - Butcher	Butcher Manager	40 - 50	No, from Scotland
A5 – Accommodation Developer	Nurse, multiple entrepreneur	50 - 60	Local to area, not this town
A6 – Drinks Manufacturer	Investment Banking, London	40 - 50	Inherited Father’s estate & returned from London
A7 - Property Developers,	Debt Collection Business	40 - 50	Family-owned local farm, returned from London
A8 - Decorative Retailer	Mother	40 -50	Moved to rural new estate from urban core
B9 – Gift Producer & Retailer	Management Consultant	60 - 70	Moved recently to area
B10 – Interior Design	Chef	50 - 60	Parents moved to be near Industrial Estate,
B11 – Water sports shop	IT desk support	40 - 50	Moved from Tyneside
B12 – Surf school	Care worker	30 - 40	Local
B13 – Coffee manufacturer	Supermarket manager	60 - 70	Moved to area
B14 – Food Producer	Dressmaker	50 - 60	Moved from Town A for business premises
B15 -Artist	Mother	60 - 70	Local
B16 - Beautician	Beautician	50 - 60	Moved locally 20 years ago
B17 – Card retailer	Florist	60 - 70	Local
C18 - Gift Shop	Teacher	60 - 70	Moved to area

C19 - Grocer	Accountant and Factory Manager	60 - 70	Moved to area
C20 - Craft Shop	Social Worker	60 -70	Moved to area
C21- Homeware	Art graduate	20 - 30	Local
C22 - Sweet shop	Postman	50 - 60	Moved to area
C23- Accom Provider	Draughtsman	40 - 50	Local
C24 - Graphic Designer	Graphic Designer	40 - 50	Moved to area

The business interviews were used to help identify which policy makers or stakeholders would be relevant to interview. In depth interviews were held with a key identified lead in each community identified at Table 3 – the leaders of the Development Trust in two communities and a local politician in the third. These leads were identified through desk research and expert advice from the County Council. These were then supplemented with interviews with meso level stakeholders and policymakers who had been referenced through snowball sampling as being relevant.

Table 3 - Stakeholder Participants

Participant Ref	Role	Type of Organisation
L25	Local Politician	Town A
L26	Executive Director	Town B Community Development Trust
L27	Executive Director	Town C Community Development Trust
S28	Senior Politician	Northumberland County Council
S29	Director responsible for Rural Policy	Northumberland County Council
S30	Director	Community Action Northumberland, a Social Enterprise responsible for supporting Northumberland Rural Communities
S31	Director	Local Enterprise Partnership
S32	Senior Manager	North of Tyne Mayoral Authority

A semi-structured interview guide was created for the businesses however this was used flexibly to enable interviewees to tell their story of their town, ensuing the most

important aspects of the town's history were given appropriate focus. The role of the interviewer was principally to support the respondent's story telling by asking probing questions. This flexibility combined with a set of common questions enabled a "critical incident" approach to analysing key moments in the histories of the town. This enabled the researcher to understand the key meanings ascribed to the events by the respondent and enabled the researcher to establish any patterns (Kain, 2004). For the stakeholder interviews, each stakeholder was researched before interview and bespoke questions were created to reflect their specific interests.

3.3 Data analysis

The following section includes a historical narrative for each of the three towns. The historical narratives were developed through analysing historic accounts, old maps, policy plans and local history group websites. Notes were taken from all different sources and triangulated, and the rough data sorted into chronological order to create timelines outlining key events and information points. A specific timeline was not chosen, instead the researcher was led by the data which meant starting the account at the first recorded relevant historic events. For Wooler and Rothbury, this means their case studies start much earlier with royal Market Town warrants. Amble's history is insignificant until the industrial revolution and the discovery of coal in the locality and therefore the focus is much later. Whilst these case studies are primarily descriptive, some analysis was required to interpret the historic data into a meaningful narrative.

The analysis used Cresswell's lens of place (2009) focusing first on the materiality of the settlement and how this impacted on the businesses within the community. As illustrated in

Figure 1 below the coding of quotes related to materiality noted physical aspects of the location, proximity to other activity or lack of proximity to other activity and scale.

Quote	Primary coding	Secondary Coding
“Bridge Street does not get sun until the afternoon and I think people walk up Main Street look along and see that it’s a bit dark so we don’t get the same footfall!” A3	Location Attractiveness	Physical Location
“Being on the Main Street in this location works, people can pull up and park and Rothbury is on the crossroads for lots of nearby villages and people come to the hospital and the doctor’s surgery, there’s lots of reasons to come to the village and then do some shopping.” A1	Locality Destination Cluster	Proximity
“Access to the Cheviots is our USP. Most of our visitors are walkers, mountain bikers or trail runners – people who love the outdoors.” C23	Destination Proximity	
“It’s not a coincidence that we became one of the biggest kayak suppliers in the UK. Amble is brilliantly placed for all types of watersports. The sea is 5 minutes away, Druridge Lake is 10 minutes down the road and the river Coquet is brilliant for running freshwater kayaking. Paddlers love visiting the area for the range of experiences and then come and try new kit with us.” B11	Water Location Physical Context Proximity	
“The 17 miles from Alnwick to Wooler is both our greatest strength and weakness. Many people shop on the High Street because they don’t want to drive and this means we maintain a better range of services but that distance does restrict the access to social and cultural activity. It’s hard to keep young people and so we do have a predominantly older population.” C20	Distance Proximity Local services Remoteness	
“On Saturday we have regular day trippers who venture out from Newcastle for a drive in their cars and buy their joint of meat for Sunday. They do a bit of shopping on the High Street, have a stroll and buy some lunch.”A4	Destination Proximity Urban	
“Everyone is worried about when Rothbury becomes big enough to attract a large supermarket chain but I’m not sure where there is a suitable site. There’s the High Street which is sandwiched between the Cheviots and then the river so there isn’t a site on this side of the village. The land on the other side of the Coquet where the auction mart is floods, so I don’t think they would want to build there and its not good for access. As we are next to the National Park, they cannot build on green field so I think our geography does limit future large scale development.” L25	Scale Physical landscape Planning limitation Physical Context	Scale

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Figure 1 – Illustrative quotes and coding relating to Materiality of Place

Secondly the analysis considered the meanings developed through the history and culture of the place and how the businesses exploited this meaning to create products and experiences that created greater entrepreneurial value. The illustrative quotes set out in Figure 2 show the initial coding which included emotional connection, nostalgia, exploitation and authenticity were then categorised into secondary codes relating to embedded in place, nostalgia of place and exploitation of place.

Quote	Primary Coding	Secondary Codes
"I've always loved Northumberland, one of the reasons is that it's uncompromising , the people are very friendly and funny and they are kind and helpful but there is a line , it's not evident from the outside but there is a real grit underneath the friendly surface." A3	Uncompromising Independent Self determining	Culture of Place
"Our accommodation is an old fashioned hostel. We get lots of families that want to come to a proper old hostel, like their parents used to remember." C23	Nostalgia Family Tradition	Nostalgia of Place
"In Amble everything is guided by our past. We are building on and reinventing those industries that we are known for. The Lobster Hatchery tells the story of our fishing heritage and ensure we have young lobsters in future. The Amble Boathouse puts us on the map using our fine fish produce. Queen Street because its an authentic real High Street with everything you used to see – a butchers, a bakers, a fishmongers, a hardware store."L26	Nostalgia Heritage Authenticity	
"Being in Amble by the sea makes the difference, people buy a latte, look out and watch the boats come in and they think it's the best coffee they have ever had. I'm not selling a hot beverage, I'm selling a luxury experience and one that's pretty affordable at £2.35 a cup. That's what has made the business grow." B13	Exploiting place Creating experiences	Exploiting Place
"I wanted to create something extraordinary , a product that encapsulated how I feel about this part of Northumberland, the rawness and the wild beauty and put it in a drink ..." A6	Place Inspired Emotive Product creation	
" We called the shop,[the Town] Family [Shop] as we wanted to associate our product with this town. The family is just me but I wanted it to sound rooted in [the Town]. It was important." A4	Quality Embedded in place Roots	

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Figure 2 – Illustrative Quotes and Coding Structure for Meaning of Place

The final section considered how the practices of the businesses and other stakeholders had changed the meaning of place over time.

Quote	Primary Coding	Secondary Coding
“There has been a significant change in the village in the last four of five years and that’s about new people coming into the village into the new houses. It’s a bit more innovative, you can actually sense this idea of moving on, of new development and it feels more healthy.” A5	New people Change Innovation	Incoming ideas
“Rothbury reminds me of Liberty in London. You can get everything but it’s a bit eclectic. It kind of orchestrates itself and self regulates with this independent offer.” L25	Independent Self regulated Collective	Destination
“We’re stronger as a group. You know there’s no-one business or no one shop in this village that is sufficient to bring lots of people from elsewhere. But collectively we have a really interesting range of different things. Pretty much like a department store but run by different individuals.” A3	Independent Collective	
“Once the Boathouse started winning awards, it reinforced Amble’s reputation for food, in particular great seafood and other restaurants looked to start here creating a cluster of excellence. People now travel from Newcastle and beyond to eat in Amble, which is amazing.” L26	Destination Clustering Reputation Collective	
“Due to size, the businesses in Amble are on the whole family businesses – we’ve never had any national businesses – so they were from Amble and wanted it to be better. National chains abandoned the town, local families could not move their business and it was their livelihood so they had to stick with it. They had to work with us to find ways to make Amble better because they had no other options and we had to work with the family businesses because we had no national corporates that we could turn to for help.” L26	Local family Small businesses Determination Embedded	Embedded
“You try and make a business work and you are stuck in the middle of as often described as nowhere but which for me is at the heart of my emotional needs” A6	Emotional Placelessness	
“It’s the lifestyle. It’s the walk with my dog in the morning. It’s the lack of stress, I don’t like stress, that’s what motivates me to live and work here” C24	Lifestyle Quality of Life	Quality of Life

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Figure 3 – Illustrative quotes and Coding Structure for Practices of Place

The indicative quotes above considered how new people were changing the practice of place, how the collective action of businesses to create a destination was creating new practices of place and bringing in new visitors and how the embedded nature of the

businesses and the quality of life kept the entrepreneurs within the community practising place.

This empirical evidence was considered alongside the historical evidence to develop the following narratives.

4. Historical narratives: Rothbury, Amble and Wooler

This section includes a historical narrative for each of the three towns.

4.1 Rothbury

Rothbury is a market town and civil parish in Northumberland, England, situated inland on the River Coquet. It is 26 miles (42 km) north of Newcastle upon Tyne, the nearest major urban conurbation. At the 2011 census, it had a population of 2,107. It is located on the edge of the Northumberland National Park, at the neck of the narrow cultivated valley of the River Coquet in a part of the county called Coquetdale. The town occupies the valley bottom on both sides of the river and has expanded up the valley sides in more recent times.

The first documentary mention of Rothbury was circa 1100, as *Routhebiria*, or "Routha's town" (Beckensall, 2004). Rothbury emerged as an important town because of its location at a crossroads over a ford on the River Coquet. Turnpike roads leading to Newcastle, Alnwick, Hexham and Morpeth allowed for an influx of families and the enlargement of the settlement during the Middle Ages. The village is on an ancient packhorse trail from Hexham to Alnmouth and a droving route down the Coquet valley. Since 1291, Rothbury has been chartered as a market town which enabled Rothbury to become a centre for dealing in cattle and wool for the surrounding villages – a function that it continues to serve.

In the medieval period Rothbury was for a lengthy time a royal burgh and then a baronial borough. By 1535 the parish of Rothbury had the highest parochial value in Northumberland. In common with many of the smaller border towns, Rothbury suffered from the disruption of the Scottish Wars and border raids that continued into the 16th century (Dodds 1940). Rothbury was burnt to the ground quite often. As late as the 16th century Rothbury parishioners failed to attend church because of feuds, and at other times congregated in armed groups in segregated areas of the church (Goodman 1992). However, Rothbury was also a place that valued education with the founding of a Grammar School as a free school in Rothbury in 1673.

In 1760, Bishop Pocock described Rothbury as:

“...a poor town of two streets which are not paved, and the houses are mostly thatched. There are turnpiked roads to and from it to Hexham and Newcastle, Morpeth and Alnwick which makes it a thoroughfare from all the towns to the west and north from Ellesden. It is a market town, and they have fairs chiefly for black cattle and wool is sent from this place to Newcastle. They have several shops and handicrafts exercised here particularly that of hatters (Dodds, 1940, p342).”

The town saw little industrialisation through this period and retained its primary function as a market town. Rothbury was never an industrial town. This can be explained for several reasons. Its topography in the river valley means that the lowlands were prone to flooding and the higher valley sides were not easy to build upon. It did not have coal or precious natural assets that drove industrial exploitation.

However, from the 17th to the 18th century the number of freeholders in Rothbury increased considerably from three in 1663 to 12 who voted in the county election in 1710; by 1747 there were 22 voters and 39 in 1826. These figures suggest that the town increased in size in the later 18th and early 19th century (Dixon, 1903; Dodds, 1940). This may be

explained in the 18th century by Rothbury's position on the newly turnpiked Hexham to Alnmouth road resulting in the town benefiting from increased through trade. Four cattle fairs were held each year and Rothbury acted as a market centre for the towns lying to the east and west of it (Dodds, 1940). Two smithies and a brewery are marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey. The availability of good quality spring water allowed the development of several breweries and public houses serving a wide rural catchment area.

The second edition (1897) Ordnance Survey shows another smithy and a malting yard. The existence of craft scale activity is further illustrated by several buildings which appear to have been built as workshops in the 19th century and which still survive today; however, there is no evidence of manufacture on an industrial scale. Rothbury developed extensively in the Victorian era, due in large part to the railway and the industrialist Sir William Armstrong. Between 1862 and 1865, Armstrong built Cragside, a country house just outside Rothbury, and extended it between 1869 and 1900. The house and its estate are now owned by the National Trust and are open to the public, attracting many visitors to the area.

A rail link was connected (1870), a large livestock market was opened near the railway station and Donkin and Son's stock market was established in 1871. This was the biggest cattle and sheep mart in the county which, in the last 30 years of the 19th century, increased the town's business by a hundredfold. This led to several business developments. The County Hotel was opened in 1879 and GA Mackay Plumber and Ironmonger was established in 1881. In the later part of the 19th century Rothbury also became popular as a health resort. The motor car brought Rothbury within easier reach of industrial Tyneside and visitors continued to come in increasing numbers to walk in the surrounding hills and enjoy the

pleasures offered by a peaceful rural market town at the gateway to the National Park. As the Northumberland County Council Extensive Urban Survey stated:

“The present-day town strongly reflects the form and character of the town as it was established in the 19th century, and it has continued to attract visitors and to act as a market and service centre for Coquetdale to this day.” (2009, p6)

Throughout the 20th and 21st century Rothbury has continued along a similar trajectory, offering a hub within Coquetdale for services and playing a key tourism role as the gateway to the National Park and the National Trust owned Cragside property. Due to its attractive location, it is a popular commuter town to Newcastle, an attractive retirement place and continues to have a thriving craft and artisan community. In 2013, following a campaign and petition lead by the local business community Rothbury became the first recipient of the Rural Community Broadband Fund with more than 370 homes and businesses able to place orders for fibre broadband and enjoy superfast internet speeds (Defra, 2013).

Rothbury continues to be perceived as a desirable town in and in 2016 was named in the Sunday Times Best Places to Live list (Northumberland Gazette. 2016) and in 2017 featured in the Guardian’s “Let’s move to” column (Dyckhoff, 2016). A local historian summed up Rothbury’s continuing popularity stating:

“To my mind, Rothbury remains a jewel in the Northumberland hills. Its situation is superb, its buildings a fascinating mix of traditional Northumbrian and post railway Victoriana. But most of all it is unspoiled. The wonderful greens and the trees are beautifully intact and lined with unbroken rows of intensely satisfying buildings. Long may it remain so.”

(Grundy, 2001)

4.2 Amble

The town of Amble is situated on the North East coast, at the mouth of the Coquet river in mid-Northumberland. It can be found 1 mile southeast of picturesque Warkworth and 9 miles south of Alnwick. Amble was built on a point of land that juts out, so providing extensive views of the coastline. It has a total population of circa 5,800 inhabitants making it the largest of the towns studied. Amble is one of 37 smaller 'seaside towns' in England and Wales which have a population below 10,000 and which qualify as 'rural' settlements in official definitions (DCLG, 2011). Amble is 32 miles from the nearest urban centre of Newcastle and the district administrative and service centre of Alnwick lies ten miles away along a "tortuous coastal road" (Alnwick District Council, 2008, p8). With the loss of the station at Amble, its closest rail link is now at Alnmouth, nearly six miles along the same coastal route. The A1 trunk road lies about 5 miles west but there is no good direct road access to it from Amble. The town is 38 miles from the border with Scotland.

Amble and the surrounding area have been populated for many centuries. Ancient British foundations have been found here, as well as Roman coins. Amble has always been industrious with evidence of salt-making in 1178 and descriptions of the town in 1538 described the abundance of sea coal. Sandstone was quarried here early in the seventeenth century. However, Amble was never seen as an exciting place – the history of Amble was described as "dull, meagre, and unromantic, with scarcely a single incident outside the "humdrum drudgery" of everyday life" (McAndrews, 1912).

From the Saxon invasion of Britain, there is evidence of ships having entered the River Coquet. Amble was originally located south of the mouth of the River Coquet, however in

March 1764, the river below Warkworth broke its banks and changed its course heading direct to the sea and changing the future of Amble. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Amble was simply three farms. In 1831 Amble's inhabitants were mostly agricultural labourers and fishermen, with a small number of coal miners. Salt extraction had been going on for centuries. In the parish registers it was unusual to have more than a couple of baptisms a year from Amble. In 1831, Amble Township had a population of less than 250 people. Ten years later the population had almost trebled to over 700. By 1851, there were more than 1000 inhabitants.

Whilst coal extraction was mentioned as early as 1608, the Industrial Revolution meant a significant expansion in coal mining to drive the new industries. Entrepreneurs, Robert Arthur F Kingscote of Gloucestershire and Thomas Browne, a solicitor of London recognised the opportunity of Amble and developed two projects. A bill was, enacted in 1837, as the Warkworth Harbour and Dock Act, allowing the creation of a harbour and they acquired a 42-year lease to extract coal creating the Radcliffe Coal Company. The infrastructure of Amble in the late 1830s and early 1840s was incapable of coping with the influx of workmen employed on the harbour works. Miners' cottages were built to house the pitmen. In 1837 Amble acquired an entirely new main street, Queen Street. The street included houses, shops and new pubs including the Waterloo Inn and the Dock Hotel, both of which still survive.

The Northern Catholic Calendar noted that, in 1840, the work on the harbour had attracted a considerable number of Irish labourers, most of who were lodged in temporary wooden huts. Throughout the 1840s, there were numerous advertisements offering building land for sale in Amble. Everybody was out to make their fortune. The Newcastle Courant of 1 May 1840, offered building sites for sale:

“The extensive improvements which are now in progress at Amble, the wide and valuable coal field by which it is surrounded, and the erection of a most convenient harbour, indicate the rapid rise of Amble into a large and flourishing seat of commerce, and insure for its purchaser an ample and safe investment for his capital.”

There were no street names in the 1841 census, inhabitants lived in “Amble” or on one of the surrounding farms, but it is clear from the quote below that Amble was increasingly a destination for entrepreneurship and activity:

“Yet by 1841 the speculators had moved in and there were disputes over rights of way, bankruptcies, Irish navvies, Scottish joiners and masons, beer shops, drinking and brawling. Save for the rule of law and order, Amble would not have looked out of place in the Wild West.”

(Rice, 2010)

The harbour was certified complete in 1849. 1849 was a landmark year as a branch of the Newcastle to Berwick Railway was opened which ran right to the harbour via Broomhill and Radcliffe collieries and the Warkworth Harbour Dock Company Act was passed in 1851 allowing staithe to be built at the harbour. By 1854, most of the Radcliffe and Broomhill coal was very efficiently being transported direct from pithead to ship. In 1861 due to the growth of coal exports, customs officers and coastguards were appointed.

In the 1870s, Mr Hugh Andrews took over the management of Broomhill Colliery, and the output more than doubled. The services of J. H. Merivale, Esq., Professor of Mining at Durham College of Science, was secured, and from a daily output of 1000 tons it rose to 2000 tons. It was stated that this was the end of an era as Amble was transformed from an agricultural village to an industrial mining town:

“The erstwhile obscure tiny village was suddenly invaded by crowds of workmen. From this time Amble ceased to be an agricultural village, and agriculture was forced to give way to the slow but steady march of the mining industry”

(Mc Andrews, 1912)

In 1874, the North Eastern Banking Company acquired a freehold site to erect substantial bank buildings. The same year saw an announcement from the North Eastern Railway Company that they would open a branch railway for passenger and goods traffic. Up to 1894 there was only a single line, and the Broomhill Coal Company found their traffic so congested that an application was made to Parliament for power to construct a new railway. As a result, an agreement was made with the North Eastern Railway Company to double the existing line from Broomhill to Amble, and this was completed in 1894.

The Newcastle Courant of 26 December 1876 captured the development in an article entitled “Progress at Amble.”

“The extensive improvements which are now in progress at Amble, the wide and valuable coal field by which it is surrounded, and the erection of a most convenient harbour, indicate the rapid rise of Amble into a large and flourishing seat of commerce, and insure for its purchaser an ample and safe investment for his capital.”

(Quoted in Rice, 2010)

Other industries such as ship-building and repair and sea fishing expanded with the growth of the town. An extract from Amble – The Young Port (1876) demonstrates the pace of change within Amble.

“Glancing down some of the new streets, we note there is no pavement, or it only extends along part of the length of the street; in one we perceive the stumps of the hedges and bushes that grew there a short time ago, or the great root of a tree, still in situ ; in another, an open burn, with only a few old planks thrown across it for people to walk on; and we note that the tramways for the coal-waggons cross the public roads and pathways without the least protection. But this incompleteness is by no means

the result of idleness or indifference; everyone is intelligently and briskly busy, and there is not a loungeer or beggar to be seen in the place. It is simply owing to the rapidity and recentness of its growth, and press of attention to other matters. As we have said, the whole population is heavily at work.”

(Quoted in Rice, 2010)

Whilst Amble was undoubtedly busy, the quote below recognises its isolation, noting that the sea was busier than the land:

“As Amble is not on the road to any other place, there is but very little wheeled traffic in it. The streets are comparatively quiet, owing to the absence of carriages, wagons, and omnibuses. Accidents are rare on the land, but, on the other hand, the sea furnishes its quota, and instead of street casualties, there are fishermen dying because they have been swept overboard and hurt, and sailors sick unto death brought into' the little hospital.”

(Quoted in Rice 2010)

The article continues recognising the:

“Extraordinary development which transformed “a tiny agricultural village into a prosperous, modern, industrial town in the space of a century.”

(Quoted in Rice 2010)

By the 1881 census, Amble was internationally recognised as there were 24 vessels listed at Amble, with ships and crews from Scotland, Kent, Denmark, Holland, and Germany. In 1897, the OS produced a 2nd Edition map which recorded the extraordinary changes in the town as it further industrialised. Queen Street had doubled in length and the harbour had a brickwork, boatyards, and an extensive network of high-level railway lines. Amble continues to be described as an industrial town with the following quote from a 1910 article:

“A modest, matter-of-fact workaday town, with little claim to the picturesque; Amble is essentially a modern town, with substantial stone-built houses, and well-made streets; a population estimated to be nearly six thousand—a purely industrial community,”

(Andrews, 1910).

The origins of Amble's nickname as "The Friendliest Port" came from a 1935 telegram sent by Amble Council to the captain of the famous Cunard Liner Mauretania as she steamed past on her way north to be scrapped. "Greetings from Amble, last port in England, to still the finest ship on the seas". Back came the reply: "Mauretania to Urban Council, Amble, to the last and kindest port in England, greetings and thanks. Mauretania." Decades of retelling this story means 'kindest' has now turned into 'friendliest' which forms part of the official narrative of Amble by the Development Trust and Parish Council.

So, what brought about the decline of Amble in the 20th Century? The very same things that had made it boom in the 19th. Coal exports from the harbour reached their peak in 1930 and thereafter started to decline. The Second World War led to increased government intervention in the industry due to its strategic importance. The post-war Labour Government nationalised the industry in 1946 under the newly formed National Coal Board. This led to much rationalisation and modernisation as well as improved conditions for mineworkers. The collieries producing the coal became uneconomic and closed, Broomhill in 1961 and Hauxley in 1966. The miners moved to other local pits at Shilbottle and Ellington or migrated to the South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields. The last coal shipment was in 1969 and the staithes were closed in 1970.

Attempts were made to find alternative exports for the harbour but, the river was never deep enough, despite dredging, to take boats of sufficient size. The railway station closed to passengers in 1930. The final demise for the railway came in 1969 with the cessation of the transportation of goods and coal by rail. The railway tracks and staithes were

dismantled. The harbour contracted and become simply a fishing port. Coal extraction continued with the expansion of opencast mining. Two neighbouring villages with significant populations, Radcliffe and Chevington Drift, were demolished in the 1970s/80s to make way for opencast mining. Inhabitants of these villages were moved to Amble and Hadston. The national pit strike in 1972 saw the miners form their blockade among the ruins of Radcliffe's streets to prevent the movement of the opencast lorries - the first national strike since 1926. Privatisation of the industry occurred between 1987 and 1994 with the last remaining colliery, Ellington closed in 2005.

Amble has been the recipient of regional development assistance from 1965, when the restructuring of coal-mining operations resulted in unemployment at 6.5 per cent, compared to a national average of 1.5 per cent (The Guardian, 1965). By 1969 with the closure of the nearby airbase of RAF Acklington, local unemployment exceeded 13 per cent. (Kershaw 1971). Several interventions were made by the public sector. In 1964, the local council purchased farmland to develop as a visitor caravan site which still exists today as the 5-star Links Holiday Park and, in the 1970s, the Braid was reclaimed in preparation for the development of the Amble Marina with secure berths for 250 vessels which opened in 1987. The development assistance was withdrawn in 1984, at which time a newspaper report noted that over 30 per cent of the 6,000 population were unemployed, with 80 per cent of council house tenants and 45 per cent of homeowners receiving benefits or rebates for their housing costs and over 25 per cent of children claiming free school meals (Hetherington 1984). The change in official status was one of the "glaring anomalies" of a government review, resulting from the town being reclassified as part of the "travel to work area" for Alnwick rather than a part of the industrialised regions to the south.

In 1994, Amble Development Trust was created as a limited company in response to these and in 1995 was constituted as a registered charity. The main objectives of the Trust are listed as:

“To regenerate the former coal mining town of Amble by taking a lead in most aspects of economic, social and community regeneration in partnership with other agencies and to provide the conditions and infrastructure for the restoration of community self-confidence, self-esteem and economic prosperity”

(Amble Development Trust, 1994)

The Development Trust has led several projects including a refurbishment of Amble Pier, a new town square, a beach hut development, and the creation of a retail Harbour Village. As shown in the quote below from the Amble Character Appraisal, the town is on a journey but is succeeding in creating a tourism destination.

“Amble has gone from a minor agricultural hamlet with a little long established but very modest industry nearby, to a major industrial port and supporting settlement and into a working holiday resort with a determination to grow its economy further.”

(Alnwick District Council, 2008 p,25)

In 2019, Amble was named by the Sunday Times as one of the best places to live by the sea and the article evidenced the significant regeneration efforts that had resulted in it receiving this accolade:

“Two decades ago, this former mining and fishing town at the mouth of the River Coquet was known mostly for its high unemployment rate and was bypassed for the brooding castles and sandy beaches of Bamburgh and Alnmouth, to the north. An enthusiastic regeneration scheme has transformed the harbour – now home to smart apartments, cafés, restaurants and the Northumberland Seafood Centre, a lobster hatchery and fish market – and with it the fortunes of the village.”

(quoted in Northumberland Gazette, 2019)

4.3 Wooler

Wooler is the market town of Glendale, a valley in North Northumberland which covers 250 square miles. The rural community has a population of around 6,000 with a third living in the market town of Wooler, 14 miles from the nearest traffic light and with only one direct bus per week to Newcastle which is thirty-seven miles away. It is perched on the western side of the Wooler Water, a tributary of the River Till, a site providing panoramic views across the Cheviots to the west and the Milfield Plain to the north-west. The nearest conurbations are larger market towns including Berwick which lies 15 miles to the north-east and Alnwick a similar distance to the south-east.

Since 1199 Wooler has been, and still is, the market centre for both the Milfield Plain (today a productive arable area with rich alluvial soils ideal for wheat) and the surrounding uplands. During the 13th century it was one of the richest towns in Northumberland with equal importance to Newcastle and Alnwick (Berwick Friends 2024). One of the reasons for the success of Wooler is that it lies on an important route (turnpiked in the 18th century) across the Borders (the present A697) between Morpeth to the south-east, and Coldstream to the north-west – ultimately a route between London and Edinburgh. It meant that over the later 18th and early 19th centuries, the town provided the important function of post or coaching stop. However, until the Union of the Crowns in 1603, the route was a mixed blessing, bringing Border reivers and before this, the armies of England and Scotland; Wooler was substantially damaged by the Scots in 1340 and 1409.

Always an important agricultural centre, Wooler was noted for its wool by the 1300s. The grazing of sheep on the higher land around the town is a mainstay of the agricultural

economy today, just as it was over medieval times. By that time Wooler was a major export centre, shipping wool to Berwick and onward to Flanders and consequently grew in wealth (Collier and Stewart, 1986, p 1). With the troubles of the border country, Wooler often fell victim to raids and this perhaps prevented the place from developing into a more substantial town. By 1821 Wooler contained a population of 1830 people and 315 houses, and held weekly markets for the sale of grains, especially corn. There were also two annual markets held for the sale of sheep, horses and cattle. Whellan's Directory of 1855 lists 13 inns in Wooler. Historically, these were sustained both by the town's role as a market centre and by its function as a post and coaching town.

The surrounding area was at that time mostly agricultural, as it is today, with sheep farming carrying out an important role. Whilst there was obvious farming wealth, the history books noted a culture of meanness and lack of investment in the town:

"The increasing opulence of the farmers operates favourably on the trade of this town, and the shops are well supplied with articles of almost every description: but though the adjoining lands have been for some time in a state of progressive improvement, most of the buildings [of the town] are suffered to remain in their ancient meanness, an emblem of the former poverty of the place"

(Parson and White's Directory of 1827, p488)

This meanness was remedied when, in the winter of 1862 a second fire broke out in the main street which did considerable damage. (Slater's Directory, 1864, p134). After this destruction

the Earl of Tankerville, Lord of the Manor, took the opportunity for a significant rebuild, and within a few years a new High Street emerged (Collier and Stewart, 1986, p66-7).

Wooler remained an isolated place for centuries until the coming of the railways in the Victorian era. The North Eastern Railway link between Alnwick and Coldstream was completed in 1887 and a station, yard and freight stores were built at Wooler. A mart was also created in a field opposite the station. It was subsequently enlarged, and an auction hall added (Collier and Stewart, 1986, p37-8). The arrival of the railway allowed Wooler to become a holiday retreat and it began to benefit from the tourist industry. Initially the line served both passengers and freight services, but after World War I its passenger use declined, and from 1930 the line was operated for freight only. After the track was badly flooded in 1948 the route declined, and parts were closed, although the Wooler to Cornhill section remained open until 1965. Many of the station buildings have been converted into houses and the waiting room into a Youth Hostel.

If we fast forward to modern day, Wooler is now a place in transition. Once a thriving agricultural area, the number employed in agriculture has dramatically decreased and population numbers have decreased significantly (ONS, 2021). Around 30% of the community is now at pensionable age, a mixture of an aging population and people moving into the area in their later years. For younger members of the community, it has become increasingly difficult to get on the property ladder (Johnstone, 2013). There have been a range of issues associated with rural decline identified including: affordable housing, unemployment, social isolation, lack of public transport and out-migration from the area of younger residents. The Glendale Gateway Trust was set up in 1996 as an initiative of Berwick Borough Council, the Community Council of Northumberland and Northumberland County Council to address

these issues of rural decline in the area following a village appraisal and has taken on a significant number of capital projects including building affordable housing and regenerating the high street.

Despite the concerns raised above, in visiting Wooler, you would observe a thriving high street, a very active local community evidenced by posters and events listings and in 2023, Wooler was named in the Sunday Times Best Places to Live (Northumberland Gazette, 2023). Glendale is designated as “an area of high landscape value” and is marketed as “Gateway to the Cheviots” resulting in tourism being a key growth economy which has resulted in two caravan sites. This move into tourism has received a significant boost with the creation of a new major £13 million investment in a visitor attraction. Ad Gefrin tells the history of Wooler’s anglo-saxon past alongside exploiting the local barley and water supply to produce a Northumberland Whisky. This is the brainchild of the third-generation owner of a haulage yard in Wooler, whose business had historically delivered the livestock to market but with the closure of the haulage yard in the 1990s had seen the property sit empty. Opened in 2023, the business has in its first year beat its target and seeks to revitalise Wooler.

5. Research Findings: materiality, meaning and practices in place

This section leverages Cresswell's sense of place (2009) and offer findings of a cross-case analysis that explain the development of entrepreneurship in the three towns. According to Cresswell (2009, p119) there are three elements of place – materiality, meaning and practice. These align closely with Halfacree's three-fold model of rural space with materiality being referenced as "physical rural", meaning linking to "perceptions of rural" and practice related to "living the rural". Under each of the headings we will consider on whether this element has impacted on the types of entrepreneurship in the three case studies and how. To do this, we will link the historic case studies with empirical evidence from the stakeholder and business interviews.

5.1 Materiality

Materiality covers the physical aspects of place and links closely to "rural locality" in Halfacree's threefold model of rural space. The materiality of the three towns clearly have significantly shaped the type of businesses and the development of these rural market towns. At a very basic level, the creation and growth of these towns is based on their materiality. The historic references demonstrate that Rothbury and Wooler both grew due to their physical locations at cross-roads for trading. Rothbury was located at the confluence of a key "droving" route and Wooler was on the main coaching route to Edinburgh. These towns continue to serve as hubs to this day for the surrounding hinterland enabling a greater range of businesses than the absolute immediate catchment could support. The importance of this hub role is emphasised in the quote below from a shop owner, and in particular the quote shows the importance of creating a critical mass of key services to give people reasons to visit the town.

“Rothbury is at the crossroads for lots of different villages and surrounding communities. And a big part is the other services – the hospital and the doctor’s surgeries. There’s lots of reasons for people to come to Rothbury and we all benefit from more visitors”

A1 - Hardware Shop

These settlements are also a consequence of the geology of the land and the natural resources. All three settlements developed because of their access to water on rivers which historically enabled people both to live and tend animals, but also used water as an industrial resource for mills and as a means of transportation. Amble was never well connected by land but grew due to its position on the river mouth and the North Sea and its proximity to the coal fields that fuelled the industrial revolution.

Water has always been of particular relevance to Amble. The historic case study shows that it was the flooding of the river that moved the course of the river north enabling Amble to connect to the coalmines to the south. This is probably the most instrumental factor in the historic development of Amble as the coalmines facilitated the development of the harbour which spawned related activity including ship building and fishing. If we fast forward, the port designed for coal transport now is now the heart of the tourist destination with the associated Harbour Village Development, a Seafood Centre include Lobster Hatchery and a boat marina. Amble has refocused its history focusing on fishing and the quality of its locally caught seafood giving it a unique selling point. The businesses that have developed in Amble often have links to the water from the UK’s largest kayak centre, a surf school, several award-winning fish restaurants, the harbour retail village, and the fishermen- each of whom are their own small business. Water still is a resource used by local businesses but instead of being a resource for production, in Amble it has become a resource for consumption with cafes and restaurants selling the waterside view. The physical geography can and does create opportunities which

Garrod referenced as countryside capital (Garrod et al., 2006). A local artist who had a sales pod in the newly established harbour village specialised in selling seascapes.

“Tourists love to take a picture of the sea home with them. I sell these landscapes as a gift card to shops all around the country. I am often asked if they are paintings of Cornwall and am proud to inform that this is Northumberland. I have a stockist of cards in Australia. I think it helps sell Amble and Northumberland as it shows people what’s here. Cards are great because they fit in a handbag or a pocket, so every day-tripper can take a little bit of the sea home for a few pounds, giving them a visual reminder of their visit.”

B15 - Artist

This quote highlights the emotional element of the purchase. This idea that people are taking a little of the rural landscape home with them to their urban lives reinforces the principles of the rural idyll and people projecting thoughts of carefree holidays with the rural and coastal landscape. The artist commoditises this landscape into a product that all can afford, making the consumption of the rural landscape a reality for all. This consumption of place was also perceived by some of the interviewees to change how consumers tasted and enjoyed their food product as indicated from this coffee roaster below:

“The coffee is good but like, it’s not the best in the world, it’s just well roasted coffee but it’s roasted in the Harbour Pod, so people can see it being roasted by the same person that serves you and can smell the roast when they enter the pod., people could buy something similar from most good coffee roasters. Being in Amble by the sea makes the difference, people buy a latte from the pod on the harbour, look out and watch the boats coming in and they think it’s the best coffee they have ever had. I’m not selling a hot beverage; I’m selling a luxury experience and one that’s affordable at £2.35 a cup. That’s what has made the business grow.”

B13 - Coffee Manufacturer

This quote shows how businesses incorporate elements of the meaning and materiality of place into their products, creating value for the consumer and the business. Furthermore,

several leisure-based businesses used the access to water as a key resource using the landscape as a recreational playground (Woods, 2010) as indicated in the quote below:

“It’s not a coincidence, that we’ve become one of the largest kayak suppliers in the UK. Amble is brilliantly placed for all types of water sports. The sea is five minutes away, Druridge Lake is ten minutes down the road, and we are on the river Coquet which is brilliant for running freshwater kayaking. Paddlers love visiting the area for the range of experiences and then they come and try a new boat or buy some kit with us. We’ve also worked hard on our search engine optimisation so that we are listed at the top of kayak searches”

B11 – Water sports Shop

This quote identifies how the location attracts specific types of businesses and customers. Finally, the physicality of the settlement can limit future development. The town of Rothbury did not grow due to its valley position and the lack of suitable land for industrial development. These restrictions have once again protected the local businesses and the charm and attractiveness of the community but have potentially also restricted competition and the market potential for businesses focused on growth. This tension is highlighted in the quote below where a supermarket is seen as a threat to existing businesses.

“There’s always a certain amount of anxiety about what point will the village get big enough for it to be a desirable place for a big supermarket. It’s hard to see where you would put one because of the geography of the place which I think is one of its strengths because you’re bounded on one side by the river and then the other by the hills”

L25 – Local Politician

The geography is therefore simultaneously a limitation to some businesses growth but is also creating opportunities and protecting several small businesses who may not survive in a more competitive environment.

5.2 Meaning

The meaning of place is a direct reference to how people perceive place. Meanings can be very personal and connected to individuals or can be collective representations. Place is therefore a social construct (Bunce, 1993). Meanings do not change quickly but take time to be created and are then reinforced through practice. It is therefore not surprising that key historical elements play out in the meanings associated with each of these places today. The same conditions that made Rothbury and Wooler strong agricultural areas hundreds of years ago continue to have impact as sheep farming continues to dominate the highlands of Wooler and the alluvial plain of Rothbury continues to provide fertile ground for grain. 14% of the working population of Glendale (the administrative unit of Wooler) and 12% of the ward of Rothbury is employed in agriculture, livestock, and forestry which whilst significantly less than historic numbers are still extremely high for a European country. This has direct effects on the nature of the local town and economy with the presence of long-term farming families and numerous indirect effects including the processing of agricultural product and a significant agricultural supply chain of SMEs such as fencing, mechanical and agricultural engineering.

Despite the changes to agriculture and reduction in jobs this agricultural base continues to define the meaning of Rothbury and Wooler with both still being associated with words like “traditional” and “rural” which can impact on the types of small businesses within the areas and how the place develops. The history of Rothbury shows a strong enduring sense of place – a place that embodies many of the attributes associated with rurality - prettiness, unspoilt, green spaces, community, a slower way of life, craftsmanship - but whilst maintaining those enduring qualities continues to innovate, connect globally, and secure the first rural fibre broadband rollout in the UK.

When the Guardian listed Rothbury as a place to “move to” it stated that Rothbury was “pretty perfect” and referenced the rurality and the friendly shopkeepers stating

“There are more sheep than people here, which makes for an idyll, plus shopkeepers who know their customers and have time to chat.”

(Dyhckhoff, 2017)

This image of rurality is practiced by the local businesses who use it to amplify their own brands reinforcing a normative nostalgic ideal (Bunce, 1993). When representing the rural (Halfacree, 2006) the image is one of tradition, offering a simpler, more wholesome life. This is not necessarily based on the reality of the rural but is a commoditisation of a perception of rurality. An example is in the photo below of a shop owner in Rothbury who has created a formal uniform for the shop with a tie and apron, formalities that reflect a traditional approach and evoke nostalgia.



Figure 4 – The Butcher’s Uniform

The use of language associated with rurality was also used in the naming of the products.

“We called the shop, Rothbury Family Butchers as we wanted to associate our product with this town. The family is just me, but I wanted it to sound rooted in Rothbury, it was important. Lots of our award-winning sausages are named after local landmarks, for example: the Cragside Cracker or the Simonside Sizzler”

A4 - Butcher

This quote shows how the shop owner wants to highlight other aspects of rurality including being rooted in the community and the importance of family and potentially inter-generational business. The quote shows how the producer's passion for place manifests itself in his business and how his business reinforces his identity in place. He is not just any producer, he is the Rothbury producer and whilst he is an incomer to the village, he chose to create a perception that the business was part of the heritage of the village. He continues to embed the business in location by calling more and more products after local landmarks, deepening the symbolic associations of the business with place.

The quality of lifestyle and the attractiveness of the physical environment have been critical to Rothbury's continued ability to attract people to live and support the community helping it remain relevant and resilient. Census data shows that Rothbury has more skilled workers and professionals (ONS, 2021) than the other towns studied and due to its desirable housing and distance to Newcastle, many residents commute to urban based jobs. There are also several successful knowledge-based service businesses such as Lazy Grace, a website designing business based in Rothbury or specialist niche businesses such as Potted History, a craft pottery business that creates replica pots for museums. These businesses successfully fought for Rothbury to be the first rural town to secure fibre broadband and now benefit from the increased connectivity enabling e-commerce and arguably reducing the distance penalty of rurality.

This relationship with the urban is also important to Rothbury's development. Interestingly whilst Amble is closer in miles to Newcastle, there was far greater reference in

the Rothbury interviews to Newcastle suggesting that distance is not just material but is also social. Whilst the history of Amble suggested it was always isolated by land on a promontory, Rothbury was always at an important road crossing and was later connected by the railway to Newcastle. Furthermore, Rothbury had many more trading connections with Newcastle particularly through the Victorian era with Lord Armstrong as his factories were based in Newcastle with his principal home in Rothbury.

Several of the businesses interviewed referenced links to Newcastle and the urban core. The table below shows some of the links referenced in the interviews and demonstrates that the connectivity between Newcastle and Rothbury is both a physical connectivity with better commuter links but also a social connectivity with many Rothbury residents and business owners commuting to Newcastle or using Newcastle for leisure, hobbies or for volunteering. These connections created value for Rothbury often bringing in new connections or ideas from outside the town. It could be argued that this social connectivity stopped Rothbury becoming simply just a pretty market town but kept it in step with the development of the urban core and enabled it to evolve and progress including creating the demand for fibre broadband.

Table 4 – Rothbury’s businesses stated links to Newcastle/Urban Core

A1 - Hardware shop	Lives in Newcastle, commutes to Rothbury
A2 - Computer Shop	Member of judo club in Newcastle
A3 – Art Gallery	Husband does significant work with Newcastle University. Son in law (who lives in Rothbury) works in Newcastle.
A4 - Butcher	Volunteers at soup kitchen in Newcastle. Goes to football and has a guest slot regularly on Radio Newcastle. Delivers to the wider Newcastle conurbation

A6 – Drinks Manufacturer	Wife volunteers with Refugees in Newcastle.
A7 - Property Developers,	Work with scout groups from Newcastle
A8 - Decorative Retailer	Husband commuted to urban core

These relationships also encouraged Newcastle day trippers and leisure tourists to consume the countryside as indicated in the quote below:

“We get lots of people who come on a Saturday morning for a drive out, they do a bit of shopping and then have a walk and then have some lunch and then drive home, having had a nice time. We’re just the right distance from town [Newcastle] for people to enjoy having a day trip and feel like they’ve had some clean country air before returning back.”

A4 - Butcher

However, there is also a future risk that the town hollows out and simply becomes a commuter town which was raised in the interviews as seen below:

“Rothbury has lots of people who leave the village at 7am and go work in Newcastle or in Nissan at Sunderland I fear a bit for Rothbury that it just becomes a commuter town for people moving out, full of NHS execs and Uni lecturers.”

L28 - Politician

Whilst it is clear from quotes like the quote from an academic below that Wooler also benefits from its attractive location, it’s distance from Newcastle means it has a different mix of residents and consequently businesses from Rothbury.

“Both for people who have moved to the village, as well as for many of those who have lived in the region since they were born, the natural beauty of Glendale and the Cheviot Hills is a very important reason to live here. They have the tranquillity and the majesty of the countryside round about very much in mind when it comes to assessing their quality of life.”

(Hernandez, 2018)

Wooler's peripherality, in part, defines its businesses with many being "lifestyle" businesses creating enough profit at best to support the owner but not seeking further profit. There is a distance tension - this distance both isolates and insulates the market town from competition but in doing so can also reduce the size of the market for businesses' services as seen in the quote from a shopkeeper below:

"The 17 miles from Alnwick to Wooler is both our greatest strength and weakness. Many people shop on the High Street because they don't want to waste an hour driving backwards and forwards and this means we maintain a far better range of services than if we were nearer another larger town or city. But that distance does restrict the jobs available and the access to social and cultural activity. It's hard to keep young people in a town like Wooler as there is not a lot for them to do, so we do have a predominantly older population. And this in turn impacts the type of shops and services that do well here and the ability for those businesses to grow."

C20 - Craft Shop

These lifestyle businesses make up most of the businesses interviewed in Wooler and there are examples of these types of businesses in both Amble and Rothbury. This distance tension is not evenly felt by all parts of the population with the feeling of peripherality impacting young people more forcing them to move and reducing the local labour market and skewing the demand for goods and services to those aimed at servicing older people. This process is self-reinforcing as the lack of services aimed at young people increases young people's propensity to perceive the town is not for them and to increase their desire to move out.

The lived practice of peripherality also can change the types of business. Peripherality is also a social construct. Wooler's distance from other settlements has not materially changed and at one stage in history it was one of the richest parts of the region but the value we place on agriculture and sheep farming has changed hence why peripherality is socially

constructed. There is not one universal relationship between business and peripherality. Different businesses have differing abilities to overcome the “distance penalty” i.e., the assumed cost of being peripheral and some can even use their remote location to their advantage. The business below diversified their offer to support the locals seeking to meet a wide range of their needs.

“Well, I’ve had this business since last November. It’s an optician and a wool shop. The shop was owned by the opticians but they decided they were going to run it anymore and so they asked me if I would take it on. They come up once a month to do tests so it’s like an outreach which is important as there isn’t an optician for miles, and they send me the glasses and locals come and collect them. When the opticians are not here, we use the dispensing room for craft classes, knit and chat etc. I also sell swimwear because the caravan park has a pool and people are always forgetting their swimming costumes and I have underwear and nightwear at the back of the shop as lots of the locals aren’t very mobile. If they pull up outside in their mobility scooters, I’ll take out what they need. And we have greetings cards as they have good margins. And I’ve got some catalogues and some of the locals come in and order stuff like cardigans and I can get them delivered to the shop.”

C20 - Craft shop,

The quote is indicative of the innovation and diversification of the community-based shop owners. On a business plan, the mix and variety of products seems entirely illogical but with local knowledge of the customer base, the owner continues to add new lines of product to grow and diversify her business whilst offering a much-needed local service. The impact of physical distance and an isolated market means that the businesses may tailor their service to the needs of the small local market creating businesses that are very bespoke to local conditions. As these businesses are so bespoke, they are only scalable to the size of the immediate community and any visitors. Furthermore, the bespoke nature of the businesses may mean that institutional stakeholders such as banks or grant makers may struggle to

understand the business model as it does not comply with assessment frameworks. This may explain why ninety percent of the businesses in the empirical research were self-financed.

Whilst Rothbury and Wooler's meaning as places has direct continuity from their past and has evolved, with differing degrees of success, Amble, in comparison, has suffered several exogenous shocks including most dramatically the closure of the coal mines, the removal of state aid and changes in fishing quotas limiting North Sea fishing vessels. The town's meaning was historically based on its "industriousness" but after its decline, the town was stripped of its meaning. Unlike Rothbury and Wooler, it had become dependent on large employers, who then left the town, leaving limited capacity to redevelop place. Through the work of the Development Trust, co-ordinating other small businesses it has had to reinvent its future, which is considered in the next section on practices.

5.3 Practices

Places are practiced. People do things in place. What they do, in part, is responsible for the meanings that a place might have. Most obviously places are left with the imprint of notable events such as battles and signings of treaties. Of relevance, is the continual reference in the histories of Wooler and Rothbury to the battles with Scotland, the Borderlands wars, a consequence of their material location but undoubtedly impacting the culture of both towns. The key theme that was continually reinforced in the coded data in Rothbury was the strong spirit of independence that in secondary coding related to this principle. This resulted in Rothbury resisting the creation of a Development Trust and the businesses of Rothbury not engaging in business associations or any form of organised institution. This independent

culture may explain the number of small businesses and the support for these small businesses from the wider community. One of the interviews said:

“Rothbury reminds me of Liberty in London. You can get everything but it’s a bit eclectic. It kind of orchestrates itself and self regulates with this independent offer.”

L25 – Local Politician

There was a recognition that collectively the businesses were stronger, but each asserted their independence, within the overall destination brand.

“Rothbury is like a department store, just with each department being owned independently – shoppers like visiting – they just don’t come for one shop but because the whole experience is attractive.”

A3 – Art Gallery

This lack of reliance on any one small business or leader may in part explain the resilience of Rothbury.

Within Wooler, there was a clear division between the incoming new residents who lead the Development Trust and the established locals that sat on the Parish Council with obvious conflict within the community continuing to be reported.

“I was asked to join the Gateway Trust. And I said to the Chair, the basic problem with the Gateway Trust, is it’s a posh people’s club. I said there is no-one in the Trust who lives in local authority housing, so this is not representative of our community at all. Their used to be a saying that you cannot trust the Trust. And that was a perception at grassroots level that they are largely self-satisfying. I don’t know the composition of the Trust, but I doubt whether there is working class guy on it.”

C19 - Wooler

An academic visiting Wooler referenced a culture of wilfulness that resulted from the Border history which may in part create a lens to understand the ongoing hostilities:

“Many of the people I have spoken to attribute a certain degree of wilfulness, to the locals resulting from the difficult living conditions in the past when the region was even more isolated than it is now. Furthermore, being a border region characterised by constant warlike conflicts, changes of political dominion, as well as by more than 400 years of skirmishes between border raiders and reivers and the inhabitants settled in the region, the local people have developed a notable degree of independence of action and self-sufficiency.”

(Hernandez, 2018)

Amble however has always prided itself as the “friendliest port” referencing a historic telegram in the narrative of the town. By continually practicing this story, Amble has in recent years grown significantly, with 1000 new houses in development but appears to have achieved this without upsetting the resident locals who instead seem to have welcomed the developments. This is indicated in the quote below from the Director of the Development Trust:

“I think locals are ok with the changes. We have always been called the Friendliest Port and this attitude has helped us integrate new people but the things people like such as the High Street and the Harbour are strong – they might be different, but they are thriving and the locals like that.”

L26 - Director

However, there is evidence even before the Mauretania that Amble was an open economy continually welcoming finance from London, entrepreneurs, and Irish navvies. The history of Amble tells a narrative of a town importing in labour, expertise and finance and exporting coal. The coal trade and the harbour meant it always looked out and had international connectivity. The coal entrepreneurs, the harbour owners and the railway developers were

all from outside the town but helped develop the town as a place of “industry”. When these industries closed Amble was left without meaning. The catapulting of Amble from a small agricultural settlement to a bustling growing coal port and then the subsequent decline of the coal industry was not within the control of the local community but was the result of global exogenous shifts demonstrating that small rural communities cannot and have never been able to focus on endogenous development alone (Hadjimichalis and Hudson, 2014). However, with the failure of national government support and the lack of significant capacity within the town, Amble could have drifted further into decline. It is however something within the industrious culture that made Amble want to be better as indicated in the quote below from the Amble conservation area plan.

“However, Amble is not just a post-industrial town like any other. The story of its evolution from a tiny agricultural hamlet, through a thrusting industrial centre, to a post-industrial town is unusually well recorded in its surviving layout and townscape. In addition, it occupies a wonderful topographical location at the river mouth of one of Northumberland’s finest rivers. It has the complex and sometimes confusing atmosphere of a place where small things have been made large and the large things now remain only as shadows of the past. The place has been enriched by its history but is now animated by a community wanting to evolve into a sustainable future, to the extent of creating a new iconic open space to celebrate this new aspiration. This makes Amble different than many other small industrial towns in the UK and the place feels different because of it.”

(Alnwick District Council, 2008, p40)

The Development Trust has worked with the local businesses to reinvent Amble as explained in the quote below:

“The businesses in Amble have on the whole been family businesses, we’ve never had many national businesses – so they were from Amble and wanted it to be better. Since forming the Development Trust in 1994 we have relied on these businesses as the national businesses abandoned Amble. Local families could not move their businesses and it was their livelihood, so they had to stick with it. They had to work with us to find ways to make Amble better because they had no other

options, and we must work with the local family businesses because we had no national corporates that we could turn to for help. Family run businesses will try and put everything into it, the only multi-nationals we have are Boots, Tesco, the Co-op, Post Office I suppose and TSB. If you oversee your own future, you are more committed.”

L26 - Director

Through the creation of the Development Trust, it has empowered the private sector to become advocates for the town creating a new identity (Creed, Dejordy and Lok, 2010) through their networks, investments, quality of the services they offer and their corporate brand reach. A number of these businesses have become key leaders and champions of the town with their businesses becoming symbols of change. In re-inventing Amble, the Development Trust outlined in the quote below how it used Amble’s history to guide its future:

“In Amble, everything we do is guided by our past. We are building on and reinventing those industries that we are known for. The Lobster Hatchery has been funded by the Development Trust as it tells the story of our fishing heritage. The Amble Boathouse restaurant put us on the map using our fine fish produce. The Harbour Village pods are designed based on upturned boats. We’ve built the bathing huts on Little Shore beach. Visitors love Queen Street because it’s an authentic real High Street with everything you used to see – a butcher, a baker, a fishmonger, a hardware store...”

L26 - Director

This commoditisation of heritage and focus on the classic bucket and spade Victorian holiday experience demonstrates the power of nostalgia in the rural representation. It also demonstrates that these representations of rural are social constructs, a decision of local policymakers and businesspeople, rather than based on historic reality. Amble’s history is one of mining and exporting coal. Amble Development Trust have cleverly refocused the history of the town, effectively developing a new historic narrative and new infrastructure to tell the

story of the market town. Even the Italian- sounding home-made ice cream shop, Spurellis, on the front is not what it seems as explained in the quote below from the Director of the Development Trust:

“Nick bought the Boat Yard and has been a key investor in Amble. He is good at using small amounts of public money to create a large project. Everything the Spurrs do, they do very well. He loves ice cream, so he challenged himself to create an ice cream parlour. Within months of being open Spurellis had won awards for its ice cream beating real established Italian ice cream parlours.”

L26 - Director

This lack of authenticity however has not damaged the perception of place. Amble is geographically at the end of the Northumbrian heritage coastline.

Through its efforts at regeneration, Amble has successfully repositioned itself as part of the heritage coastline using its businesses and its assets to dial up the heritage that links it to the North Northumberland heritage coastline and purposefully downplaying the industrial assets that link it to the south Northumberland industrial belt. This highlights that all geography is contextual and that the towns in the case studies do not exist in isolation but are shaped by the surrounding area. The role of small businesses and entrepreneurs have been key in recreating Amble, creating these new heritage-based businesses which attract visitors and change perceptions. The quote from the Amble Development Trust below shows the impact of the changes in Amble:

“The difference now is that people are moving into Amble. We used to be reliant only on the locals. Queen Street was shortlisted as the Best High Street due to all of its great independent shops, the Old Boat House won lots of national awards for its seafood and then we were highlighted by the Times as a top place to move to. This showcased all of the hard work we had done over decades to get people to think differently about Amble. The town can have changed immeasurably but changing

people's perceptions of the town takes time. People are now retiring from down South and using their house money to buy two properties – one to live in and one to rent out. So, we have a growing number of holiday homes which attracts more people to visit.”

L26 - Director

This demonstrates the role small businesses can play in rebranding place and creating destinations. Businesses in themselves can be destinations attracting people to travel to visit them. Destination businesses help redefine localities as destinations. A cluster of businesses can amplify a brand message and provide a powerful tool to reposition the place. Just as Amble in the 1800s was featured in national newspapers as a destination for investment and industry, Amble is once again becoming an exemplar destination for reinvention and new development.

5.4 Reflection on findings

The research considered how the businesses related to the materiality, meaning and practice of place (Cresswell, 2009). The physical environment has historically dictated the development of the settlements and provides resource that entrepreneurs use to create opportunities. However, even materiality is suggested to be a social construct as different aspects of materiality were perceived as important during different points in history. This is indicated by the changing wealth of the towns with all three at some point in history being hugely significant in the UK and now appearing as small and relatively unknown. The materiality is used by the businesses and place to create meaning. Meaning becomes the “brand” of the place i.e. what it is known for. This meaning is critically important to the places remaining relevant as they need to adjust to exogenous conditions over time.

Wooler is continuing to adjust to the changing nature of agriculture with the aim of repositioning its future to becoming a tourist destination. With its position 40 miles from the urban core, a limited local market and an ageing demographic, many of the local businesses are foundational lifestyle businesses. The new £13m attraction created by a local entrepreneurial family telling the story of Wooler's Anglo-Saxon history and using the local barley and water to create whisky, a high value product will undoubtedly give this reinvention a significant boost.

Rothbury has successfully utilised its social connectivity to Newcastle to become a thriving commuter town and the post covid work shift enabling more people to work from home alongside its pioneering approach to securing fibre broadband means that Rothbury is well placed to provide local basic services whilst supporting a population of knowledge workers, niche businesses selling on the internet and craftspeople. Rothbury is a good example of how a town has successfully adapted fundamentally changing with globalisation and technology and highlighting the ongoing blurring of the rural -urban continuum (Pahl, 1966).

Amble's story is potentially the most dramatic as it has been driven by exogenous forces creating huge growth from a small agricultural settlement to a booming coal town and then huge decline resulting in mass unemployment. Over the past thirty years, using a classic neo-endogenous model including small scale interventions lead by a local Development Trust and practiced by small local businesses Amble has created new meaning and is now earmarked for a further 1000 homes creating significant growth and attracting larger scale businesses to the area, creating further change. However, the increased prosperity means the national businesses that once abandoned Amble are once again looking at re-investing with the

opening of a new retail park with a large-scale national supermarket chain. With the High Street already changing, featuring a dominance of service-based business and recognising the impact of internet shopping, the key question is whether Amble's neo-endogenous approach will enable local businesses to survive in an increasingly competitive environment.

Both Rothbury and Wooler continue to show cultural traits developed through the challenges of years of Borderlands wars. Rothbury businesses and residents are staunchly independent and very supportive of independent businesses but through historic relationships with the urban core of Newcastle appear to be able to blend rural and urban characteristics marketing themselves with rural attributes but underpinning this with technologies, business acumen and innovation more closely associated with urban environments. In Wooler, this Borderlands "single mindedness" appears to create more conflict, perhaps because of the peripheral location, the town seems more introspect and shows a level of resentment of "outsiders". Amble however uses historic stories of the "Friendliest Port" to retell and reinforce its narrative of being friendly and welcoming. This narrative has helped it embrace new start-up businesses, for example, the harbour village development and develop a service culture suited for tourism. It has achieved this with limited resentment between locals and new residents or holidaymakers which perhaps reflects on its history welcoming diverse groups of people from Irish labourers, international ships, and London bankers.

6. Discussion

The historical case studies evidence the complex interplay between place and entrepreneurship demonstrating how Cresswell's components of place (2009) – materiality, meaning and practice - impact entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship impacts place. Market towns within a few miles of one another, can operate fundamentally differently due to the interplay of global and local factors (Gkartzios et al., 2022). As the exogenous factors (Bryden and Munro, 2001) were constant for the three towns, it demonstrates the range of endogenous impacts which influence rural community resilience.

Whilst the three towns researched all demonstrate resilience, their journeys are very different as are their approaches, which reinforces the findings by Aoyama (2009) that places have vastly different cultural orientations or meanings and as these meanings develop over time in response to history, it is very difficult to change these quickly as they are resistant to short term policy interventions (Wyrwich, 2012). Figure 1 below shows that entrepreneurs use the resources of place – both material resources and the meaning of place as inputs to create value for their business. Historically, rural businesses have often been suggested to be resource constrained but the research reinforces that resourceful embedded entrepreneur find value in many aspects of the materiality and meaning of place from the natural landscape (Bosworth, 2012; Halfacree, 2009; Bosworth and Turner, 2018), tradition (Benneworth, 2004) or community loyalty (Bosworth, 2012) and use it in their practices to create competitive advantage or differentiation. This research illustrates that the entrepreneurs are not resource constrained but have access to different resources in their spatial context (Korsgaard et al., 2021) and suggests that the apparent constrained nature of resources is often socially constructed (Baker and Nelson, 2005) and seen from an urban bias.

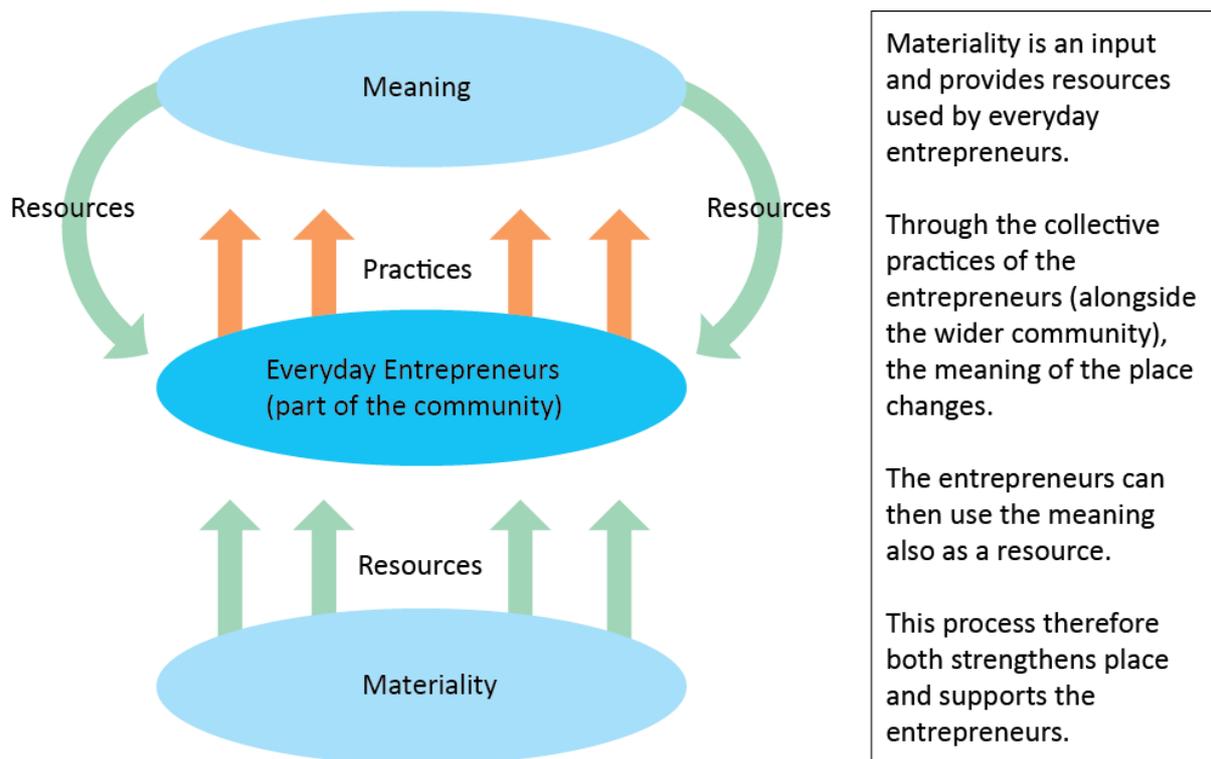


Figure 5 – The relationship between the components of place and entrepreneurship

The meaning of place is an outcome that can be changed by the practices of the entrepreneurs over long periods of time supporting their role in community development (Lyons et al., 2012) and reinforcing the principle that small rural businesses are spatially and socially entrenched (Anderson, Warren and Bensemman, 2019). This research illustrates the critical role businesses can play in creating a shared sense of identity which is fluid enough to enable communities to adapt and progress (Bosworth and Willett, 2011). The practices of the businesses often enable or require the entrepreneurs to import external ideas and thinking impacting the meaning of the community but as the business owners and staff are often also part of the community (Sommerville, 2011), they are likely to be familiar, have strong networks and community understanding invoking trust and supporting the acceptance of change. In sparse communities, where there are fewer players, the role of small businesses is particularly significant as they often represent the local institutional capacity (Gaddefors,

Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020) helping mobilise internal resources to support local development (Ward, 2003) and manage external factors which is critical in neo-endogenous community development.

If supporting the resilience of rural communities is a government objective (DLUHC, 2022), then there needs to be a significant focus on building local capacity including entrepreneurial capacity to enable the community to mitigate and manage change. This creates a significant challenge for government. Whilst there have been calls for specific rural policy (House of Lords, 2019) this research suggests that there is no one “rural” with the needs of each community differing significantly. Rural proofing at a national level equally will not enable the nuance required in approaches to enable local appropriate place-based policy. A significant resource which could be encouraged to support place based neo-endogenous approaches is the small business community. As Lowe et al state:

“if endogenous development has any meaning it must refer to a local development potential which state agencies may be able to stimulate and channel but which exists independently of them” (1995, p2).

Everyday entrepreneurs could be this local development potential, however currently enterprise and rural policy offers very limited support for these types of “everyday entrepreneurs” as it fails to recognise their social and community value. As Bosworth (2012) stated if we can reward farmers for creating environmental impact through the changing agricultural policy approach, would it not be possible to create tax incentives to support rural entrepreneurs to create social community impact? New policy approaches need to be considered to enable vibrant rural communities to continuously reinvent against a backdrop of significant change.

7. Contribution

The historic case studies illustrate the heterogeneity of rural communities (Gkartzios et al., 2022) and show how diverging development paths are created because of history, geography and community practice. As the exogenous factors (Bryden and Munro, 2001) were constant for the three towns, it demonstrates the range of endogenous impacts which influence rural community resilience, in particular the materiality of place which both provides a resource and opportunities but also can limit development or entrepreneurial growth. The research shows this results in different entrepreneurial cultures, market opportunities and community leadership capacity, creating different types of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship as well as different community structures.

The paper explores the spatial context of entrepreneurship demonstrating the agentic relationship between everyday entrepreneurs and their spatial context and reinforces that small businesses are spatially and socially entrenched (Anderson, Warren and Bensemann, 2019). In doing so, the research highlights several factors relating to both to the materiality and meaning of place (Cresswell, 2009) that are associated with rural and demonstrates how enterprising business owners use these as resources, suggesting that rural businesses should not be characterised by the label of resource constrained but instead recognised as having access to different types of resource (Korsgaard et al., 2021).

The collective everyday practices of the entrepreneurs also over time change the meaning of the place and therefore the research recognises the role everyday entrepreneurs can play in neo-endogenous community development (Bosworth et al., 2018), particularly in

peripheral communities with “thin institutional” capacity (Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020).

The paper has practical implications for policy makers as it demonstrates the complexity of applying universal rural or enterprise policy due to the increasing heterogeneity of place and plurality of rural identities (Gkartzios et al., 2022) and raises the need to encourage “everyday entrepreneurs” as they are a key part of the institutional capacity available in small towns to create neo-endogenous change.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This research has obvious limitations. It researches the specificities of the relationship between entrepreneurship and place through historic sources and lived experiences of twenty-four entrepreneurs in three towns in the same administrative county of Northern England and therefore may have limited transferability. It is however possible to embrace pluralistic universalism by accepting that knowledge is place sensitive and bound by specific cultural norms and that reapplication may be disruptive or even inappropriate (Lowe, 2012). This universalism makes it possible to learn something from every context if there are sufficient sensitivities to the unique realities of lived entrepreneurial practices.

Through this historic case study approach, supplemented with interviews which illustrate the real lived experiences of everyday entrepreneurs, it does however enable the researcher to consider a level of detail not available in other forms of methodology and as the research is about context it enables the researcher to fully immerse themselves within the rural contexts of these three towns over an extended period.

This research used historical data to consider aspects of place that impacted on entrepreneurship and identified that meaning changed with time with each of these towns being rich and of national importance at some stage in their history. This would suggest that a longitudinal study of the development of lived experience of rural entrepreneurship in the context of specific places could give greater understanding of the agentic relationship between entrepreneurship and place.

This research specifically chose to focus on three rural market towns in sparsely populated Northumberland. Further research could consider whether “everyday entrepreneurs” have a different relationship with place in a suburban town considering the validity of the differentiation of rural (Hoggart, 1990; Pahl, 1966).

The research touches on the capacity of communities to create change and the role entrepreneurs play in creating the institutional capacity to support neo-endogenous development within these peripheral communities (Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020). Within two of the towns, the business community played a key role in supporting and developing social enterprises to create a vision for the community, in the form of Development Trusts, whereas the third relied on individual, independent efforts. Further research could consider the role of entrepreneurs in supporting community development by comparing informal and more formally organised community capacity vehicles.

Finally, the research demonstrates the key role the business community can play in supporting the resilience and regeneration of local communities and illustrates the challenge of universal government policy in addressing the diverse needs of heterogeneous rural communities. Future research could consider how government could recognise the importance of everyday entrepreneurship and incentivise more everyday entrepreneurs within these communities.

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Chapter 4 - BRIDGING THE POLICY GAP – THE ROLE OF MESO INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORTING RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Abstract

National government entrepreneurship policies are focused on the macro-outcomes of productivity and growth, more easily measured and delivered in larger businesses and rural policy continues to be dominated by agricultural interests. However, within the rural economy, there are few large businesses, and the rural economy is facing a paradigm shift moving from the historic dominance of the agricultural sector to a diversified, multi-sector approach (OECD, 2006). Furthermore, the emerging school of rural entrepreneurship research suggest that rural entrepreneurs are often not motivated by profit but by social and community outcomes. There are therefore several sources of disconnection between national policy and the lived experience of rural places and entrepreneurs.

Sustaining the rural economy is increasingly dependent upon working with a wide range of small businesses within sparse rural communities. With a national government reluctance to create specific rural policy, a recognition that local communities have differing capacity to support development and a realisation that local communities cannot overcome the challenges of globalisation alone, the research seeks to consider how national policies are adapted to meet the needs of rural entrepreneurs and communities.

This research is divided into two parts. First, it seeks to unearth the sources of disconnection in the institutional context to better understand why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel 2020). Second, leveraging data and translation theory, it seeks to delineate the roles and practices of the meso-level institutions in bridging the gap between macro universal policy and the micro-community level requirements.

This paper contributes to understanding the under-researched institutional context of rural enterprise policy and develops a theoretical model to explain the role of meso level governance in bridging the relationship between exogenous national government policy and endogenous community activity within this changing rural paradigm (OECD, 2006).

1 Introduction

This two-part paper seeks to unearth the sources of disconnection in the institutional context to better understand why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel, 2020) and leveraging data and translation theory, it seeks to delineate the roles and practices of the meso-level institutions in bridging the gap between macro universal policy and the micro-community level requirements. Rural communities are facing a significant paradigm shift (OECD, 2006) from places dominated by agricultural interests to places with mixed economies supporting an increasingly diverse range of businesses. The resilience of communities including restoring local pride and supporting high streets has been identified as a key government policy priority (DLUHC, 2022). As small businesses are often the only economic drivers within rural communities and have social impact delivering key services and animating the wider community, they are critical players in the regeneration of rural communities (Campbell, James and Kunkle, 2013; Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup, 2020). However, research suggest that “poor public policy and a lack of political will” means that the rural economy is 19% less productive (per worker) than the national average – a problem that costs the UK £43bn in lost economic output each year (APPG, 2022; APPG, 2023). This failure by successive governments over many decades creates an environment that left rural communities uniquely vulnerable to geopolitical events.

National government policy is focused on creating jobs, productivity, and growth. A focus on these outcomes tend to favour large business and as rural areas have fewer large businesses reinforce an urban bias resulting in a lack of relevance for the rural entrepreneurial eco-system. While economic development has been traditionally the role of national governments, this responsibility is increasingly complex with devolution creating new levels

of regional governance (Pike et al., 2015) which creates issues of multi-level governance. Interactions between bodies at all levels are necessary for successful policy making and service delivery (Piattoni, 2010) but are often characterised between tensions at different layers (Munoz and Kimmitt, 2019). With the demographic and social changes linked to the decline in agriculture in rural areas, it is recognised that delivering competitive rural economies requires a more sophisticated approach to policy development moving away from a top-down national government framework to include the integration of bottom-up local level policies with regional and national approaches (OECD, 2006). The fortunes of rural areas are increasingly influenced by the nature of their relationships with the extra-local including their distance to urban settlements, topography, natural resources, skills levels, attractiveness to incomers or tourists and housing stock. There is no longer one definition of rural but many local versions resulting in a real challenge for national government, who prefer universal policy due to efficiency and equity concerns, to create relevant interventions. There is a need for a better understanding of the relative interplay between the increasingly complex levels of government and new models of governance (Spigel, 2015) and a need to consider the institutional conditions that shape local and regional development (Gertler, 2010) and how they do it.

To explore this phenomenon in context, this paper considers entrepreneurship in the rural market towns of Northumberland in Northern England. Northumberland is characterised by its rurality and sparse population with no cities and consequently it is a county of market towns dominated by small businesses. These market towns are often important service hubs for wider rural populations and due to changes in retail and agriculture they are also places in flux with complex community needs.

This research is divided into two parts. First, it seeks to unearth the sources of disconnection in the institutional context to better understand why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel, 2020). Second, and leveraging data and translation theory, it seeks to delineate the roles and practices of the meso-level institutions in bridging the gap between macro universal policy and the micro community level requirements. The research seeks to answer Peck and Theodore's (2015) call for more investigation into the mutually constitutive role of macro-political and economic processes and patterns of local and regional development creating greater clarity on the roles of different actors.

The research concludes that there are five sources of disconnect related to: strategy; resource; structure; timeframes and scale. The local authority meso level is doing more than transmitting policy from the national to the local but is developing local capacity and influencing national policy to make it more relevant whilst continually evolving its own role to meet the needs of a multi-level governance framework. The research contributes to theory by illustrating how: the meso level bridges power dynamics (Shucksmith, 2010); manages macro-concerns (Ward, 2005); joins disparate national policies, funding streams and projects to create one local place-based narrative; and simultaneously supports the local communities to build capacity (Ward, 2005) to enable implementation within the rural context (Bosworth et al., 2016). It helps explain how with the right skills and resource at the meso level national mainstream policy can be developed to support the specific needs of rural communities ,potentially questioning the need for specific rural legislation (House of Lords, 2019) but instead requiring greater funding to recognise the increased costs of implementation in sparse, peripheral areas.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Changing Nature of Rural

Despite statements that “the countryside is one of our greatest assets” (House of Lords, 2021 p1) and that “rural areas are at the heart of our levelling up agenda” (DLUHC quoted in Rural Services Network, 2022), this research highlights a disconnect between national government policies and support for entrepreneurship in rural communities. An All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse (APPG) suggested that “poor public policy and a lack of political will” means that the rural economy is 19% less productive (per worker) than the national average – a problem that costs the UK £43bn in lost economic output each year (APPG, 2022; APPG, 2023). This failure by successive governments over many decades creates an environment that left rural communities uniquely vulnerable to geopolitical events.

Rural is a contested term (Woods, 2005; 2011). Historically, definitions of rural areas have focused on what they lack compared to urban areas, such as peripheral locations, infrastructure deficiencies, and reduced competitiveness (Lowe et al., 1998;). These positivist definitions obscure the fact that different places have their own culturally specific ideas of the countryside (Woods, 2005). In response to these challenges, new social constructionism has shifted towards embracing a diversity of values and identities, moving away from fixed representations (Gkartzios et al., 2021).

Despite significant transformations in rural areas, the dominant discourse still treats them as residual and subordinate spaces requiring minimal intervention or investment (Gkartzios et al., 2021). Rural areas are often depicted either as idyllic retreats for elites or as

"left behind" regions lagging technologically, culturally, and economically, unable to compete globally (Murdoch et al., 2003). This "rural myopia" fails to acknowledge the complex realities of contemporary rural places, which are influenced by an increasingly diverse contextual environment. This myopic view is largely due to agriculture-biased perspectives that prioritize farming and preservation interests over other rural activities, ignoring the fundamental changes in the rural economy labelled as the new rural paradigm by the OECD (2006). This paradigm shift is driven by the decline of agriculture as the dominant sector and lifestyle in rural communities.

As rural areas transition from an agriculture-centric focus to a multi-sectoral approach, diverse development strategies have emerged, shaped by local land ownership structures and regional social changes (Murdoch et al., 2003; Terluin, 2003). Differences in economic development success between rural localities can be attributed to the interplay of global and local factors (Bryden and Munro, 2000; Woods, 2007). The evolution from a positivist to a dynamic and transformational understanding of rural areas acknowledges that rural places are ever-changing and shaped by the power and agency of multiple groups (Frouws, 1998; Richardson, 2000). This new rural paradigm (OECD, 2006) underscores the heterogeneity of rural areas and the challenge of one-size-fits-all approaches (Ward and Brown, 2009).

2.2 Rural Enterprise

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been viewed as a market phenomenon involving alert individuals seeking profit from economic exchanges with other market participants (Hebert and Link, 1989). Historically, entrepreneurs were seen as financially driven, ambitious, young risk-takers with high-tech, high-growth innovative business ideas, often backed by banks

(Autio et al., 2014; Acs et al., 2016). These entrepreneurs were typically studied in isolation, without considering their contextual settings. However, there is an increasing body of research focusing on "everyday entrepreneurs" (Steyaert and Katz, 2004), those businesses we interact with daily in our communities, which are contextually embedded and socially situated (Anderson, Warren and Bensemann 2019).

There is evidence that the rural context uniquely shapes the activities and behaviours of rural business owners, leading to distinct features that create different types of value for local economies and communities (Bosworth, 2012; Bosworth and Turner 2018). This perspective recognizes a different type of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018), where rural business owners' motivations often extend beyond profitability (Steiner and Atterton, 2015; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Steinerowski et al., 2008). The make-up of the business sector in rural areas is also different. Rural areas host higher proportions of self-employment (3.7% for rural compared to 0.8% for urban firms) and employment in small (28.6% for rural and 19.2% for urban firms) and microenterprises (29.6% for rural and 24.8% for urban firms) (Defra, 2018, quoted in Phillipson et al., 2019).

Since entrepreneurs and their activities are embedded in social, institutional, and spatial relations, which significantly shape their actions (Dacin et al., 1999; Thornton, 1999), entrepreneurship varies across different contexts (Thornton, 1999; Zahra, 2007). Several studies indicate that the effects of context on entrepreneurship are more pronounced in rural and depleted areas (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever, Anderson and Jack, 2014). However, there is debate about how best to encourage entrepreneurship, with tension between central national policies and local approaches (Peck and McGuinness, 2003; Benneworth, 2004). This debate is particularly relevant for rural areas, with ongoing discussions about the need for a

national rural strategy (House of Lords, 2019), greater rural proofing of mainstream activities (Defra, 2024), or local tailoring of national activities to fit specific places (Phillipson et al., 2019). National government's reliance on start-up rates and measuring entrepreneurship through new firm formation rates (Acs and Armington, 2004; Van Stel and Storey, 2004) does not reflect the multi-dimensional approach required to foster a local entrepreneurial culture (Huggins and Williams, 2011).

To unlock the untapped potential in rural areas, calculated at £43bn (APPG, 2022), it is argued that policy needs to focus on facilitating growth by ensuring that the support is tailored to local contexts in which rural businesses are operating (Bosworth et al., 2016). Furthermore, entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as being agentic, changing the context in which it operates. Entrepreneurship is seen as a key mechanism to counter unequal regional development (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Labrianidis, 2006; North and Smallbone, 2006; OECD, 2006). Developing the resilience of all parts of the UK has been identified as a key government policy (DHLUC 2022). It is increasingly recognized that private sector businesses play a critical role in enhancing the adaptive capacity of communities (Campbell, James and Kunkle, 2013). Entrepreneurial agency develops and reconfigures local and regional contexts, economies, and institutions (Anderson, Warren and Benseman, 2018; McKeever, Jack and Anderson, 2015).

2.3 A Brief History of Rural Development Policy 2014 – 2024

This section considers rural development policy pre-Brexit. Historically, rural enterprise policy focused primarily on agricultural support, reflecting the dominance of farming in rural economies. Subsidies, grants, and regulatory frameworks were designed to stabilize farm

incomes and enhance agricultural productivity (Lowe and Ward, 2007). However, as the economic landscape shifted, policy makers recognized the need for diversification beyond agriculture, leading to broader support for non-farming rural enterprises.

From 2014 – 2020, the key focus of rural development was from funding from the EU, particularly the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) which formed part of the Common Agricultural Policy. The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) introduced in 2014 was a major beneficiary of EU funding and provided a framework for supporting rural businesses, focusing on enhancing competitiveness, promoting sustainable land management, and improving the quality of life in rural areas (Defra, 2014).

However, the RDPE has been criticised for its strong emphasis on agricultural development which failed to reflect the diversity of England's rural communities (Dwyer et al., 2007), the complexity and bureaucracy associated with accessing funding creating barriers for micro-businesses and its focus on top-down development (Shucksmith, 2000). This approach can lead to misalignment between policy objectives and local realities, resulting in interventions that may not be well-suited to specific regional contexts.

The notable exception to the dominant exogenous approach was the LEADER programme launched in 1991 which encouraged local action groups to design and implement development projects, fostering a bottom-up approach to rural enterprise support (European Commission, 2014). LEADER however faced criticism that it did not offer value for money based on the costs per job evaluation criteria set (Ekosgen, 2011). However, evaluations that considered the wider benefits of LEADER identified significant non-economic outcomes for example - the creation of social capital (Nardone et al., 2010) and the high level of volunteer

support (Ekosgen, 2011). It was argued that whilst the measurable economic effects of LEADER may be small, their impacts can make a real difference to local communities (Bosworth et al. 2016).

The combination of local resources and external forces, termed neo-endogenous development (Lowe et al., 1998; Ray, 2001), exemplifies a shift in rural governance (Scott and Murray 2009; Bock 2019). Critics, however, caution against bias and elitism in participation processes (Storey, 1999; Shortall, 2008) and argue that relying solely on local factors is unrealistic in a globalized context (Ward et al., 2005). Neo-endogenous development relies on the gradual evolution of networks, the accumulation of local knowledge, and the building on past achievements (Bosworth et al., 2016). This process can enhance confidence and capabilities, allowing external actors to loosen their control over procedural matters. It also enables local actors to follow their own objectives. In each case, increased confidence in local systems has led to greater local control. (Lowe et al., 1995; Ray, 2000)

Post Brexit in 2020, the government has introduced several agriculturally based schemes and other than the Rural England Prosperity Fund (2022) has relied on mainstream Levelling Up funding (DHLUC 2022) which was aimed at supporting all parts of the UK to reach their potential and Shared Prosperity funding, which was established to replace EU structural funds, aiming to reduce regional inequalities and support economic development. A portion of Shared Prosperity Funding was dedicated to rural areas.

3. The Research Methodology

This research is divided into two parts. First, it seeks to unearth the sources of disconnection in the institutional context to better understand why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel, 2020). This requires an understanding of national level sources of disconnect and as it would be impractical to interview national politicians and policymakers, the first element of research was a desk based policy document review of rural and enterprise policy post 2020. This policy documentation review was supported by qualitative empirical interviews at the meso and local levels. These qualitative interviews are designed to understand further the roles and practices of the more local institutions in bridging the gap between macro-universal policy and the micro-community level requirements (Peck and Theodore, 2015).

A qualitative approach was chosen as in-depth interviews are particularly applicable to policy research, as they address objectives concerning contextual, evaluative, and strategic issues and provide rich and worthwhile data (Burton, 2000). As this research is considering context, a qualitative approach would seem valid as the objectives are understanding the complex interplay between the multi-level of governance (“how and why”) rather than measuring (“how many”) (Gartner and Birley, 2002; McKeever et al., 2015). Whilst the publicly available official documents help identify the key themes and the role of national government, conducting interviews is essential to understand in greater detail the regional and local perspective and to give a view beyond the formal discourse. Furthermore, it allows understanding of the interpretation of policy objectives and their implementation, within Northumberland institutional settings (Rucht and Gerhards, 1992).

3.1 Study Context

Given that this study is interested in context, it is important that the research describes the context (McKeever et al., 2015). This research is set within rural Northumberland. Northumberland is England's most northern county. Since 2009, Northumberland has been the UK's largest unitary authority by geographic coverage and is also the most sparsely populated in England being home to circa 320,000 people with a population density of 163 people per square mile (ONS, 2021). The County has no cities with the nearest being Newcastle Upon Tyne and is dominated by market towns. Northumberland was chosen as the study area due to its peripherality and its focus on market towns and small businesses.

The Northumberland Economic Strategy 2019 – 2024 sets out six priorities which include: "Support enterprise and investment" and "invest in towns and communities" and references small rural businesses acknowledging their barriers to growth stating:

"Northumberland is home to competitive small businesses; our ambition is to support this base to grow and operate in new markets. Many face particular barriers to growth in rural communities and our mission is to remove as many as possible and ensure that all companies in Northumberland have the opportunity to reach their potential."

(Northumberland County Council, 2018 p12).

As this research seeks to understand how peripheral areas outperform expectations, the research focused on market towns that were acknowledged to have successfully regenerated.

The challenge of towns is not unique to Northumberland but is recognised as a national challenge. The former Prime minister, Rishi Sunak, said in launching his Towns Plan:

"Towns are the place most of us call home and where most of us go to work. But politicians have always taken towns for granted and focused on cities. The result is the half-empty high streets, run-down shopping centres and anti-social behaviour that

undermine many towns' prosperity and hold back people's opportunity – and without a new approach, these problems will only get worse.”

(DLUHC, 2023 p4).

It is due to this resurged interest in towns and the dominant narrative that they are “left behind” that this research, specifically focuses on three market towns where they have retained a strong high street, a thriving small business base and an active community to try and understand the reasons for these town's relative success.

Several wards within Northumberland were researched and considered using data from the 2011 census. Three rural (Bibby and Brindley, 2013) towns were chosen, all of whom had seen significant changes in their key industries and all of whom appear to be prospering with vibrant High Streets and busy community noticeboards. These communities were selected because they are small, socially and geographically self-defined and therefore they offer some transparency of social process and influences (McKeever et al., 2015). Koestler's (1964) view is that the smallness of an area should make social patterns including the processes of entrepreneurs easier to analyse which in other places may be confused by density and diluted by size (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever et al., 2014; Martin et al 2015).

3.2 The Data Collection and Analysis Process

The first stage of data collection involved an in-depth review of policy documentation to identify the potential sources for the disconnect indicated in the literature review. As this study is considering multi-levels of governance, policy documentation was considered from national government, regional and local government, and available policy documentation at

a local town level. The policy research captured in Table 1, below, focused on policies post 2020 as this represented a new period of UK rural policy development as prior to this point UK policy had been heavily influenced by European Union agricultural and rural policy.

Table 1 – Key Policies relating to National Rural Economy and Northumberland Rural Economy 2020 – 2024

Policy Document	Author	Key Themes
Macro – international/national		
BEIS SME Action Plan 2022- 2025	BEIS	5 priorities - cheaper energy and net zero by 2050, innovation: boost enterprise, support cost of living; drive economic recovery from covid
Delivering rural opportunity 2024	Defra	Rural economy benefits from 3 funds: UK Shared Prosperity; Levelling Up; £110m Rural England Prosperity Fund administered by Councils
Our Long-Term Plan for Towns 2023	DLUHC	Refocus from cities to towns – towns been forgotten - £1.1bn into 55 towns, new Towns Taskforce
Unleashing rural opportunity 2023	Defra	£3.2bn flowing into UK rural economy through schemes that support sustainable and productive farm businesses. 4 priorities – growing rural economy; connectivity; homes & energy; community
The Rural Premium 2023	APPG	People in rural areas need to spend 20- 30% more than others daily
Rural England Prosperity Fund 2022	Defra	Capital funding from March 2023 -2025 to complement SPF funding in rural areas – for businesses and community
Levelling up in the rural economy 2022	APPG	Rural economy is 18% less productive Matters affecting rural fall through the cracks of Whitehall & Defra does not have levers to administer rural
Levelling Up White Paper 2022	DLUHC	Commitment to tackling spatial inequality in all parts of UK – through productivity, boost public services, restore pride & build community
Shared Prosperity Fund 2022	DLUHC	£2.6bn fund to replace EU structural funds to be allocated via a funding formula rather than competition
Defra Outcome Delivery Plan 2021/22	Defra	Dept priority outcomes for environment, net zero, floods and resilience, and agriculture, food, fisheries, animal welfare and biosecurity, and a set of strategic enablers that aim to strengthen our capacity and capability.
Time for a strategy for rural economy 2019	House of Lords	Need for a rural strategy as rural proofing is not enough
Meso – Regional/sub-regional		
North East Strategic Economic Plan 2019	North East LEP	Creating more and better jobs
North East Devolution Deal 2024	DLUHC	Rural identified as a specific portfolio
North of Tyne Stewardship & Rural Investment Plan 2022	NTCA/NCC	£9m for rural
North of Tyne Devolution Deal 2017	MHCLG	The first devolution deal to include rural
Northumberland Local Plan 2016 - 2036	NCC (agreed 20220)	Plan for growth - 15,000 jobs, 17,700 new homes

Northumberland Economic Strategy 2019 - 2024	NCC (2018)	Importance of small businesses and market towns to Northumberland
Local (where available)		
Wooler Neighbourhood Plan 2021	Parish Council	Need for housing growth for young people & opportunities for more businesses – needs to be sustainable growth

These sources were reviewed using an inductive approach to try and answer the research question to unearth the sources of disconnection in the institutional context and better understand why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel 2020).

Inductive analysis is the process by which a general conclusion is drawn from individual observations. The benefits of an inductive approach are that it allows flexibility and of value in this paper is that it attends closely to context. The initial documents were read, and notes were taken, and quotes captured. These were then taken through initial coding and then once all the coding was completed, themes were identified which relate to the sources of disconnect.

Table 2 below, sets out how quotes taken from the policy documentation were sorted using initial coding and then grouped into five themed sources of disconnection.

Table 2 – Examples of sources of disconnect captured in the Policy Documentation Review

Example evidence from policy documentation	Initial coding	Disconnect theme
"Government neglect of the rural economy has created a cost-of-living 'rural premium', revealing rural communities spend 10-20% more on everyday items like fuel, despite wages being 7.5% lower than their urban counterparts." (APPG 2023p4)	Higher Rural costs/lower rural wages/inequality	Structural
"The rural economy is 19% less productive (per worker) than the national average – a problem that costs the UK £43bn in lost economic output each year" (APPG 2023 p4)	Lower productivity/lost GDP	Structural
"The productivity gap is "largely caused by poor public policy and lack of political will to address it, rather than any fundamental underlying and irrevocable circumstance." (APPG 2023 p4)	Poor public policy/lack of political will	Structural
"Rural communities and the economies in them have been ignored and underrated for too long. We must act now to reverse this trend, but we can no longer allow the clear inequalities between the urban and rural to continue unchecked. A rural strategy would address	Rural economy ignored/lack of political will/inequality	Structural

challenges and realise potential in struggling and under-performing areas and allow vibrant and thriving areas to develop further. Doing nothing is not an option.” (Lord Foster of Bath’s comments relating to House of Lords 2019)		
“One consistent theme throughout the evidence we received was that matters affecting the rural economy often fell between the cracks of Whitehall departments. Many ministers and officials simply assume that Defra is responsible for the countryside and ignore it a result. But Defra simply does not have the policy levers at its disposal to implement many of the ideas necessary to grow the economy in rural areas.” (APPG Inquiry into Rural Productivity 2022 p5)	Departmentalisation Sectoral change,	Structural
“Efforts to rural proof policy-making is widely believed to have failed. As a result, a more targeted, cross-departmental, ministerial-led approach is necessary.” (APPG Report 2023p5)	Failure of rural proofing/ leadership	Resource
Whilst over 80% of the UK area (90% of England) is officially classed as rural with 12 million people, 20% of our population living in rural areas, DEFRA’s rural policy team prior to Brexit was reduced to circa 60 staff. (House of Lords Select Committee 2018 p35).	Cuts/priorities/ capacity	Resource
“In undertaking an inquiry looking into rural productivity, it is important to consider the term productivity itself. The inquiry considered whether the way in which productivity is measured discriminates against rural areas. The 18% productivity disparity between urban and rural areas refers to economic productivity, as measured through GVA. This metric is useful in highlighting the difference in economic output between rural and urban areas, but it is a crude measure that does not consider other factors, such as the social or health benefits of living in rural areas. These benefits are hugely important but are missed in the calculations.” (APPG 2023 p51)	Definition, economic outputs vs social outcomes	Strategic
“Rural proofing as a policy is “fundamentally flawed”. She told us that rural proofing unhelpfully considers rural areas to be homogenous and has not delivered in terms of meeting the needs of rural people.” (Professor Sally Shortall quoted at House of Lords 2019 Para 77)	Reframing rural Heterogeneity	Strategic
“By strategy we are referring to an over-arching framework document which would set out the government’s vision, aim and objectives over a multi-year period. This is different to policies, which we view as courses of action adopted for a particular purpose or outcome.” (House of Lords Report 2019 Para 46.)	Long term vision, multi-year, strategy	Timescale
“An urgent change in attitude from the Government, however, is necessary. Whilst we welcome the current focus on farming’s relationship with the environment, we reiterate that the countryside is not a museum, but an economic powerhouse in its own right that is deserving of broader economic development.” (Lord Cameron of Dillington quoted in response of APPG 2022)	Nostalgia, farming vs broad economic development, looking forward	Timescale
“The minimum threshold of £500,000 for the Community Renewal Fund was a practical example of where government policy has led to a direct inequality to access of funding for urban and rural as this is far beyond many small rural communities and organisations” (APPG 2022)	Threshold, access to funding, inequality	Scale
“Evidence from the Rural Growth Network indicates that for micro businesses standard intervention rates are a barrier and a more bespoke approach is required.” (Northumberland Council 2018 p40)	Thresholds, intervention rates	Scale

The evidence coded from the policy documentation was then triangulated with evidence from the empirical evidence. Eight in depth qualitative interviews were conducted to give a lived experience of localised regional, local authority and community contexts within the research area of Northumberland. Data was gathered from policymakers in Northumberland County Council, the LEP, the Combined Authority and within the local leadership of the three communities.

The participants were chosen using purposive sampling – all participants played an active role in supporting local entrepreneurship. Through searches in the local media and research on job roles a long list of participants was identified and contacted. These participants were chosen as they were willing to participate and as a sample group included representation from each of the three market towns, the local authority level and the new regional arrangements of governance – see Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Participants

Participant Ref	Role	Type of Organisation
L25	Local Politician	Town A
L26	Executive Director	Town B Community Development Trust
L27	Executive Director	Town C Community Development Trust
S28	Senior Politician	Northumberland County Council
S29	Director responsible for Rural Policy	Northumberland County Council
S30	Director	Community Action Northumberland, a Social Enterprise responsible for supporting Northumberland Rural Communities
S31	Director	Local Enterprise Partnership
S32	Senior Manager	North of Tyne Mayoral Authority

The policymaker interviews were undertaken post the literature review and in-depth analysis of the context. Semi-structured interviews were the main form of data collection. An

interview guide was produced drawing from the initial literature review, particularly focusing on the roles of the multi-levels of government. The interviews were however allowed to develop as guided in-depth conversations enabling participants to focus on issues of importance to them and to maintain the flexibility to develop new data on areas that had not been previously considered. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and due to covid were conducted online and were recorded with the permission of the participant and auto transcribed. Eight stakeholder interviews were collected, transcribed, and analysed simultaneously (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006. p17).

The quotes were initially coded and then these codes were considered in conjunction with the themes that had emerged from the documentary source review. This triangulation of data enabled the researcher to check whether the sources of disconnect identified through the national documentary sources were valid and represented the lived experiences of the policymakers in Northumberland. Examples of the quotes and the coding process are set out in Table 4. Both sources of data were then brought together in the Findings section below.

Table 4 – Analysis of Sources of Disconnect from the Stakeholder Interview Data

Analysis of local policy makers relationship with national policy	Initial coding	Disconnect theme
“We’re really trying to influence government to make sure the enabling infrastructure is built into projects but we’re not there yet” S28 -Politician	Lack of capacity building	Structural
“We know there are outcomes other than productivity that are important locally or will drive productivity long term but won’t meet the instant requirements of the metrics required for the funding.” S29 -Director, NCC	Metrics not fit for purpose	Structural
“The pace at which we are expected to deliver means you can’t get people engaged because you’ve got to get the money out of the door so quickly.” S29 - Director, NCC	Timescales discourage engagement	Temporal
“When we get a call for projects from government, we have 3 months, so we are always on the backfoot.” S29 - Director, NCC	Timescale limits efficacy	Temporal
“It takes a long time to change perceptions, you can make changes to aesthetics, but it’s a long time before people think differently about place” L26 - Director, Development Trust B	Time frame/long termism	Temporal
“In rural, you can make big impacts with modest sums of money if you do it right but that’s the bit government don’t recognise” S29- Director, NCC	Lack of understanding Small funds	Scale
“We need investment, but it won’t be big projects. 20 jobs here and there – that’s the future of economic development – there are no big bullet solutions anymore” S28- Politician	Small projects	Scale
“Amble got £3m from the Coastal Community Fund as a catalyst to make things happen. It’s not really that much but it changed the dynamic in the town.” L26 - Director, Development Trust	Catalytic funding	Scale
“It’s not like the government and policymakers are anti-rural but it’s just there is limited money and it’s easier to focus on large scale problems and concentrated issues. We don’t have any choice; our economic base is dominated by small businesses. Ultimately it spreads the risk as our fortunes are not dependent on one or two huge employers but it’s much harder work. It’s a lot easier in many respects dealing with larger businesses, there are big headline numbers and one of two key contacts” S29 - Director, NCC	Scale/Inefficiency of dealing with small businesses	Scale
“Family run businesses will try and put everything into it. If you are in charge of your future, you are more committed.” L26 - Development Trust B	Commitment, long termism	Scale
“The businesses in Amble are on the whole family businesses – we’ve never had many national businesses – so they were from Amble and wanted it to be better.” L26 – Director, Development Trust B	Family Business/commitment to place	Scale
“Having independent businesses is a real bonus, we have a unique selling point.” L26 – Director, Development Trust B	USP - Independence	Scale
“Small businesses are at the heart of Northumberland. I mean 85% of our businesses employ less than 5 people.” L27 – Director, Development Trust C	Importance of small businesses	Scale
“The big employers can go at any time. With our small business base, we have resilience.” L26 - Director, Development Trust B	Resilience	Scale

“Small businesses are the lungs of rural areas because if they start to get too big, they get itchy feet, look for new premises, different skills and often end up in more urban settings.” L26, Development Trust C	Importance of small business	Scale
“Small businesses keep rural communities sustainable – they support the shops, pubs, schools, public services – without them the countryside would leach people.” S30	Sustainability of small businesses	Scale
“These small businesses have helped forge an identity for Amble a new identity.” L26, Director Development Trust B	Identity & small business	Scale
“The £3m for each town is really incidental, giving the local community capability and agency is the real legacy so that they are equipped to go for their own funding” S28, Politician	Building capacity/Community engagement	Scale
“It’s all cumulative – people choosing to come here. They walk the pier, they visit the pods in the harbour village, go shopping on Q St – it all kind of builds and you get a cyclical impact.” L26, Development Trust B	Cumulative impact/Co-ordination	Strategic
“Regeneration is like a big jigsaw you’ve got to keep working on every piece to create a new picture.” S27 Director, NCC	Regeneration Co-ordination	Strategic
“We play the game with government and design programmes that have elements of good productivity so we can mask other stuff behind it – that’s essentially what we do, package things up in a way that provides government with what they need and hid other things in the funding envelope that we would not be able to bid for in isolation.” S27 -Director NCC	Repackaging policy	Strategic
“There is a disconnect with national government, where they say its place based but they don’t understand place” S28 -Politician	Lack of understanding of place	Structural
“We’ve got officers who understand the patch, so they use their leverage to try and broker ways forward working with the community.” S28- Politician	Brokering Negotiation	Resource
“If people can harness help from the rest of the town, it’s got half a chance. We can help build capacity but ultimately success rests locally” S28- Politician	Building support	Resource
“Regeneration works best when it’s not done to places. We recognise this, that’s why we are trying so hard to build local ownership but it’s easier some places than others” S27- Director, NCC	Bottom up	Resource

4. Part 1 - Findings: Sources of disconnect

The research evidences the disconnect particularly between national government policy and the needs of the small businesses and rural communities referenced in the literature review and shows evidence that this disconnect relates to the following key areas:

1. A structural disconnect due to a lack of recognition of the changes within the rural economy resulting in the institutions historically charged with rural development not now having the levers or powers to deliver.
2. A resource and continuity disconnect with a lack of resources invested in this area of policy and an ever-changing institutional framework with short term leadership.
3. A strategic disconnect as the wider social objectives of the small businesses often challenged the government belief that private business is market driven and focused on profit and growth.
4. A timescale disconnect as the timeframes of politics did not deliver the long-term strategies required to create sustainable change: and
5. A scale disconnect as the policies of government required macro-outputs that these small businesses did not deliver and required economy of scale of inputs meaning these communities often fell below the threshold in grant funding.

These disconnects are explored in the following sections with the aim of explaining the reasons for the disconnect between policy and the needs of small businesses in rural communities.

4.1 A structural disconnect

This disconnect considers the structural disconnect that mean that national government policy does not meet local needs. An All-Party Parliamentary Group’s Report on Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse (2023 p4) stated that the

“Government neglect of the rural economy has created a cost-of-living ‘rural premium’, revealing rural communities spend 10-20% more on everyday items like fuel, despite wages being 7.5% lower than their urban counterparts.”

The rural economy is 19% less productive (per worker) than the national average – a problem that costs the UK £43bn in lost economic output each year (APPG, 2023). The report on rural productivity states that this productivity gap is:

“largely caused by poor public policy and lack of political will to address it, rather than any fundamental underlying and irrevocable circumstance”

(APPG, 2023 p4).

The report states that the failure by successive governments over many decades has created an environment that left rural communities uniquely vulnerable to geopolitical events. This report reiterates the calls for a specific rural strategy outlined in the House of Lords Report “Time for a Rural Strategy” (2019) where the Chair of the Committee Lord Foster of Bath stated:

“Rural Economies and the economies in them have been ignored and underrated for too long. We must act now to reverse this trend, but we can longer allow the clear inequalities between the urban and rural to continue unchecked. A rural strategy would address challenges and realise potential in struggling and under-performing areas and allow vibrant and thriving areas to develop further. Doing nothing is not an option.”

Within England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has the brief to support the rural economy but its dominant focus on agriculture, means that it cannot deliver the breadth of policy required, nor does it appear to have the influence or resource to enable others within government to adequately support. The significant changes in national government bodies focused on rural with the abolishment of some key agencies such as the Rural Development Commission means that there is a lack of institutional memory with learning being lost.

Defra's introduction (Defra 2023) states: "We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities." However, the Defra Outcome Delivery Plan 2021-2022 (Defra 2021) fails to list rural growth or productivity, despite the rural economy being worth £261 billion (Rural Economic Bulletin 2021) and instead prioritises the environment, carbon emissions, agriculture, and the prevention of flooding. DEFRA lists 33 agency and public bodies that it works with (Defra 2022) yet none of these represent rural communities or rural enterprise but include agriculture, environment, fishing and food.

As shown by the diagram below agriculture, forestry and fishing which are traditionally seen as the drivers of the rural economy only represent fourteen percent of the English rural economy in 2020/21 demonstrating that a focus on these traditional rural sectors could result in most of the rural economy being discounted.

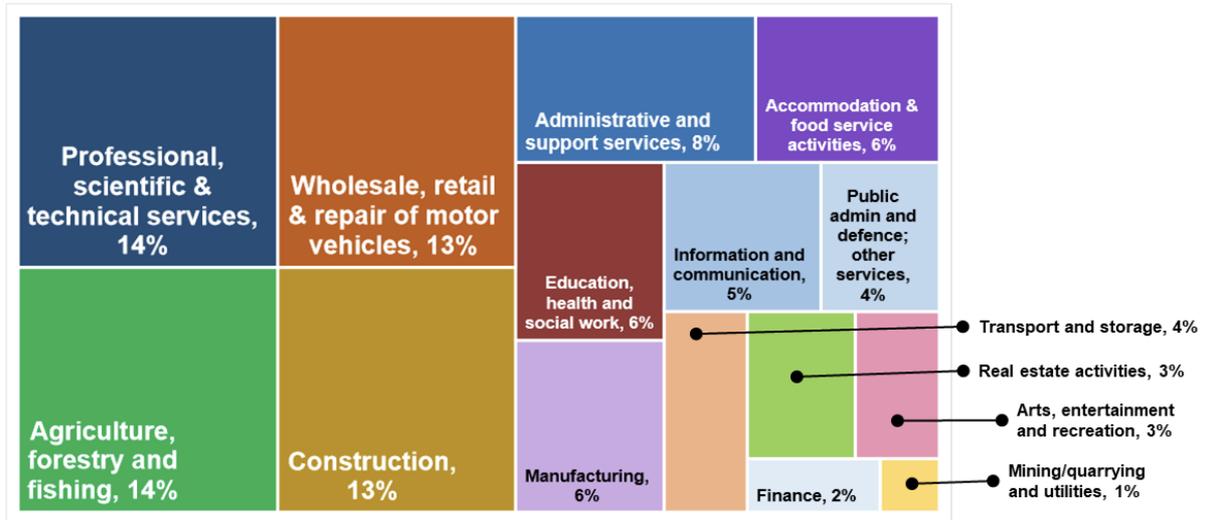


Figure 1 - Percentage of local registered businesses by industry in rural areas in England, 2020/21 (Defra 2022)

This increasing diversity of sector and the broader range of issues that impact the entrepreneurial ecosystem means that Defra cannot provide the solutions as it does not hold all the policy levers but instead needs to influence other areas of policy. Research by the Federation of Small Businesses (2022) states that the key issues for rural small businesses include: rural transport, skills and broadband access. None of these issues are within the policy remit of Defra and therefore require support from cross government. This cross-government challenge was referenced in the recent inquiry into rural productivity which stated that:

“One consistent theme throughout the evidence we received was that matters affecting the rural economy often fell between the cracks of Whitehall departments. Many ministers and officials simply assume that Defra is responsible for the countryside and ignore it a result. But Defra simply does not have the policy levers at its disposal to implement many of the ideas necessary to grow the economy in rural areas.”

(APPG 2022 p5)

This was reinforced in the empirical evidence by a Director at the Council who stated:

“Regeneration is like a big jigsaw, you’ve got to keep working on every piece to create a new picture.”

S27 Director, Northumberland County Council

A manager at the Combined Authority acknowledged the cultural and structural challenges within government of working across policy areas in the quote below:

“Even within government departments, there seems to be silos and therefore government struggles to create policies that cut across government departments.”

S32 Manager, North of Tyne Combined Authority

Furthermore, even when specific rural schemes were developed, such as Rural England Prosperity Fund, it was argued that the design of programmes demonstrated a lack of understanding of the rural economy as indicated in the quote below from the Rural Service Network:

“The fact that the scheme delivers capital funding only is one of the major concerns. It demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of what is needed to support activity in rural areas and is a backward step. The lack of revenue funding ignores the issues of the capacity of rural councils regarding the development and delivery of proposals.”

(Rural Services Network 2023)

This fundamental challenge between the nature of the funding and the needs of the local rural communities demonstrates the frustration and tension between the different levels of government.

4.2 A resource and continuity disconnect

The next identified disconnect referred to resource, continuity, and skill. Primarily there is an argument that the disconnect is caused in part due to the lack of institutional memory and broader understanding of the rural economy within government as over the past twenty-five years successive governments have continuously created and abolished institutions resulting in the current situation where there are no specific bodies focused on rural development or enterprise.

Figure 2 below shows the changes in institutional arrangements highlighting the challenge to retain expertise and knowledge of the specifics of rural. For example, at a national level, the Rural Development Commission was abolished in 1999 and merged with the Countryside Agency which was then abolished in 2006. The Commission for Rural Communities was created in 2005 which was abolished in 2010 when DEFRA's communities' policy unit was put in charge. In 2015 this unit was then also abolished.

	1990				2025
National Government Dept		2001- Creation of DEFRA through merger of parts of Ministry of Ag., Farming & Fisheries and Department Env, , Transport & Regions.	2010 – Abolition of CRC means DEFRA’s Communities Policy Unit resp. for delivery	2015 – Defra’s Rural Communities Policy Unit abolished.	
National Statutory Bodies	1999- The Countryside Commission merged with Rural Development Commission to form the Countryside Agency	2005 – Creation of Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) 2006- Countryside Agency becomes part of Natural England	2013 – Commission for Rural Communities abolished		
Regional	1997- Creation of 12 Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)		2012 – Abolition of RDAs and creation of 39 LEPS		2022 – Levelling Up Paper - Announces new Mayoral Authority incl. 7 Local Auth. 2024 - 2024 – Abolition of NTCA and LEP to form North East Combined Authority and new Mayor elected
Sub-regional	1997 - Creation of Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) a public private partnership to support County Council and 6 District Councils	2009 – District Councils abolished to create one Unitary Authority for Northumberland	2012 – NSP abolished	2018 - Creation of North of Tyne Mayoral Authority (3 LAs) 2019 Mayor Elected	
Local Institutions related to casestudies	1994 –Creation of Amble Development Trust 1996 – Creation of Glendale Gateway Trust				

Figure 2 – The Changing Institutional Framework for Rural Policy 1990 – 2024 nationally, regionally, and locally within the Northumberland case study area

Furthermore, if we consider the leadership of Defra, there has been eight Secretaries of State in the past 10 years with many lasting less than one year. This lack of consistency and continuity has implications for the ability of the department to govern effectively or to influence more widely within government.

If Defra is to influence other government departments, this means building cross department relationships and finding consensus which is resource intensive. However, despite the demands of the rural economy becoming increasingly complex there is a decline in institutional capacity (House of Lords 2018). Whilst over 80% of the UK area (90% of England) is officially classed as rural with 12 million people, 20% of our population living in rural areas, DEFRA’s rural policy team prior to Brexit was reduced to circa 60 staff.

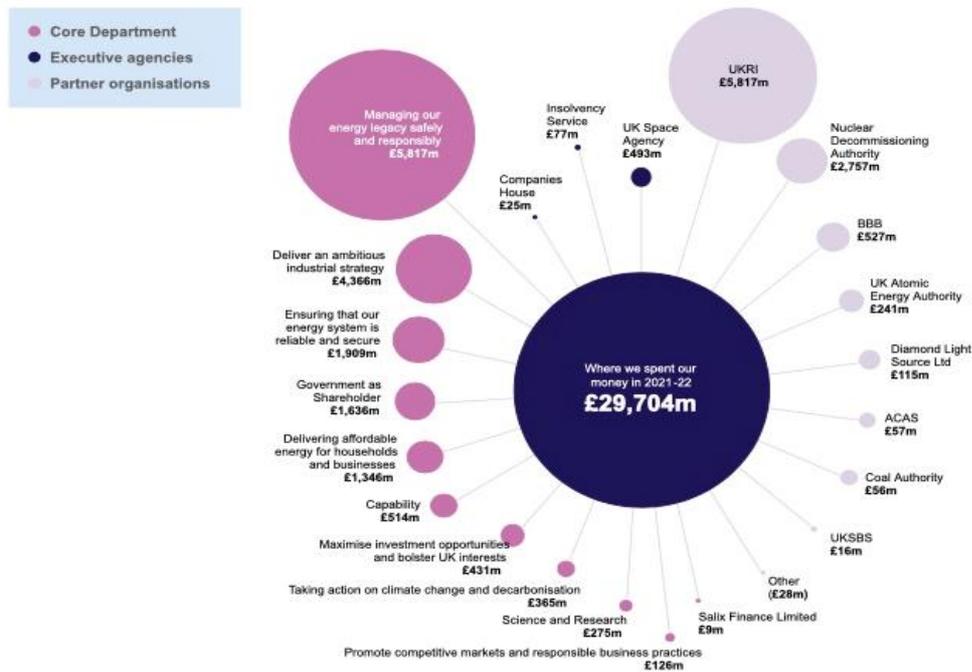
The 2023 All Parliamentary Party Group Report (APPG) on the Rural Powerhouse (p47)

recognised this lack of resource stating:

“The evidence received by the inquiry pointed towards systemic failings in the Government’s rural policy development. There is no doubt of Defra’s ministerial team’s commitment to the countryside, but also that it did not have the policy levers at its disposal to make a meaningful difference on economic and social policies beyond farming and forestry. We heard evidence that many of those other government departments that did have the powers necessary to generate economic growth in the countryside had a laissez-faire attitude towards rural policymaking. Efforts to rural proof policymaking is widely believed to have failed. As a result, a more targeted, cross-departmental, ministerial-led approach is necessary.”

Whilst the government’s response to this APPG stated that rural proofing of mainstream policies should suffice, Figure 3., below, from the BEIS Action Plan 2019 shows how little of the overall budget on enterprise is invested in supporting the needs of small businesses, which characterise the economy of rural areas. Only £16m of £29 billion is focused specifically on small business activity with most funding committed to high growth sectors.

This spending pattern illustrates government’s focus on large corporate employers, which has very limited application within rural communities.



Where we spent our money in 2021-22: diagram data

Figure 3 - Diagram taken from the BEIS SME action plan 2022-2025 (published 26 Jan 2023)

This is indicative of a broader government focus on growth and productivity which by nature often excludes rural areas and small businesses. This is despite as the quote below demonstrates the costs of delivering interventions for rural small businesses will also be more expensive than the equivalent job output for urban areas which was expressed in the quote below from a manager at North of Tyne Combined Authority:

“Most people work within an urban setting and don't necessarily understand why it costs more to deliver something similar in the rural area on why you might get lower outputs.” S32 Manager, North of Tyne Combined Authority

The lack of resource focused on SMEs nationally is further challenged as the government suggested that it was the responsibility of local authorities to deliver rural strategies. However, local authorities face a long term decrease in spending power with the amount of

money received from government grants, council tax and business rates falling by 10.2% between 2009/10 and 2021/22 (Institute for Government, 2023) creating the challenge of where is the resource that will support the unlocking of the rural economy. This lack of local capacity hinders the ability of communities to secure government funding and was a key criticism of the Rural England Prosperity Fund:

“Capacity of (rather lack of it) is also a key issue for the business and local community/voluntary organisations concerned, both in their ability to develop new products/services and support existing activity without some additional revenue support. A key difference to LEADER funding is that each LEADER programme had a Management and Administration budget, which could be up to 18% of the overall programme budget. It would have been very helpful if a provision such as that were included in the Rural England Prosperity Fund.”

(Rural Services Network 2023 p2)

This quote also signifies frustration that national government policy is not evolving in this area or building on previous learnings of what worked well, perhaps again due to a lack of continuity of resource or thinking at a national level. This continuing frustration was also reflected at a meso level with a politician stating:

“We’re really trying to influence government to make sure the enabling infrastructure is built into projects but we are not there yet.”

S28 – Politician, Northumberland County Council

4.3 A strategic disconnect

The definition of entrepreneurship used by central government is based on an economic market perspective which is measured through start-ups, jobs, or GDP growth whereas rural enterprises are characterised as being socially embedded (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011) valuing social outcomes alongside economic outputs.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) report (2023 p51) considering rural productivity stated:

“In undertaking an inquiry looking into rural productivity, it is important to consider the term productivity itself. The inquiry considered whether the way in which productivity is measured discriminates against rural areas. The 18% productivity disparity between urban and rural areas refers to economic productivity, as measured through GVA. This metric is useful in highlighting the difference in economic output between rural and urban areas, but it is a crude measure that does not take into account other factors, such as the social or health benefits of living in rural areas. These benefits are hugely important but are missed in the calculations.”

This quote recognises that entrepreneurship within rural communities is often not motivated by profit. This suggests that a fundamental shift in definitions and objectives is needed to enable national government policy to meet the needs of rural areas. The need to reconsider this definition of productivity is increasing as rural communities are increasingly also being measured on environmental outcomes as recognised in the quote below:

“Definitions of productivity may need re-assessing to reflect environmental and social outputs as well as economic. Particularly in the light of climate change and the high priority of the decarbonisation agenda, any approach which relies on income and other financial indicators of productivity alone is clearly out of date and would fail rural areas”.

(Rural Services Network 2023)

Whilst not recognised at a national macro level, the fragility of small businesses and this focus on commercial sustainability is acknowledged by the local level county council who also specifically reference the changing nature of the rural economy in their Economic Plan stating:

“As we move to a post Brexit world, we will seek measures that safeguard our business community’s commercial viability, particularly in sectors where there is likely to be a major impact or direct changes required such as in the uplands as the agricultural and farming industry transitions to new support arrangements.”

(Northumberland County Council 2019 – 2024 p13).

The interviews suggested as well as having different objectives, the structure of national government with the bureaucratic requirements of the civil service and Treasury fundamentally mean that it cannot deliver place-sensitive solutions. Whilst local policymakers acknowledged that the intention of national politicians was right the bureaucracy of the civil service meant that the true objective became lost in implementation. It was suggested that the heterogenous nature of place and therefore the multiplicity of potential solutions required made it difficult for government who preferred universality of approach, as this fulfilled its objectives of efficiency.

4.4 A temporal disconnect

The next disconnect identified referred to timescales. There were three perspectives on time that enhanced the disconnect between central government and local delivery. These related to the lack of long-term strategy resulting in a string of short-term projects; the speed at which government required responses to funding bids that limited bottom-up engagement in project development and the focus on rural communities as frozen in time, rather than depicting a modern and progressive view of the countryside, its communities, and businesses.

The timeframes failed to recognise the need for long term support to create lasting change or to build capacity within communities, creating a set of interventions rather than long term strategies. The continuing changes in approach and lack of strategy were both raised in the House of Lords Report in 2019 which stated:

“The history of rural policy in England indicates that, while successive governments’ commitment to the rural economy has sometimes seemed lacking, there have been periodic cases of at least rhetorical commitment, which are then often overtaken by events and shifting governmental priorities. In addition, we have heard that policy is all too often made by urban-oriented decision makers with little understanding of rural needs and priorities. In light of our inquiry, this affirms the case that there is a need for a clearer, more consistent, and accountable rural strategy, which gives rural economies their due importance and which can survive future dislocations of governmental policy priorities. It is useful to note from the outset of this section that we make a distinction between the terms strategy and policy. By strategy we are referring to an over-arching framework document which would set out the government’s vision, aim and objectives over a multi-year period. This is different to policies, which we view as courses of action adopted for a particular purpose or outcome.”

(House of Lords 2019, section 46)

This quote indicates the challenges of a lack of continuity, the tendency for policymakers to see things from an urban perspective and the need for long term thinking. This requirement for a long-term approach is necessary as the issues within rural communities are deep-seated, multi-layered and have developed over significant time. The need for long term relationships with businesses is also of concern and was raised below within the Northumberland Economic Strategy 2019 – 2025 . The quote highlights that the council continues to use its influence to advocate for a longer term approach.

“This means developing longer term relationships with the business community to be able to work successfully with companies as they develop, short term grant programmes have proven to be problematic in this regard and we are making the case for a longer-term approach. “

(Northumberland County Council, 2018, p39.)

There was also a process issue raised about the short timeframes for government funding and commissioning which limited bottom-up engagement in project development, resulting in government being pitched sub-optimum ideas produced at speed. This criticism was levelled at the Rural England Prosperity Fund by the Rural Services Network (2023) with the Rural Lens report stating:

“In our view, the timescale did not allow sufficient time for meaningful consultation with the rural communities within the local authority areas on the specifics of the rural fund.”

(Rural Services Network, 2023, p3)

The short time scales of government funding were raised repeatedly within the stakeholder interviews with comments such as the one below from a regional policymaker:

“When we get a call for projects from government, we have three months, so we are always on the backfoot”

S29 – Director, Northumberland County Council

Furthermore, it was suggested that the outlook of politicians and civil servants in considering rural was temporally challenged with a focus on the past and not the future. The Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Productivity stated:

“An urgent change in attitude from the Government, however, is necessary. Whilst we welcome the current focus on farming’s relationship with the environment, we reiterate that the countryside is not a museum, but an economic powerhouse in its own right that is deserving of broader economic development.”

(APPG, 2022, p4)

This inability to see the rural economy as progressive but instead focusing on a historic depiction of rural as unchanging results in a lack of vision for the rural economy and a perspective that rural is “left behind” when research demonstrates that there is no evidence that rural SMEs systematically underperform in comparison with their urban counterparts (Phillipson et al., 2019).

4.5 A disconnect of scale

The next form of disconnect considers scale. The mechanisms of central government such as Treasury rules meant it was easier and more efficient to focus on large businesses in intensive clusters meaning rural and small businesses were never a priority. The challenges of winning rural appropriate funding were highlighted in the APPG (2022) where the North East LEP were quoted stating the minimum threshold of £500,000 for the Community Renewal Fund was a :

“Practical example of where government policy has led to a direct inequality to access of funding for urban and rural as this is far beyond many small rural communities and organisations”

(Northumberland LEP quoted at APPG, 2022, p16).

This was also referenced in the Northumberland Economic Strategy (2019 – 2024) that stated:

“Evidence from the Rural Growth Network indicates that for micro businesses standard intervention rates are a barrier and a more bespoke approach is required.”

(Northumberland County Council, 2018, p40)

As well as the size of small business, the nature of small business was also not understood with the 2019 House of Lords report recognising that whilst government had announced a range of measures to help businesses, only incorporated structures could benefit, and as most rural businesses are sole traders or family partnerships they could not qualify. This was also reflected at a local level with the Northumberland Economic Strategy (2018 p39) stating that:

“We know there are more businesses below the threshold of ten employees as this makes up the majority of our business stock. Much of the support already successfully provided by both LEADER and the North East Rural Growth Network has focused on these businesses in recent years with much success. We now think we can go further and provide long term assistance both in terms of support, advice, and finance to unlock more development and growth in this area. This will take the form of support to both scale up and also shape up businesses to be more resilient, productive and able to withstand future change in markets.”

This quote demonstrates how the local authority are trying to overcome several of the disconnects including references to “long term assistance” to overcome the short-termism of government; references to prior schemes to demonstrate learning capacity and institutional memory; a direct reference to the size and nature of business they are focused on and a reference to an outcome that goes beyond productivity but incorporates future proofing from external shocks and resilience. It also demonstrates the continuity of thinking within the local government level building on previous interventions and incorporating learning in policy design.

5. Part 2 - The role of meso in overcoming the disconnect

Through the interviews and analysis of the policy documentation, it is clear that there is an increasingly complex multi-level governance system (Pike et al., 2016). Three key levels of institutional arrangements are identified. The national government framework for rural development lead by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the wider rural infrastructure which is determined by national government policy (macro); the emerging and evolving regional approaches which started with Regional Development Agencies and post their abolition has been continued via Local Enterprise Partnerships and more recently via regional devolution and Mayoral Devolved Authorities and the local democratic processes via local authorities (meso); and micro-local institutional arrangements via town or parish councils and in some areas, social enterprises such as Development Trusts. (micro).

The meso level has been chosen as due to devolution, this level of governance is of increasing importance. The meso level is chosen as this is the focus of new levels of devolved governance including the new regional Mayoral authorities and as the literature suggests that macro-level representations provide insufficient explanations of the mechanisms that affect rural entrepreneurship, micro-level accounts of rural entrepreneurship are deemed too granular for understanding the holistic picture of rural enterprising (Munoz and Kimmitt, 2019).

For the purposes of this research, the Local Authorities, Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships are all recognised as performing the role of the meso- level of governance. This decision was made based on the empirical evidence which suggested that within the rural portfolio resource from Northumberland County Council, the local authority,

was seconded into the LEP and Combined Authority or sat on their relevant rural steering groups suggesting that ostensibly they were a linked governance network.

These arrangements are increasingly complex and play into the debate about the importance of bottom-up vs top-down policy making. In order, to understand the interplay between the micro-local processes within the communities and the macro policy approaches, the next sections will consider the role of the meso level of governance, in trying to bridge this disconnect. As the previous section has identified the sources of a series of disconnects and the next section seeks to understand how the sources of these disconnects are overcome, the researcher sought to find a theoretical lens to help explain the phenomena.

5.1 Applying the theory of translation as a theoretical lens

In seeking a theoretical lens, the researcher was seeking to understand how a general theory can be applied in several different contexts. The theory of translation has been stated to link the general to the particular and shifts a way of thinking from a government department to a multitude of workplaces, communities, high streets, or homes. Translation has been used before in policy studies to explain the process of reformulation of policy problems, orientations and proposals in a different language and cultural context (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2019). Whilst normally the context in which such translation is discussed is in the implementation of international policy into domestic legislation, there are parallels within this research. The translation of international policy into domestic legislation requires the policy to be embedded in differing cultures which requires an understanding of the domestic needs and how to achieve this result within that institutional culture. This is also true of the process of applying universal government policy at a local place-based level.

Translation is not simply a transfer of policy but considers the conditions of the reception (Bourdieu, 2002). It expressly recognises that the meaning of the translation will differ from the original text because meanings and connotations are different from one “language” to another, all of them embedded in a different culture, which is changing over time. Rather than a linear process of reformulation or reinterpretation, translation reflects dynamic and intense (back-and-forth) processes. Translation is a form of intercultural interaction connecting different actors, institutions, and levels in public decision-making (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2019) which therefore makes it an appropriate tool within the increasingly multi-level governance systems in rural policy (OECD, 2006).

This theory therefore recognises the fluid and dynamic nature of policy and that policy is contextual and agentic, its meaning changing as it is implemented (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2019). Lendvai and Stubbs (2007 p175) stated that:

“a series of interesting, and sometimes even surprising, disturbances can occur in the spaces between the creation, the transmission and the interpretation or reception of policy meanings.”

Furthermore, the theory recognises that “policy objects only partly result from the work of policy designers” (Rein and Schön, 1996 p93) recognising the role of multiple actors, which travel across different spaces and levels (Mukhtarov, 2014). In the world of public policies, the activity of translation is political, implying negotiations and conflicts between different policy actors with different kinds of resources (positional, expertise, financial, relational, legitimacy and time), different conception of the policies to be conducted and different policy goals (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2019). This ability to explain negotiation and conflict is key to helping provide an appropriate lens to explain how the sources of disconnect are tackled within a multi-level governance system

Michel Callon (1986) analysed the knowledge transfer from one scientific world to another and proposed an analytical translation framework, based on the distinction between four intertwined dimensions:

- the reformulation of a problem.
- the negotiation between the different actors involved in the process of reformulation.
- the assignment of different roles to these actors during the process; and
- the mobilization of actors in the process that allows the achievement.

This theoretical framework is applied at the second stage of analysis as a lens to help explain how the sources of disconnect are overcome and by whom in the multi-level governance system. This framework is applied through a process of deductive analysis as deductive analysis is an appropriate tool to help in the application of theory.

5.2 Deductive analysis

In Part 2 of the Analysis, the researcher having finished initial coding, applied deductive analysis. Whilst the first part of the analysis used a bottom-up approach only to find themes, the second part of the analysis takes that coded data and uses a deductive approach which is top down. Deductive analysis enables the data to be categorised and sorted in line with theory, allowing us to test the established theory of translation within the new context of meso-level of governance in rural entrepreneurship. Patton (1991, p.194) argues that the qualitative researcher can adopt deductive processes after an initial inductive approach.

“As evaluation fieldwork begins, the evaluator may be open to whatever emerges from the data, a discovery or inductive approach. Then, as the enquiry reveals patterns and major dimensions of interest, the evaluator will begin to focus on verifying and elucidating what appears to be emerging, a more deductive approach to data collection and analysis.”

Kirk and Miller (1986, p25) view good qualitative technique as a process of alternating inductive and deductive processes:

“The fieldworker ... is continuously engaged in something very like hypothesis testing.... He or she draws tentative conclusions from his or her current understanding of the situation.... Where, for unanticipated reasons, this understanding is invalid, the qualitative researcher will sooner or later... find out about it.”

As we are seeking to consider the hypothesis for creating theory to explain this phenomenon moving to a deductive approach seems appropriate.

Callon’s (1986) four-part theory of translation is used as the lens to provide the themes against which the research was analysed. The data is therefore recoded against each of the four parts of the theory i.e., Reformulation of the Problem; Negotiation between Different Actors; Assignment of Different Roles and Mobilisation of the Actors. Table 5 below gives examples. Examples of this process of analysis are set out at Table 5 below.

Table 5 – Examples of Deductive Analysis against Callon’s Four Themes of Translation (Callon 1986)

Deductive Analysis against Callon’s Four Themes (1986)	Initial Coding	Quotes from Local Policy Maker interviews
Reformulation of Problem	Productivity Changing metrics Long term Differing objectives	“We know there are outcomes other than productivity that are important locally or will drive productivity long term but won’t meet the instant requirements of the metrics required for the funding. And actually, a lot of what we do in the rural is actually just sustainability, making sure that stuff keeps going, you know, resilience and not losing things.” S29 Director, NCC
	Refocusing projects into programmes Moving from one town to whole county Aggregating data	“So, the place programme, we're the first and the only deal that's got a programme around place. In the other deals, it's the focus on a town and they've got to identify the projects in the deal. So, we've got place, we've got energy, we've got digital, we've got business infrastructure, and it's about more devolution to the areas to kind of focus on, you can choose your towns, you can develop the programmes, and we're selling back a programme to the government. So, I'm not to selling one town’s outputs to government. I'm selling them an aggregate of all the towns in the borderlands deal. So that means you get your outcomes. Yeah, you can hide your productivity, you can demonstrate productivity at that level I couldn't do it at Rothbury level. Yeah, but I can do it at Borderlands programme level. that's the trick.” S29 – Director NCC
Negotiation between the different actors	Productivity Changing metrics Long term Differing objectives	“Government think big is beautiful, the bigger the project almost the better, whereas in, in our world, you can make really big impacts with relatively modest sums of money, and lessons learnt, and things can be sustainable if you do them in the right way. And that's the bit that government don't tend to kind of recognise. And so that's why we're really trying to influence from inside.” S28-Politician NCC
	Refocusing projects into programmes Moving from one town to whole county	“I don't think we're going to get shared prosperity fund that's going to have a dedicated rural element. Given all the promises we had about, you know, it's going to replicate, it's going to, you know, mirror what we had in the ERDF ESF and RDP. The bit that's going to be missing is things like Rural Development Programme and we're going to have to fight at the table to get that rural money. It's the ring fence on the basis that rural communities need something slightly different.” S30 Director

	Aggregating data	
Assignment of Different Roles	Flexibility Different governance rules Changing metrics	“You’ve got the Rural Growth programme, it is measured mostly on a jobs basis, though you're right. I think that your kind of just have to accept to a degree that metric is not completely right, but I don't know how easy it is for government to move away from that. I think that that's where Council spending comes into it a little bit more, we're not governed in the same way by a green book, or this or that or the other. We can do things like look at community hubs and community activity and try to stimulate and drive that. I think that’s the bit that we are pushing at the minute as we are going through a discussion on the next round of devolution.” S29 - Director, NCC
	Productivity Changing metrics Long term Differing objectives	“There is a need to communicate with communities and the LEP doesn’t have the capacity to do this directly but has partners that can bring this to play. I am certain that J [Director at NCC] will hold our feet to the fire on UK Shared Prosperity Fund and make sure we do a good job with the replacement of the European Structural Fund programme. She’s involved in our boards and there will be other partners as well.” S31 – Director, LEP
Mobilisation of Actors	Refocusing projects into programmes Moving from one town to whole county Aggregating data	“It's a bit like nation building you can't go in and do stuff to people, it has to come from inside. And you have to hope that people go on a journey together with you. And in some places, it will work. In some cases, it won't, but you can't just go in and say we're going to build this institution. When we came into office in 2017, the first thing I did was to put in place, town forums for all of the major towns to start off. And those were intended really to get decision makers and everybody into one place in the view of the county in the full view of the council, that is, so that the Council could understand what was not happening. Because stuff sort of fell through the gaps. And the council can fulfil that role and get those people into one place. And before you knew where they were actually the ideas were flowing quite quickly. So that's what my attempt at Town forums has been to get people together and try to go on a loose journey with the council.” S28 - Senior Politician NCC
	Identifying leaders Mobilising actors Agency Engagement	“There’s a resource of human capital in communities but that needs to be leveraged, they are an asset base. There’s a learning thing. Older people are often the human asset that’s available. Pretty much all of the social enterprises that were set up were set up by people over 50 and there needed to be some engagement with local agencies to identify those leaders and bring them through which was quite interesting.” S30- Director

6. Part 2 – Findings from Deductive Analysis using Theory of Translation as a lens

The next section explains the findings of the deductive analysis against each category of Callon’s (1986) theory of translation.

6.1. Reformulation of Problem

There is clear evidence that the local authority acknowledges the problem in the application of national entrepreneurship policy within the rural communities they represent and therefore seek to reformulate the problem. This was acknowledged by the politician below who recognised that the national approach was not an intentional anti-rural stance, it was an issue of efficiency, prioritisation and convenience which lead politicians to focus on areas where they could tackle problems at scale. The result of this was that rural places that were characterised by sparse resources and a lack of scale would never be prioritised.

“It’s not like the government and policymakers are anti-rural but it’s just there is limited money and it’s easier to focus on large scale problems and concentrated issues.”

S28 Politician, NCC

The quote below from a rural affairs leader suggests that the true intentions of politicians were lost as the process of policy making pinned down outputs rather than focusing on outcomes, removing flexibility.

“Whoever the politicians are, their intention is really sound, but the minute when it starts getting turned into programmes and bills, and others get involved in making it work, and sort fitting it with accountability and audit routes, it just becomes this thing that isn't really what they intended in the first place. And, and just doesn't achieve the sort of flexibility that they're looking for. Because they don't really know what they want, do they, they want places to be successful, and not have to bother with them again, you know, basically, as what they want, they don't really know how to achieve it because it could happen in so many different ways.”

S30 – Director, Community Action Northumberland

The quote below from a Director at Northumberland County council highlights the strategic disconnect recognising that the government’s objectives are not necessarily local objectives

with government focusing on productivity whereas local authorities, small businesses and rural communities were concerned about sustainability and resilience.

“We know there are outcomes other than productivity that are important locally or will drive productivity long term but won’t meet the instant requirements of the metrics required for the funding. And actually, a lot of what we do in the rural is actually just sustainability, making sure that stuff keeps going, you know, resilience and not losing things.”

S29 - Director, NCC

The challenges of measuring these other outcomes are acknowledged at a local level. The quote below from one of the leaders of the Development Trust demonstrates that often the outcome of their work is about changes of perception and giving local people pride again which are not easily measured by national government policy.

“We refurbished the retail space to be able to bring new businesses in, that in itself was a really positive impact because it did away with a lot of dereliction in the town centre and really lifted the place and immediately people start to feel it’s a better place to live. And I get these things are very difficult to measure but we know from the feedback, from everyday comments that the area has improved considerably since the 1980s when there was a real dip. “ L27

As stated in the quote below, resilience is not simply economic, often small businesses are the glue that keeps a community sustainable providing key services and places for people to meet and interact as indicated in the quote below:

“Small businesses keep rural communities sustainable – they support the shops, pubs, schools, public services – without them the countryside would leach people.”

S30 - Director, Rural Network

Whilst acknowledging that it may cost more to service small businesses, local policymakers highlighted resilience benefits as large numbers of small businesses mean that they are not exposed to the economic shocks of one large employer closing making them more resilient.

“Since forming the Development Trust in 1994 we have relied on these small family businesses as the national businesses abandoned Amble. Big employers can go at any time but with a small business base we have resilience. Local families could not move their businesses and it was their livelihood, so they had to stick with it. They had to work with us to find ways to make Amble better because they had no other options and we had to work with the family businesses because we had no national corporates that we could turn to for help. Family run businesses will try and put everything into it, the only multi-nationals we have here are Boots, Tesco, the Co-op, Post Office I suppose and TSB. If you are in charge of your own future, you are more committed.”

L26 - Director, Development Trust

The interviews suggest that there are greater flexibilities in the role and rules of the Council that enable it to shape policy around place. The quote below from a Director at Northumberland County Council acknowledges the challenges of the green book on national government policy design and reflects that local authorities have greater flexibility.

“You’ve got the Rural Growth programme, it is measured mostly on a jobs basis, though you're right. I think that your kind of just have to accept to a degree that metric is not completely right, but I don't know how easy it is for government to move away from that. I think that that's where Council spending comes into it a little bit more, we're not governed in the same way by a green book, or this or that or the other. We can do things like look at community hubs and community activity and try to stimulate and drive that. I think that's the bit that we are pushing at the minute as we are going through a discussion on the next round of devolution.”

S29 - Director, NCC

This suggested that the devolution of government could help create a more flexible approach which would enable greater tailoring of policy to meet the needs of place. The quote below from a Director in Northumberland County Council shows how the local authority redefine

the strategic outputs repackaging productivity within their context, focusing on sustainability and resilience, issues that matter and resonate with local communities.

“So, you've got to be cute about how we package things that you know, to get those loss leader things in terms of government outcomes under the radar. The LEP they're driven by the same metrics. So, we've got to try and package things up so that you've got elements of the programme that give the productivity. But as we know that there's other outcomes that are much more important locally, or will drive the productivity in time, but it won't be instant. And actually, a lot of what we do in the rural is actually just sustainability, making sure that stuff keeps going, you know, resilience and not losing things. So that's the first thing. And then obviously, if it can grow great or maybe, just diversify to build that resilience. But it's that that we've focused on much more than productivity per se.”

S29 - Director NCC

To meet government's requirements the local authority team, package up streams of projects to meet the criteria, re-interpreting the policy approach to overcome the problems of eligibility and scale. They work at multiple levels, changing not just the scale of projects but trying to overcome issues of temporality, creating long term local programmes of activity to create the required long-term outcomes, and then using short term government bids to patchwork together a cocktail of funding that delivers for the community.

The local authority also aggregates outputs across multiple towns to meet government needs by using a sector programme approach which enables them to use the funds in more sparsely populated rural areas that otherwise would be ineligible for this type of funding overcoming the disconnects of scale and creating a mechanism to enable the authority to deliver on the outputs of productivity whilst including areas in the programme that would never normally meet the criteria.

“So, the place programme, we're the first and the only deal that's got a programme around place. In the other deals, it's the focus on a town and they've got to identify

the projects in the deal. So, we've got place, we've got energy, we've got digital, we've got business infrastructure, and it's about more devolution to the areas to kind of focus on, you can choose your towns, you can develop the programmes, and we're selling back a programme to the government. So, I'm not to selling one town's outputs to government. I'm selling them an aggregate of all the towns in the borderlands deal. So that means you get your outcomes. Yeah, you can hide your productivity, you can demonstrate productivity at that level I couldn't do it at Rothbury level. Yeah, but I can do it at Borderlands programme level. that's the trick.”

S29 - Director, NCC

The quote demonstrates that the Council Officers are aware of the disconnect and are intentionally repackaging activity to support local communities using the funding streams and government projects available. The quote discusses “selling back programmes to government” which indicates this broker role, not only helping locally but reshaping the government approach. There is also evidence of the level of negotiation required with government to secure this flexibility. The quote states this is the first deal which has been structured in this way demonstrating how the local authority are innovating to get around the challenges of the national government frameworks.

This repackaging of government policy at a meso implementation level requires an understanding of the region and a willingness to use flexibility to ensure it meets local needs. The quote below from the LEP demonstrates how they are using their credibility with government to try and secure larger pots of funds from national schemes and then to use its flexibility to devise how the schemes are implemented within region.

“I think there was some concern amongst rural stakeholders that in a post Brexit environment, whether the UK Shared Prosperity Fund into which government are bundling everything, will work for areas which are not in the core of the economic story, like rural areas but not exclusively rural areas, it could be you know deprived areas or areas of mining communities... And I think we were able to demonstrate that we understand the complexity of the region and we are flexible in deployment. So, for example in the current EDRF programme, we didn't have a simple evaluation

methodology where return on investment was the sole arbiter of who got the money. So different programmes have been set up including the Rural Growth programme. And certainly, there is a long-term commitment that has been written into the Local Industrial Strategy that assuming we have control of the cash, we will recommission and make it more flexible.”

S31 - Director, LEP

The quote indicates the desire for national government to keep things simple and put all funds through one Shared Prosperity Fund. The quote also indicates that the flexibility required to successfully implement these funds is not only beneficial to rural areas but enables all place-based activity which requires tailoring beyond the mainstream.

As stated within the disconnects, the rural economy is multifaceted which has been cited as a challenge for national government however there is evidence that this co-ordination may be easier at a regional level creating a “whole place perspective”. The quote below from a Director at the Local Enterprise Partnership demonstrates how they co-ordinate beyond their direct responsibilities recognising the importance of the wider eco-system in supporting their objectives of creating economic growth.

“We tell a story about demonstrating an understanding of the rural dimension which talks about rural innovation priorities, rural planning and infrastructure which isn’t our direct responsibility but is important in trying to understand the sort of environment we are working in and then there’s a rural housing thing and digital connectivity to services and housing. So, there’s an understanding beyond the direct things we do, that there are also things that are important to the rural economy, where we aim to co-ordinate and create some leadership.”

S31 - Director, LEP

6.2 Negotiation between the different actors involved in the process of reformulation

The key negotiation seems to be ensuring that some funding from central schemes is ringfenced for rural, particularly as the funding streams keep changing. Whilst political promises are given that new funding streams will replicate previous schemes, the evidence on the ground is that there is less funding nationally ringfenced for rural activity and that the funding streams that they are looking to bid into are not led by Defra despite Defra having the lead for rural affairs. The quote below from a Director in a Rural Lobby Group outlines these concerns and the critical role of the meso local authorities in holding national government to its commitments.

“I don't think we're going to get shared prosperity fund that's going to have a dedicated rural element. Given all the promises we had about, you know, it's going to replicate, it's going to, you know, mirror what we had in the ERDF ESF and RDP. The bit that's going to be missing is things like Rural Development Programme and we're going to have to fight at the table to get that rural money. It's the ring fence on the basis that rural communities need something slightly different.”

S30 – Director, Community Action Northumberland

Government's desire to deliver policy interventions at scale was raised many times within the interviews as a particular area requiring negotiation. The council evidenced below that there was an ongoing negotiation to support government to reduce the size of projects to enable smaller communities to participate. This quote illustrates also how the Council defines its role trying to influence the policy process.

“Government think big is beautiful, the bigger the project almost the better, whereas in, in our world, you can make really big impacts with relatively modest sums of money, and lessons learnt, and things can be sustainable if you do them in the right way. And that's the bit that government don't tend to kind of recognise. And so that's why we're really trying to influence from inside.”

S28 - Politician, NCC

These negotiations also happened at a regional level. The quote below demonstrates how the Council used evidence from national pilot programmes to persuade the newly formed North of Tyne Combined Authority to invest in rural specific activity. It is another example of how despite failings to learn from successful pilots at a national level, the regional institutional memory of the local authority is ensuring the learning is not lost and that there is greater continuity of activity.

“There was a pilot programme, Rural Growth Networks, which were 2013- 2015. I think it was Defra funding. It was one of those great pilot programmes that you know prove it can work. And then once it proves it works, they don’t replicate it. It worked really well and out of that the county learnt a lot, because it was fairly soon after unitary government came in Northumberland. And they really built on it to make the case with North of Tyne, creating programmes that were rural specific. I think Northumberland handle rural well. I know it’s difficult in other places from listening to colleagues.”

S30 - Director, Community Action Northumberland

Sometimes these negotiations were about understanding the negative unintended consequence of government policy and negotiating a better solution or mitigating the impact at a local level. The quote from a senior local politician below shows how this specific place-based knowledge is required to understand the impact of the policies and how local government are mitigating the risks of national policy by influencing the devolved authority to commission further research. By commissioning additional research this gives the local institutions power in the negotiations with central government to reconsider the approach as well as a vision to help the local community consider what they think the future looks like.

“Wooler, is about tenant farmers, it's very easy for the biggest estates to say, right government says it wants shed loads of trees, plant them, kick off the tenant farmer.

And before you know where you are, that you know that tenant farmer, they can't buy a tractor, the dealership fails, they can't take on an apprentice, and he's going to have to, or she's going to have to go somewhere else. So, all of that will cascade from government policy if we're not careful. And that's what we're trying to stop. So, you'll notice in the papers, I think it was in January, for the cabinet for the north of Tyne, we put half a million behind studies looking at the rural economy and trying to set up our version of what we would like the countryside to look like. And that means, yes, more trees in the right place. But it means a more sustainable future for farmers, or that they can retire with dignity with a pension plan that works for them or a plan that that deals with succession, that we work out what multiple generations are going to do to the landscape and how the landscape changes, and so on and so forth”

S28 - Politician, NCC

This negotiation can involve putting forward the case for additional rural resource recognising that it can be more expensive to do things in sparsely populated areas, particularly when “per capita” evaluations were used. This is effectively a negotiation of power which requires real rural expertise and a voice at the centre of policy making.

“Is there any tension? Yeah, I mean, there is because most people work within an urban setting and don't necessarily understand why it costs more to deliver something similar in the rural area on why you might get lower outputs. But the outputs that you do get have a bigger impact, because of the multiplier effect in a rural area. But it does cost more to deliver. And now that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it; it just means that we need to think about how to do it. And it's having that sort of knowledge and understanding at the centred in the Combined Authority to be able to implement a rural by design approach because if you don't have that, then you end up with trying to shoehorn stuff in later and its more expensive again.”

S32 - Manager, North of Tyne Combined Authority

Ensuring policy is fit for purpose can also require power negotiation with central government and an ability to evidence how you can make it work. This participant believes that rural stakeholders could be better at demonstrating to government how to make it work and the impact that can be achieved.

“I think from a rural perspective, we've never really been quite good enough. Doing the basic maths and showing that, you know, if you add a lot of small things together, it makes a big thing. You know, you can have a big impact over a large area for a small amount of money that does all those things, you'll know.”

S30 – Director, Community Action Northumberland

There is acknowledgement from the local authorities that this negotiation with government is ongoing and that the rural lobbying effort was still work in progress.

“We're really trying to influence government to make sure the enabling infrastructure is built into projects but we're not there yet.”

S29 -Director, NCC

Arguably this is the nature of translation, it is an ongoing negotiation recognising the tension between national government's desire to create universal policy and the heterogenous nature of communities. This negotiation was not just about policy and funding as the meso level were also trying to negotiate with the local community to encourage them to prioritise, to articulate their needs and to support the Council in shaping national government policy. This means empowering the local leaders of the communities to proactively raise issues and to then work in partnership to find solutions. An example of this is outlined in the quote below from the leader of a Development Trust who gave a practical example of how by working in partnership, the local community and the county council had found a solution for the national challenge to reduce the cost of public services in rural communities.

“We were very worried about services in 2009, following the global economic downturn. And we actually went to the county council and put together a business case for them to demonstrate that if they moved into the [Community] Centre, we could create shared services that managed tourist information, a library, a community space and they would save money. And the community would get a library open longer hours. And that's what happened in 2012, we've got a library service that's open three times longer, the council saved money and the Trust gets a small income from the rent from the Library that we can reinvest.”

L27 – Director, Development Trust

This requires an understanding of the communities by the officers at the meso level as suggested below:

“We’ve got officers who understand the patch, so they use their leverage to try and broker ways forward working with the community.”

S29 - Director, NCC

The use of leverage indicates that this negotiation is about power. Understanding the local communities and having access to government gives the meso-level power.

6.3 The assignment of different roles

In assigning roles, there needs to be a recognition of the different resources available, skillsets and flexibilities. The meso level is performing multiple roles as well as recognising the potential capacity within others and using this knowledge to overcome the disconnects and create a more coherent approach. It was recognised that the local authority level has great flexibility enabling it to undertake a wide range of roles. This was referenced in the 2019 House of Lords report (para 190) which stated that:

“as well as their statutory and service delivery responsibilities, local authorities can also use their powers and resources to support partnership working and collaboration on rural economic development. The general power of competence, by which local authorities may choose to undertake any activity they are not specifically forbidden to do, also widens the scope of Councils’ opportunities to support rural economies.”

This broad remit enabled the local authority to take a whole place-based approach integrating multiple services and functions, a role that central government were criticised for not being able to fulfil. The 2019 House of Lords report (para 197) stated that:

“Rural-facing local authorities should adopt rural strategies as good practice where these are not already in place. These strategies should leverage their wider roles and powers to support rural economic development, including through planning policy,

support for digital infrastructure and transport provision. They should also consider the interventions that may be necessary to support the prosperity of smaller towns and outlying settlements.”

This recognises the ability of local authorities to convene, to co-ordinate policy and to engage at a micro level to understand small rural towns’ needs. The quote below from a Director at the LEP indicates the need for community capacity and the importance of partners that do this.

“There is a need to communicate with communities and the LEP doesn’t have the capacity to do this directly but has partners that can bring this to play. I am certain that [Director at NCC] will hold our feet to the fire on UK Shared Prosperity Fund and make sure we do a good job with the replacement of the European Structural Fund programme. She’s involved in our boards and there will be other partners as well.”

S31 - Director LEP

Whilst securing funding was a key meso role, the supply of funding would need to be secured from elsewhere which was often central government, but local co-ordination could help align funding streams to give greater focus and clarity and to help tailor this funding into a coherent rural scheme. Often the role at a meso level was not doing but creating partnership and mobilising a wider number of actors. This was indicated in the quote below from the Director at the LEP who acknowledged that whilst people thought power was about money, this mobilising power could be more valuable than the investment they could provide.

“The role of the LEP is about championing and driving the Strategic Economic Plan. And it has several roles within that and the one that I think people often look for is the investment role. I think however the most important roles are the leadership and co-ordination I would call them the strategic added value. Fundamentally the investment is a tool to deliver on some of the specific objectives and to oil the wheels and to future tool. As we’ve matured, I think we’ve learned a lot about what that looks like. And it’s about boundary spanning, being future focused, trying to understand markets and evidence development. It about then translating that into strategy and

partnerships. And that's different to an RDA which was more about doing stuff in the region whereas we are trying to mobilise the region."

S31 - Director, LEP

This convening role could be done formally through their Board which as a partnership involved many of the key players including the Local Authorities but could also be delivered informally through close association. This convening power was delivered at multiple levels with the Combined Authority and LEP convening the region and the Local Authority investing in and convening the local communities to create capacity to lead projects as set out in the quote below:

"I think that that's the role of a local authority that, you know, as a Combined Authority has the convenient power across the region, the local authority in a big local authority like Northumberland has been, or has convening power, and can bring different actors together and can, you know, can be a, you know, a partner to try and sort of defuse any tensions prior and sort of bring some collaboration. The local authority can invest in the infrastructure and the capacity of local communities to be able to develop things that they believe in, and supporting them to, you know, to think through what to do rather than doing things to them. So, it's enabling communities to do what they need and want. So, the Borderlands programmes are very much like that as well - putting the capacity in the right places, with a little bit of catalytic funding and support so places can own and develop, you know, what, what they feel is right for their local communities, and it's not done to them."

S32- Manager, North of Tyne Combined Authority

Recognising that there are a plethora of bodies creating activity relevant to rural small businesses, one of the clear roles undertaken by the meso level was a role in editing and signposting. The LEP highlighted the importance of this role in the quote below:

"One of the early pieces of work that was done by the business growth team was to look at the preponderance of business support programmes in the region. There were 80 organisations delivering 270 different services and that's just the public funded ones and then you layer in the accountants and solicitors and the network organisations and it's completely un navigable. And therefore, businesses don't know

where to go. One of our roles was at attempt to rationalise it and do a more sophisticated job focusing the funding on specific targeted needs, some programmes will be generic across whole region but some like rural will be targeted”

S31 - Director, LEP

The local authorities try to influence national government policy, effectively managing up, by being a champion of their rural communities and small businesses, with the aim of influencing policy design and funding streams. However, if they fail to influence, they change role and look at how to change the policy in implementation to maximise its applicability within the local community. This is evidenced in the quote below:

“The government often think big is better and the fear with Levelling Up is that whilst it mentions rural and coastal communities, the funding is never geared up for their needs. We try to voice our concerns but failing that we’ll just try and make it fit. Our officers will use their experience to find ways to make it work.”

S29 - Director, NCC

The meso level have negotiated national short-term schemes to create longer term approaches using their leverage to influence programme design. There is a recognition that further devolution via the Combined Authority enables more longer term thinking and enables a regional institutional memory about best practice but also that other institutions such as the local Universities play that role.

“So that longer term planning, which having a Combined Authority allows, I think will be helpful, having a continuous loop of learning and redesign in a way that unfortunately, government funded programs that come every four years have outputs to meet, and then go and something else starts again, and you have to start from scratch doesn't really allow you, but I think some of our regional infrastructure institutions, our anchor institutions play that role of trying to capture the learning. So, you know, our universities have a lot of experience and have done quite a lot of work on this.”

S32 - Manager, North of Tyne Combined Authority

The success the County Council is having translating universal policy and creating and securing specific rural projects and programmes is a real skill which has been practiced and developed over many years with the team learning from rural pilot activity in 2013 – 2015. This demonstrates the importance of capacity building within the meso level to develop the leadership skillset to influence the national programme activity and to listen and work with the communities on their needs. This embedded rural expertise going all the way back to the Regional Development Agency, One North East has supported the devolution process securing the first deal with a rural portfolio and enabled the new North East Combined Authority to develop its rural approach quickly securing investment funds. The quote below from a Manager in the North of Tyne Combined Authority demonstrates that despite the creation of new levels of governance including Combined Authorities, the expertise is not new but has been developed over years within a multitude of institutions within the region. This long-term perspective on capability development is key to the success of the meso level.

“Some of the learning and some of the some of that sort of coordination that happened, you know, even in the days of one Northeast, and between Durham, Northumberland and Gateshead is actually still there. I think with rural because of the work that we did in the North of Tyne, bringing a lot of the sort of other stakeholders together, many of whom have a regional footprint, taking the work that we did in another time and translating it, adapting it into a northeast piece of work was actually quite easy, because we've done some good work. And there was a risk that people said, Ah, you did that North of Tyne, we want to do something new. But I think they recognize the work that we've done, and how you know, how applicable it was, we're all dealing with very similar opportunities and challenges. And now we need to work together. So, it was quite easy to do that. And that's why the, the environment coast and rural portfolio is basically ready with an investment plan to go to cabinet where a lot of the other portfolios are not.”

S32 - Manager, North of Tyne Combined Authority

The quote below indicates how they local authorities understand the different players within the multi-level governance system and influence others to use their capability to deliver on behalf of the rural community.

“The County Council's done really well in Northumberland, so within the North of Tyne context, they've really argued the case very effectively. So, we've got a Rural Business Growth Programme, they've had Rural Growth network for quite a long time. They've got the Borderlands inclusive growth initiative now, which is primarily rural as well. And, you know, the LEP on its own wouldn't have done that. The LEP they talk about rural, and they'll say we're here for everybody across the whole piece, you know, irrespective, which is fine, that's good. But quite often, you must have a slightly different approach, and a little bit more focus and a different route to things in a rural context.”

S30 – Director, Community Action Northumberland

The role at a micro level is to convene the local community and signpost activity. This role is a conduit in signposting information to individual residents and businesses is critical to connecting policy with the end user. This is discussed by a local politician in the quote below.

“People come to me. Like if people want to set up a business and they are looking for a unit or premises. They will come and talk to me and ask me who to contact. And then ask who can I contact to get funding from or who do I need to speak to about a letter of reference for the bank. Farmers come to me if they want to dig up a road or whether its something to do with planning permission or if they want to get a contract with the Council for hedge cutting or roard clearing. People know who I am I become like the glue.”

L25 – Local Politician

This quote indicates the importance of local leaders as it gives the community one door to access to their queries and gives policy a “human face” making it more accessible.

Table 6 below sets out the roles played by the multiple levels and how they relate.

Table 6 - The relative roles of the multi-level governance layers in rural enterprise policy

	National Government	Meso (LEP/CA/County Council)	Local communities
Role	<p>Drives macro-outcomes such as GDP growth and jobs.</p> <p>Responsible for fiscal policy and redistributing taxation in the form of government programmes to support objectives.</p> <p>Creates ad hoc competitive short term funding from various government departments focused on economic growth</p>	<p>Translates national government funding from projects into programmes and then works with local communities to create capacity to shape the programmes to meet local needs.</p> <p>It Translates KPIS from productivity to social outcomes.</p> <p>Mitigates tight timeframes – preparing for future bids with ready-made project ideas:</p> <p>Rescales projects to ensure small towns and small businesses can participate and</p> <p>Integrates ad hoc projects into programmes.</p> <p>Aligns other players</p> <p>Identifies and supports capacity</p> <p>Embeds delivery</p>	<p>Understands local community and business needs and articulates these to Council to enable policy to be shaped accordingly.</p> <p>Creates delivery capacity, legitimises activity within the community and embeds the activity in local community engaging local people. Convenes people and signposts activity.</p>
Key Contribution	Funding & generic policy	<p>Influencing macro policy/championing different needs of rural</p> <p>Securing funding and creating flexibility</p> <p>Creating Partnerships</p> <p>Supporting development of capacity</p>	<p>Embedding activity – convening and signposting.</p> <p>Delivering locally</p> <p>Maintaining support</p>

Timescales	Short term	Bridging short termism of government with long term needs of community	Long term
Who	Politicians, civil service, lobby groups	Politicians & officers of NCC, LEP, Devolved Authority	Residents, voluntary sector, businesses
KPIs	Outputs	Aggregated programmes & capacity Business	Long term outcomes

6.4 Mobilisation and Implementation

Mobilisation and implementation of policy was dependent upon local engagement and understanding. This was specifically referenced in the County Council’s Plan which stated that:

“Community-led regeneration is fundamental to our approach, and we provide targeted support to assist development and delivery through the sector. Places such as Kielder, Wooler and Amble have demonstrated this approach works and are rightly showcased. Many projects that are developed by and for the community are powerful in that they provide a sustainable asset base and bring about real change that lasts and grows over time.”

Northumberland County Council 2018 p21

The importance of this local engagement was reinforced in the interviews evidenced by quotes such as the one below from local politicians:

“The message is local intelligence is extremely important. You've got to tap into local people, their ideas, harness their energy.”

S28 - Politician

To do this, the study evidenced that you needed champions within the local community who support brokering the connections as stated by the Director below:

“Yes, it's about having somebody in the community who can understand it and try and work within and connect people.”

S29 - Director, NCC

The Council perceived part of its role was developing this capacity, potentially trying to create local institutions or forums. They had created an approach with Town Forums to try and support this engagement but admitted in the study that it was not simple as applying or mandating this approach in each town. There was a clear need to engage locally with the role of the Council focused on convening the right people:

“It's a bit like nation building you can't go in and do stuff to people, it has to come from inside. And you must hope that people go on a journey together with you. And in some places, it will work. In some cases, it won't, but you can't just go in and say we're going to build this institution. When we came into office in 2017, the first thing I did was to put in place, town forums for all the major towns to start off. And those were intended really to get decision makers and everybody into one place in the view of the county in the full view of the council, that is, so that the Council could understand what was not happening. Because stuff sort of fell through the gaps. And the council can fulfil that role and get those people into one place. And before you knew where they were the ideas were flowing quite quickly. So that's what my attempt at Town forums has been to get people together and try to go on a loose journey with the council.”

S28 - Politician NCC

As well as directly trying to create the capacity for institutional engagement at a local level, the Council also used their convening power and leverage in terms of funding to try and get the different communities within the locality to prioritise together with the eventual aim that they can become independent. The quote below from a senior politician indicates the need to understand the different communities within any one town and to ensure a broad representation.

“Everyone's part of the town, they've all got a stake, you can't just pick and choose who you listen to, you know, because that's what happens in some of these

communities. And so, they want to play then they need to meet certain parameters. But once I've done that and they've started to work together as a community, rather than in factions, they start to forget about the differences between each other and focus on the commonalities and what we're hoping to do through the programme is that the £3m funding for each of the towns becomes almost incidental, local community capability is the real legacy. So that the communities are equipped to then go for their own funding to run their own projects, as opposed to come to us."

S28 – Politician, NCC

However, whilst the importance of community capacity building was acknowledged and the Council understood the power, they had to convene communities, there was still acknowledgement of how difficult this was as evidenced in this quote from a Director at the County Council.

"And I think one of our issues has been that, whilst you say that Northumberland is quite a hotbed at the moment, the bit that's really challenges is the enabling infrastructure. So, we get a lot of capital, we get a lot of things happening at pace, but it's equipping our communities and our businesses to be able to engage, build their capability and capacity up, to engage with them. That's the bit that we really struggled with."

S29 – Director, NCC

The quote below from a leader at a rural network highlights the importance of this role as whilst there is often available human capital, it often needs to be identified, encouraged and supported. This human asset is not always recognised in local regeneration but is a critical resource that the local authority working with others utilise to ensure successful delivery. This is identified in the quote below recognising that people did not always simply volunteer but needed to be engaged and supported:

"There's a resource of human capital in communities but that needs to be leveraged, they are an asset base. There's a learning thing. Older people are often the human asset that's available. Pretty much all of the social enterprises that were set up were set up by people over 50 and there needed to be some engagement with local

agencies to identify those leaders and bring them through which was quite interesting.”

S30 - Director, Community Action Northumberland

This quote highlights the opportunity in the older community but also identifies that community leadership is focused on a small demographic which may mean that projects do not represent the needs of the wider community (Shucksmith, 2010).

7. Discussion

To unlock the untapped potential in rural areas, calculated at £43bn (APPG, 2022), it is argued that policy needs to focus on ensuring that the support is tailored to local contexts in which rural businesses are operating (Bosworth et al., 2016; Atterton and Price, 2012).

Part one of the research identifies five sources of disconnection between national universal policy and the local context which means that national policy alone does not deliver appropriate support. These sources of disconnection include: different objectives and KPIs with national government focused on growth and communities focused on resilience (a strategic disconnect); too short timeframes to enable local consultation and short term policies that cannot tackle long term issues (a timescale disconnect); thresholds aimed at larger businesses or conurbations excluding micro-businesses (a scale disconnect); and a structural disconnect where national government see rural through an agricultural lens, whilst the local community recognise the increasing diversity of rural contexts. Through identifying these sources of disconnection, it enables the researcher to consider how these could be overcome and managed.

The analysis in the second part of the paper suggests that the meso level is trying to act as an intermediary to mitigate the impact of these disconnects and to create contextually relevant approaches for the local communities it works within. The research demonstrates how the meso government level, defined as the local authorities working with the new regional forms of devolved Combined Authority translate national policy and shift a way of thinking from the general to the particular (Rose, 1997) needs of the local communities they serve ensuring it is contextually appropriate (Bosworth, 2015).

This process is not linear and involved working at multiple levels at once through a “complex mesh of networks” (Terluin, 2003), both trying to influence nationally and understand local needs; secure funding nationally and embed capacity locally (Ward 2005; Bosworth et al., 2015); take singular national policy strands and build them into a localised whole place approach; and to look beyond the public sector to work with businesses and others to align activity. They work to alter the frame of national policy by breaking large programmes into smaller projects applicable to the rural environment and supporting local communities to reframe their needs in the language of government (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2019) to meet the fixed criteria of funding. This evidences that the local authority is doing more than shifting control of funds or transferring policy from the national to the local but is negotiating power relations (Shucksmith, 2010). and understanding the local considerations and reception of the approach. (Bosworth, 2015; Bourdieu, 2002) creating local autonomy. The meso level recognises that “policy objects only partly result from the work of policy designers” (Rein and Schon, 1996, p93) building capacity (Ward, 2005) with multiple actors across different spaces and levels (Mukhtarov, 2014) to negotiate and establish clear roles (Callon, 1986) enabling the agentic quality of policy with its meaning changing within its context as it is implemented (Hassenteufel and Zeigermann, 2019).

This is a demonstration of how new forms of regional devolution with the right capacity and rural expertise at a meso level can deliver the specific needs of rural communities and create place based policy (Pike et al., 2015), changing outcomes to recognise the social contribution of rural entrepreneurs (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018; Steiner and Atterton, 2015; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Steinerowksi et al., 2018) and scaling the approach to reflect the different make up of rural communities with a higher proportion

of small businesses (Phillipson et al., 2019). It enables rural to move from one fixed representation towards embracing a diversity of values and identities (Gkartzios et al., 2020) recognising the dynamism and increasing diversity within our countryside towns.

The process undertaken by the meso level is outlined in Figure 3 below and demonstrates that this is done in several steps, however the process is non-linear and can start at any point.

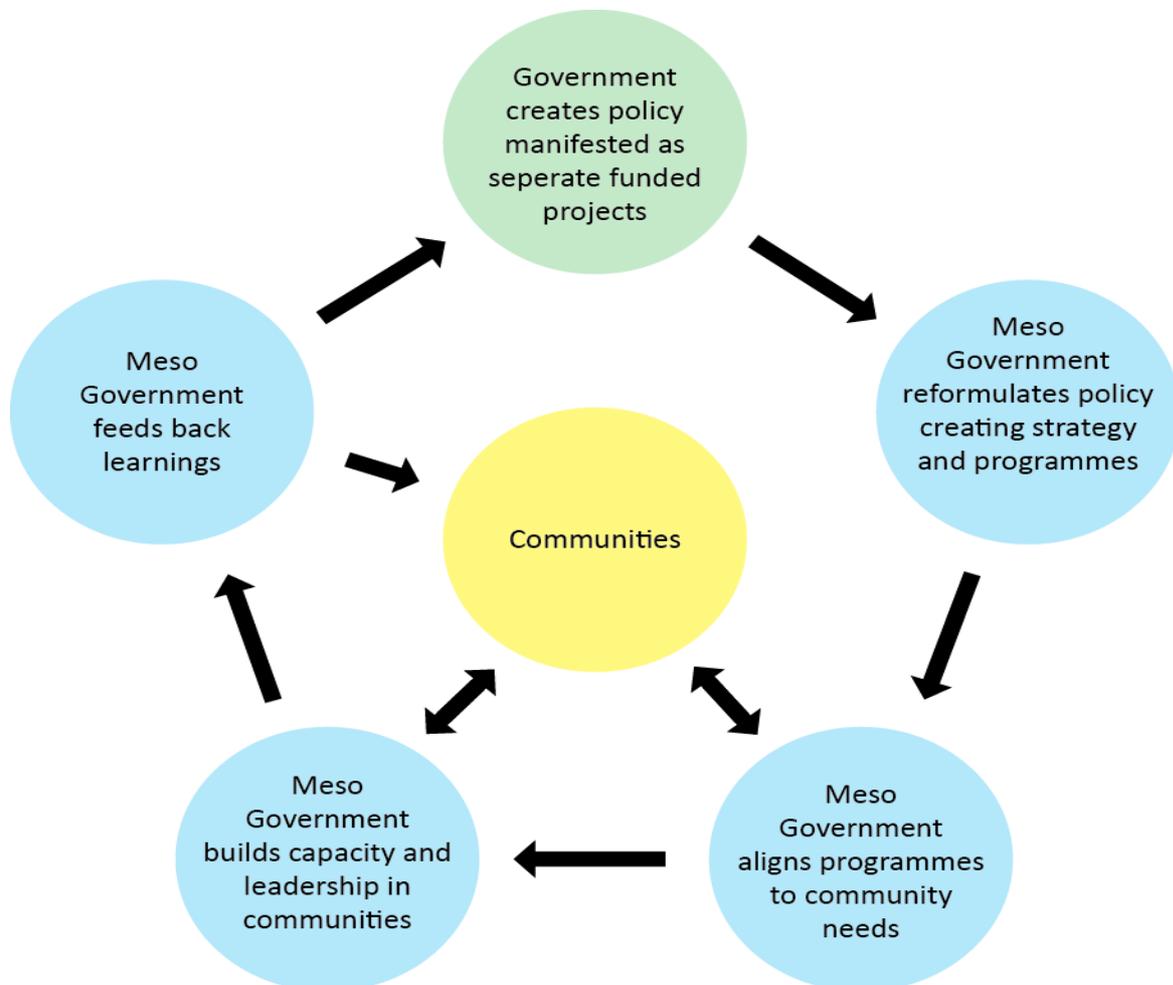


Figure 4 - Process of meso translation (not linear but continual and messy)

8. Contributions

8.1 Contribution to theory

This paper contributes to theory by firstly identifying five sources of disconnection in the institutional context which enable a better understanding of why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel, 2020). Secondly, by leveraging data and translation theory, it delineates the roles and practices of the meso-level institutions in bridging the gap between macro universal policy and the micro-community level requirements and answers the call to further consider the institutional conditions that shape local and regional development (Gertler, 2010; North, 2015) and how they do it. It extends the application of translation theory which is traditionally used to explain the integration of international policy into domestic policy by using the theory as a lens to understand how national policy is embedded and implemented in an increasingly devolved multi-level governance institutional framework.

The paper proposes a graphical representation to explain the role of meso level governance in bridging the relationship between exogenous national government policy and endogenous community activity within this changing rural paradigm (OECD, 2006). The approach demonstrates the practices of the meso as it works to overcome the macro-micro tensions of government in creating place-based policy making. In doing so it contributes to Pike et al's (2010; 2016) call for fresh thinking about the relation and interaction of exogenous and endogenous factors as it shows how neo-endogenous governance can work.

8.2 Contribution to Policy

The research has practical implications for policy makers as it supports an understanding of why there is a macro-micro tension in rural policymaking identifying five forms of disconnect. The research then explains how the meso level seeks to overcome these disconnects using their statutory flexibility, their local understanding, their long-term experience of working in rural communities and with SMEs to create a “whole place” approach. Through the work of the meso level, the requirement for a specific rural strategy is mitigated (House of Lords 2019). Arguably with an increasingly heterogenous countryside, there is a danger that a national rural strategy would create another universal approach that could not meet the diverse needs of different rural communities. Empowering and resourcing the meso level to understand and translate government policy to meet local needs may enable greater tailoring of bespoke approaches.

Whilst this research has focused on rural, developing these meso level of skills and capabilities could also enable broader place making approaches supporting all communities that fall outside the “mainstream” (Phillipson et al., 2019). However, as acknowledged by the participants in the interviews, the role of the meso level is not easy and whilst in this specific case study of Northumberland they have demonstrated some success, they still acknowledge that they could be better. Operating at this meso level requires significant resource that understands locality, long term institutional memory and an ability to innovate around policy solutions to “translate” the approach to meet both the macro and micro requirements. This reinforces the importance of devolution and building and maintaining local capacity if government wants to deliver place-based policy. As local government budgets continue to be reduced in real terms with some local authorities declaring bankruptcy there are real

concerns about the ability of local government to perform this important role going forward. This research indicates that without the interventions at a meso level, national government would fail to reach many of the commitments it sets out to support within its policy priorities such as Levelling Up (DLUHC, 2021). Central government may therefore need to consider whether current funding approaches are appropriate for building long term sustainable development support contributing to the call to understand better the relationship between macro and micro.

9. Limitations and Future Research

As a key tenet of this paper is that context matters, it needs to be caveated that this research is qualitative, based on a limited number of interviews, and is situated in three communities in one county in northern England. Whilst this may limit the application of these findings, this approach does give detailed lived experience of the importance of the meso level which is reflected by others (Munoz and Kimmitt, 2019). Further research could consider the meso level in other contexts including considering whether similar translation processes were also found between universal national government policy and specific city or industrial town needs or whether this phenomenon was specifically relevant in the rural context.

As this paper is submitted, a new Mayoral Combined Authority will be created in North East England representing a larger footprint of seven local authorities (DHLUC 2022). Longitudinal research could consider the impact of further devolution on the role of the meso level and the future effectiveness of rural entrepreneurship policy. Questions to consider include whether the significance of the rural economy decreases within a larger urban orientated organisation or whether the Mayoral Authority delivers greater resources for all. Longitudinal research could consider the impact of further devolution on the role of the meso level and the future effectiveness of rural entrepreneurship policy. Furthermore, the impact of devolution on central government activity could be researched, considering whether devolution reduces the call for specific national rural policy, instead relying on local meso levels of governance to tailor universal policy to local need.

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Chapter 5 – Concluding Chapter

1. Final Thoughts

This thesis is a story of change. It is a story based on how small embedded rural business create incremental change within their local communities, innovating to find resource in places defined as resource constrained, [Korsgaard 2020) using this resource to support and care for local residents and how, through these collective actions, over time these everyday entrepreneurs re-interpret the meaning of place. Anderson (2012, p96) stated that “tomorrow will be better than today” because “the micro of entrepreneurial endeavours become agglomerated into the macro of social and economic progress.” However, he noted that “what beguiles, is that we cannot know the details of these practices.”

This thesis seeks to shine light on these practices through the lived experiences of twenty-four everyday entrepreneurs in three rural communities in Northumberland. Whilst none of these participants would call themselves entrepreneurs, they take risks, innovate, find opportunity and create significant value. All characteristics associated with entrepreneurship (Prince 2021). However, as these businesses are not motivated by growth, a pursuit which in their peripheral context, would in any event potentially be a challenge, they remain invisible with policy makers and academics.

Yet, the outcomes they deliver, including alleviating loneliness, providing key services, building trust, creating pride in place or regenerating high streets (DHLUC 2022) are all recognised to be key objectives for government. This thesis therefore seeks to ask policymakers and academia to think more broadly and to recognise the true diversity of the

field of entrepreneurship as by doing so, there is the opportunity to unlock significant societal outcomes.

2. Motivations

This research was inspired by a desire to understand three different market towns in North Northumberland who despite being peripheral and rural, appear to defy their spatial position and have thriving high streets and vibrant engaged residents with a real pride in place. This motivated the researcher to explore why these northern outposts were not “left behind” (Martin et al. 2021), as narrated by national government in Levelling Up policy (DHLUC 2022) nor were “in decline” as suggested by rural policy due to the changes in agriculture. These three vibrant market towns can be contrasted with neighbouring places in the same administrative areas that have suffered with empty shops, the closure of services such as the pub or post office and are increasingly becoming dormant residential settlements.

Early research identified a group of entrepreneurship scholars (Anderson et al 2009), sometimes referred to as the European School of entrepreneurship, who recognised entrepreneurship as socially situated and embedded in context and who were interested in a broader definition of entrepreneurship sometimes referred to as “everyday entrepreneurship.”(Stayaert and Katz 2004) The researcher sought to tell the real lived experiences of these small business people who were highly visible within their communities but who seemed invisible to policymakers or academia. This study was about entrepreneurship in the context of these small rural communities.

Despite communities valuing their small businesses, community development research surprisingly demonstrated that entrepreneurship had historically not been seen as a key tool within this discipline (Lyons et al 2012). The researcher was therefore intrigued as

to whether the interplay between “everyday entrepreneurship” and community development could explain the resilience of these three rural communities.

Summarised together, these three papers explain why these everyday entrepreneurs are invisible due to the historic perception by government and academia that entrepreneurship research and policy is about growth and productivity. They evidence the important caring role played by everyday entrepreneurs in rural communities and the real need for peripheral rural communities, who lack institutional resource and due to their size are themselves often invisible to policy makers, to use these entrepreneurs as embedded institutional capacity to support neo-endogenous change. Recognising the limitations of national government, the research illustrates how the meso level of government can support the development of community capacity including entrepreneurship through a method of translation enabling government’s wider community objectives (DHLUC 2022) and delivering for local communities and entrepreneurs.

3. Reflections

In qualitative research, it is recognised that the researcher is the crucial measurement device and that the researcher's background, values, identity and belief may have a significant bearing on the nature of the data collected and the analysis of the data (Denscombe, 2014, p7). When writing up interpretative research findings, it is the researcher who judges what should be included (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). The research is not objective as the researcher judges what to include (Johansson, 1996) and therefore postmodernism emphasises the importance of understanding the researcher's context as part of narrative interpretation (Angrosino, 2005). In order, to understand the role of the researcher within the research, the issue of the researcher's relationship with the areas studied is relevant (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

The researcher was Director of Regions at the CBI, a lobbying organisation representing business interests. However, the researcher's career focus was principally on large corporates in urban and suburban areas. Therefore, she does not have specific knowledge of the rural economy or SME behaviour. The researcher however does start this research from the perspective that business plays a positive role in society. This position of bias needs to be considered and reflected upon within the research but as Rose (1997) stated:

“There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing” (p. 77).

A critique of the researchers' roles has developed “in response to a greater consciousness of situational identities and to the perception of relative power” (Angrosino, 2005, p734). This debate is often characterised as to whether the researcher is an “insider or outsider” (Merton,

1972). Whilst the researcher has deliberately chosen not to study the ward in which they directly live, the researcher lives in rural Northumberland and has worked extensively in the North East business community. The researcher therefore has contacts within the case study areas and has prior knowledge of the case study areas.

For these reasons within this research, the researcher adopted the established contemporary view (Mercer, 2007; Merriam et al, 2001;) that characterising a researcher as being entirely an insider or an outsider is usually inaccurate and that a better approach is to consider what Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p60-62) call “the space between”. Merriam et al (2001) argue, that a researcher will “experience moments of being both insider and outsider, but that these positions are relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and the participants” (p.416). Accordingly, the researcher considers her position in this research to have encompassed both insider, outsider and the space in between.

The researcher approached this study with an epistemological position described as interpretivist i.e., the stress is on understanding the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (Cresswell and Poth, 2017). This interpretivist approach is primarily concerned with developing insights into people’s beliefs and their lived experiences. The social world is regarded as a nuanced, multi-layered phenomenon whose complexity is best understood through a process of interpretation. The researcher’s ontological position can be described as constructionist which implies that social properties are outcomes of the interaction between individuals rather than phenomena out there and separate from those involved in its construction (Schwandt, 1994).

4. Contributions

This research considers the agentic relationship between entrepreneurship, place and policy. It recognises that rural entrepreneurship is often embedded in place and in doing so changes place creating new meanings through the practice of entrepreneurship. It also recognises that government policy is often spatially agnostic and is therefore disconnected from the places and entrepreneurs it seeks to help. Local policymakers can help overcome this disconnect reconnecting place, policy and creating a supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurs.

The research reinforces how entrepreneurship happens every day in all different sorts of places as part of daily normal life, reimagining the classic image of entrepreneurs and exploring how entrepreneurship is embedded in place and is agentic for place animating communities and helping rural places remain relevant. It describes the lives of everyday entrepreneurs and what they do daily within their communities. It demonstrates how the practices of these entrepreneurs are creating change enabling these small peripheral communities to remain relevant and supporting and caring for individuals within the communities. This social impact is not measured and is rarely recognised by policymakers. The research evidences how small business create and recreate meaning in place through their practices and how this supports the regeneration of place over time. This has within these case studies enabled these peripheral small towns to defy their peripherality creating attractive places for people to live and visit with vibrant high streets and clear community pride.

The research contributes to the body of work considering context in particular spatial context and place in rural entrepreneurship. Through historic case studies it considers how towns operating within the same rural county, with the same policy context, have developed differently. The research explores how the historic materiality, meaning and practices of place have shaped the types of business who now operate within each of the towns and have created different entrepreneurial environments in each place.

Finally at a macro level, the research having acknowledged the important role small businesses can play in rural communities seeks to understand whether national government supports their work. It identifies five types of disconnect to explain why national government policy does not meet local entrepreneurial needs and considers how the meso level of regional and local government support the towns to overcome these disconnects and to flex policy to meet the needs of these local businesses and communities.

4.1 Paper 1 – Rural entrepreneurship and the animation of invisible communities

The research illustrates the micro-practices of everyday entrepreneurs demonstrating how they create significant value, beyond their economic contributions. It contributes to the body of work on entrepreneurship in context and demonstrates that peripheral towns do not need to be “left behind” (Martin et al., 2021) but can use endogenous entrepreneurial resource to “animate the community” (McElwee et al., 2018) and continue to reinvent and reinvigorate local resources and reignite community spirit. The research shows how entrepreneurs and communities can use proximity (Korsgaard et al., 2015) to develop trust, pride and commitment that are enablers for self-reinforcing evolutionary change which helps keep these communities relevant. In doing so, the research identifies three distinct practices

contributing to the literature on the relationship between animateurship and community development- connecting, enabling and enhancing.

The application of the ethic of care (Tronto 2003) adds to the growing body of research that seeks to understand entrepreneurship in context (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017) giving a new lens and vocabulary to explain the relational and processual nature of entrepreneurship. By considering entrepreneurship through this feminist lens, it enables a greater focus on the social impact of the phenomena, rather than the traditional masculine focus which results in a focus on the heroic entrepreneur and economic growth. The focus in this research on the micro-practices of care that result in change in both the caregiver and receiver but even more critically on the overall community help explain the role played by small businesses in community development. They demonstrate how the small businesses animate the community, which is a practice that builds on but goes beyond their pure entrepreneurship role, however as this research highlights, this contribution to the wider community supports and underpins indirectly their entrepreneurial sustainability.

The empirical research demonstrates that the process of care gives the businesses their legitimacy to operate and the support to enable their financial sustainability in peripheral markets. These local businesses acknowledge they may be charging more than other competitors who are not embedded within the locality and have greater economies of scale, yet their proximate caring relationship creates additional value for the customer, helping secure long-term loyalty and support. Whilst the increased costs and lack of economies of scale that are symptomatic of the periphery provide theoretically the greatest challenge for the businesses interviewed, it is the same proximity and the deeply embedded

and interwoven relationships that are a consequence of the bounded peripheral geography that support the businesses survival.

The three practices underlying the animation process that are identified demonstrate how the businesses interact with the residents of the community and how these micro-practices help animate the community, nudging it forward and creating quiet evolution ensuring the meso community remains sustainable and relevant. Furthermore, this activity is synergistic, with all parties having agency. The connectedness that comes from these relationships, shared spaces, practices and dialogue create a stronger meso-community which is then more attractive for new businesses and residents to join creating the ultimate virtuous circle.

The work has implications for policy makers as it considers the value of the 98% of businesses that are not high growth and extends current thinking on “everyday entrepreneurship” (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) demonstrating the non-economic positive impact that entrepreneurs create in communities. Government policy relating to entrepreneurship is focused on the growth of businesses and their financial contribution at a macro level to UK Plc. There is limited reference to private business in community development policy. The research suggests that a greater focus on encouraging this type of everyday entrepreneurship could support the government’s Levelling up policy objectives (DLUHC 2022) in particular, restoring pride in place and supporting depleting community spirit. This research suggests that small businesses can step in to tackle wider social issues such as loneliness, in areas like Northumberland market towns, where public services are

being cut due to financial challenges. Finally, the research illustrates and creates visibility for the micro practices of everyday entrepreneurs that often are invisible, particularly to policy makers, due to both the lack of interest in peripheral communities of this size and the lack of qualitative research on small micro businesses which seeks to explain rather than simply quantify their activity.

4.2 Paper 2 – Place in Rural Entrepreneurship – a historic case study

The paper explores the spatial context of entrepreneurship demonstrating the agentic relationship between everyday entrepreneurs and their spatial context and reinforces that small businesses are spatially and socially entrenched (Anderson, Warren and Bensemann 2019). The research contributes to the body of work on entrepreneurship in context and demonstrates that peripheral towns do not need to be “left behind” (Martin et al., 2021) but can use endogenous entrepreneurial resource to “animate the community” (McElwee et al., 2018) and continue to reinvent and reinvigorate local resources and reignite community spirit.

The historic case studies illustrate the heterogeneity of rural communities (Gkartzios et al., 2022) and show how diverging development paths are created because of history, geography and community practice. As the exogenous factors (Bryden and Munro, 2001) were constant for the three towns, it demonstrates the range of endogenous impacts which influence rural community resilience, in particular the materiality of place which both provides a resource and opportunities but also can limit development or entrepreneurial growth. The research shows this results in different entrepreneurial cultures, market

opportunities and community leadership capacity, creating different types of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship as well as different community structures.

In doing so, the research highlights several factors relating to both to the materiality and meaning of place (Cresswell 2009) that are associated with rural and demonstrates how enterprising business owners use these as resources, suggesting that rural businesses should not be characterised by the label of resource constrained but instead recognised as having access to different types of resource (Korsgaard et al 2021). The collective everyday practices of the entrepreneurs also over time change the meaning of the place and therefore the research recognises the role everyday entrepreneurs can play in neo-endogenous community development (Johnstone and Lionais 2004), particularly in peripheral communities with “thin institutional” capacity (Gaddefors, Korsgaard and Ingstrup 2020).

The paper has practical implications for policy makers as it demonstrates the complexity of applying universal rural or enterprise policy due to the increasing heterogeneity of place and plurality of rural identities (Gkartzios et al., 2022) and raises the need to encourage “everyday entrepreneurs” as they are a key part of the institutional capacity available in small towns to create neo-endogenous change.

4.3 Paper 3 – Bridging the Policy Gap – The role of meso – institutions in supporting rural entrepreneurship

This paper considers how universal government rural entrepreneurship policy can meet the increasingly diverse needs of local communities. It contributes to theory by firstly identifying five sources of disconnection in the institutional context which enable a better understanding of why policy agents struggle to support rural entrepreneurial activity (Spigel, 2020).

Secondly, by leveraging data and translation theory, it delineates the roles and practices of the meso-level institutions in bridging the gap between macro universal policy and the micro-community level requirements and answers the call to further consider the institutional conditions that shape local and regional development (Gertler, 2010; North, 2015) and how they do it. It extends the application of translation theory which is traditionally used to explain the integration of international policy into domestic policy by using the theory as a lens to understand how national policy is embedded and implemented in an increasingly devolved multi-level governance institutional framework.

The paper proposes a graphical representation to explain the role of meso level governance in bridging the relationship between exogenous national government policy and endogenous community activity within this changing rural paradigm (OECD, 2006). The approach demonstrates the practices of the meso as it works to overcome the macro-micro tensions of government in creating place-based policy making. In doing so it contributes to Pike et al's (2010; 2016) call for fresh thinking about the relation and interaction of exogenous and endogenous factors as it shows how neo-endogenous governance can work. Furthermore, the research has practical implications for policy makers as it supports understanding of why there is a macro-micro tension in rural policymaking identifying five forms of disconnect. The research then explains how the meso level seeks to overcome these disconnects using their statutory flexibility, their local understanding, their long-term experience of working in rural communities and with SMEs to create a "whole place" approach. Through the work of the meso level, the requirement for a specific rural strategy is mitigated. Arguably with an increasingly heterogenous countryside, there is a danger that

a national rural strategy would create another universal approach that could not meet the diverse needs of different rural communities.

Empowering and resourcing the meso level to understand and translate government policy to meet local needs may enable greater tailoring of bespoke approaches. Interestingly whilst this research has focused on rural, developing these meso level of skills and capabilities could also enable broader place making approaches supporting all communities that fall outside the “mainstream” (Phillipson et al., 2019). However, as acknowledged by the participants in the interviews, the role of the meso level is not easy and whilst in this specific case study of Northumberland they have demonstrated some success, they still acknowledge that they could be better. Operating at this meso level requires significant resource that understands locality, long term institutional memory and an ability to innovate around policy solutions to “translate” the approach to meet both the macro and micro requirements. This reinforces the importance of devolution and building and maintaining local capacity if government wants to deliver place-based policy. As local government budgets continue to be reduced in real terms with some local authorities declaring bankruptcy there are real concerns about the ability of local government to perform this important role going forward. This research indicates that without the interventions at a meso level, national government would fail to reach many of the commitments it sets out to support within its policy priorities such as Levelling Up (DLUHC, 2021). Central government may therefore need to consider whether current funding approaches are appropriate for building long term sustainable development support contributing to the call to understand better the relationship between macro and micro.

4.4 Collective Contribution to Theory

This thesis was inspired by an observation that some rural communities continued to thrive and attract entrepreneurial activity despite their remote rural locations and the overarching narrative of “left behind places” (Martin et al., 2021), and “depleted communities” (McKeever et al., 2014). This thesis therefore contributes to the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurship in context in particular the calls to understand the under-researched elements of place as context (Korsgaard 2015 and the institutional policy context (Getler 2010). It contributes to the body of rural entrepreneurship by demonstrating how despite rural places being described as resource constrained, inventive small business owners find specific elements of place including the materiality of geological minerals, the geographical access to water, the wildness of the landscape or the meanings of place including proximity, a rural nostalgia for the countryside or seaside to create entrepreneurial opportunity. In so doing it demonstrates that rural places do not need to be “left behind” and that many are quietly reinventing the meaning through the micro-practices of many small businesses over extended periods of time. The use of the ethic of care to explore the micro-practices of the entrepreneur provides a new theoretical lens to consider the phenomena.

The thesis considers the policy context and the interplay between universal exogenous national policy and the local endogenous place-based needs of communities and identifies five forms of disconnect which it suggests are mitigated through the work of the meso level of government. Finally, this thesis indicates the importance of reconsidering how entrepreneurship is defined within academia as the broader approach of “everyday entrepreneurship” significantly increases the application and societal impact of the field of

research. It is argued that approaches such as taken in this thesis help extend the applicability of entrepreneurship research.

4.5 Contribution to Practice

The thesis demonstrates how “everyday entrepreneurship” can tackle societal issues such as those set out by the previous government in Levelling Up Policies (DLUHC, 2022). It explores entrepreneurship as a tool in community development and identifies how small businesses play key caring roles that tackle societal problems such as loneliness that can otherwise require public service intervention. It demonstrates how entrepreneurship is socially embedded and that entrepreneurship needs to be considered as a social phenomenon rather than valued for its economic outputs alone. The thesis demonstrates the complex embedded agency between entrepreneurial actors and their context. In demonstrating the positive societal impact created by entrepreneurs, it suggests that if the policy environment acknowledged and encouraged the role small businesses can play in supporting small fragile communities, even more social value could be created. It illustrates the disconnect between national government policy and local place-based need and creates a focus on the importance of a stable, well-resourced meso level of governance that can translate national universal policy and community needs.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This thesis benefited from the rich contextual qualitative data collected to garner a deep understanding of the impact of the everyday entrepreneurship phenomena in rural communities. As a key tenet of the thesis is that context matters, the transferability of this research is limited. This research is qualitative, based on a limited number of interviews, conducted within a three-year period during a very dynamic political environment and is situated in three communities in one county in Northern England. The thesis does give detailed lived experience of how communities develop and how entrepreneurship both supports community development and is changed by the nature of the community. However, qualitative data of this nature presents both limitations and opportunities for future research.

The small-scale sample of twenty-four businesses set within three communities within one northern English county and their narratives present as specific to their social and cultural contexts, generalization to other contexts therefore would require careful consideration. There is real opportunity however to investigate the process of everyday entrepreneurship within wider communities. Primarily, this research focused on three vibrant settlements, but the researcher also observed within the locality towns that had failed to reinvent and had lost vital services and shops. Further research could contrast evidence from these communities. Whilst the rural environment has been argued to make it easier to observe the entrepreneurial practices within the communities, small business everyday entrepreneurship exists in all communities including cities and further research could consider whether rural entrepreneurship is distinctive and materially different. Such research would help further extend the general application of entrepreneurship studies, focusing on shining a spotlight on

the 98% of businesses that represent the small and medium sized businesses who do not demonstrate the more studied high growth, high tech enterprises or large corporates.

Furthermore, the historic case study paper demonstrates the complex details of geography, geology, culture and leadership which are embedded over multiple generations that impact the unequal spatial development that successive UK governments have recognised as a key challenge (DLUHC, 2022). Amble has been recognised as a key regeneration success; however, the empirical evidence demonstrates that this change of fortune has involved a myriad of interventions by a range of key actors including entrepreneurs over a thirty-year period. Further longitudinal research focused on the entrepreneurial contribution to community development could help determine how further support for local everyday entrepreneurship could tackle regional and community spatial inequality.

8. Final Thoughts

Through exploring the practices of everyday entrepreneurship this research has uncovered the hidden role the collective practices of entrepreneurs play in reinventing and keeping our peripheral rural communities relevant, helping mitigate the exogenous change in rural places caused by the decline in agricultural employment and globalisation. The research demonstrates that rural communities do not equal “left behind”, “depleted” or resource constrained but can be progressive vibrant communities and do provide unique resources that inspire and represent opportunities for innovative entrepreneurs. Finally, by broadening the definition of entrepreneurship to include the everyday entrepreneurs that we all encounter daily in all our communities, such as the local hairdresser, baker or garage mechanic, it potentially enables business schools to become the central “convener” in an inter-disciplinary phenomenon that impacts everyone.

I hope this research inspires further interest in the 98% of businesses that represent everyday entrepreneurship and the forgotten small market towns that are quietly forging new futures. It aims to demonstrate how with the right support, the small practices of these businesses can contribute to tackling unequal regional development, creating pride in place and supporting our small rural communities to remain relevant.

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