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**Zzzz.....SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE DYNAMICS  
OF VILLAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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## **ZZZZ....SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE DYNAMICS OF VILLAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

### **ABSTRACT**

Using the qualitative research techniques of auto-ethnography, active reflection and natural observation to construct a data set of businesses in a village in rural Aberdeenshire, Scotland, U.K, this exploratory, longitudinal study examines the dynamics of village entrepreneurship in relation to those of urban entrepreneurship. It does so by analysing data on businesses in the area actively collected via a visual audit to determine whether entrepreneurship as practiced in rural areas differs from that practiced in urban areas. Although both fall under the same rubric and rest upon the same theories, from a practical perspective they differ dramatically in the pace of life in which it is enabled and enacted.

### **FRAMING THE STUDY**

This research is conducted within the framework of rurality, defined by Stathopoulou *et al* (2004), as a territorially specific entrepreneurial milieu with distinct physical, social and economic characteristics in which location, natural resources, the landscape, social capital, rural governance, business and social networks exert dynamic and complex influences on entrepreneurial activity. Stathopoulou *et al* suggest rurality is a dynamic entrepreneurial resource shaping opportunities and constraints. Research into rural and agricultural entrepreneurship is expanding, but not so research into village entrepreneurship, despite the embedded-ness of villages in rural landscapes.

This paucity of research is significant because of the ideological and operational differences between rural and urban entrepreneurship. Although both fall under the same rubric and rest upon the same theories, from a practical perspective they differ dramatically in the pace of life in which they are enabled and enacted. This tangible difference is perhaps a manifestation of the social construction of place through time; or from different rhythms of life. However, Babb and Babb (1992) found no major differences in psychological traits between urban and rural entrepreneurs thus psychological traits do not pose constraints on the expansion of entrepreneurship in rural areas. If traits are constant then environment may be the key differential making village entrepreneurship worthy of further study.

Village entrepreneurs operate between the urban and rural conceptual divides. In keeping with their environment, rural businesspeople generally operate at a slower pace on a smaller scale with less opportunity to be entrepreneurial. Consequentially, entrepreneurship as practiced in villages differs intrinsically from that encountered in urban environments. The stereotypical, flash, streetwise, urban entrepreneur familiar in the literature bears little

resemblance to the pragmatic rural entrepreneur. Differing dynamics are at play. Put simply, rural entrepreneurship may be different because of rurality. It follows that ontologically and epistemologically the stories that ideal typical village entrepreneurs can legitimately tell differ from those told by their urban counterparts, albeit their humble stories nevertheless remain entrepreneur stories. This study examines the 'ebb and flow' of small businesses and the dynamics of village life which shape *inter alia* an entrepreneurial narrative in which continuity and change, embeddedness, and evolution abound.

The study concentrates on small businesses essential to the sustenance of village life. Their closure induces a sense of angst (as tragedies to be mourned) because they illustrate a passed way of life. The decline in viability of rural and village post offices, corner shops and pubs bring about a sense of communal loss in small communities. Businesses matter at a micro-level and economically based arguments about value for money, economies of scale, and profit and loss lack persuasion. Yet, decline and fall is an accepted facet in the emotional and economic order that is village life. In Britain, we have an overly romanticised attachment to rural life and rural places as a self-perpetuating idyll. From an entrepreneurial perspective rural areas have high employment and self-employment figures. Entrepreneurship and the spirit of enterprise thrive in rural settings.

Moreover, the focus of much entrepreneurship research is upon respondents as individuals, their attributes and stories. Seldom does it concern itself with community and sense of place. In rural areas these matter. Granted attitudes and values may differ but ultimately entrepreneurs are entrepreneurs irrespective of domicile. Concentrating upon time and place may explain why some entrepreneurs extract value from the environment whilst others subsist. Using an auto-ethnographic approach situated at the nexus of people, time and place the study takes cognisance of environmental issues, encompassing a complex mass of individual issues and characteristics introduced by the differing dynamics that make up both entrepreneurship and village life. This research maps both formal and informal networks that operate within the village community exploring issues of networking.

This study is concerned with the dynamics of village life where these impinge upon notions of entrepreneurship and enterprise. A *dynamic* is concerned with '*actual force in motion*' and with action and energy central to our understanding of the doing of

entrepreneurship. This gives rise to *dynamism* as an energising force and to *dynamics* as the consideration of moving forces both physical and moral in any sphere. Dynamism is invisible albeit one can see tangible effects of its presence. Consideration of dynamics therefore contributes to our understanding of entrepreneurship. Dynamics (as in the dynamics of an action) despite their elusive quality can be inferred from human forces, ideas, motives, drives, states, traits, personality, character, social capital, skills and stories. These are the mental and physical attributes of enterprise performed in a social setting and influenced by many diverse variables such as environment, religion, social class and so forth. Yet, a number of factors have to be in place before dynamics gel resulting in positive entrepreneurial action. Thus a small business owner may possess the antecedents to become an entrepreneur but circumstances and a lack of opportunities in their immediate environs may prevent them doing so (Sayer, 2000: 58 in Blundel, 2007: 51). No one dynamic makes the practice of entrepreneurship possible, but a plurality of dynamics involving interaction between people triggered by motives and beliefs, thus although entrepreneurship is perhaps a universal human condition - the dynamics of how it is operationalised need not be.

This work is based upon the author's observations of entrepreneurship as manifested in a particular village in Aberdeenshire, Scotland over a twenty-year period. The village exudes an aura of being a quiet, slow village where nothing happens in keeping with the misperception that village life is lived at a slower (sleepier) pace. Yet it is dangerous to fall into this Tonnie trap of viewing village life as being in tune with nature and the seasons and of being at one with oneself and others, tied to the rhythms of life, life cycles and the natural order of things (Tonnie, 1887). Nevertheless, in villages many businesses are family affairs, which develop and mature in tune with their owner's lives. Thus a business folding with the retirement or death of the owner is accepted as normal whilst an immature demise is not. These evolving economic eco-systems paradoxically remain constant. The research focus is on the business community and its entrepreneurs through time. The business community qualifies as such by virtue of time, place and shared geographical location. Nevertheless, despite supporting over 70 businesses it is not a unified 'business community' as many business owners have little in common except locale. This reflective work seeks answers to the following research questions, namely

- *Is village entrepreneurship different from urban entrepreneurship?*
- *If so why, and in what ways?*
- *What's 'going on' and what can we learn from this?*

Section 2 contextualises the study in the literature. Section 3 presents methodological considerations. Section 4 introduces the reader to the village and its business community discussing demographics, historical and traditional influences and socio-cultural underpinnings. Section 5 builds upon this by presenting the results of a mapping exercise placing the business community under the sociological microscope, examining networking and the process of becoming and being a village entrepreneur taking the storied nature of village entrepreneurship into account via stories of village entrepreneurship. Section 6 synthesises the research concentrating upon the dynamics affecting village entrepreneurship. Finally, section 7 concludes with observations on village entrepreneurship.

### **CONTEXTUALISING THE LITERATURE ON VILLAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

This section contextualises the study in relation to the literature because the corpus of literature on entrepreneurship has little to say on the subject. A separate literature exists in relation to the topic in developing nations. Such studies have an ethnic and cultural focus with entrepreneurship theory being used to illuminate selected aspects of village life and practices (Nee *et al*, 1991; Yang, 1994; Chen *et al*, 1996; Loucks, 1988). Common themes are training, introducing technology and the resources. Conversely, as entrepreneurial eco-systems, British villages are left to fend for themselves. Because small-businesses are well established and embedded in everyday life, little thought is given to extending a helping hand. In a Western context, the literature focuses either upon the individual entrepreneur and their life story in the wider context of the entrepreneurship literature; or aspects of entrepreneurship theory. Seldom are studies embedded within the local milieu and the dynamics of the business communities from which individual entrepreneurs emerge.

Moreover, researching entrepreneurship in a village context is problematic because it is difficult to identify entrepreneurs and examples of entrepreneurship in action. Anderson (1998) argues that entrepreneuring is about the creation of value, at a social level in terms of new products or services, and at an individual level in terms of the production of idiosyncratic values, such as self-satisfaction and gratification. Therefore to understand individual dynamics one must determine how values are produced and interpreted at an

individual and collective basis. To understand rurality one must turn to literatures of rural sociology and anthropology where in the 1970's an argument developed regarding the difference between rural and urban life centring on the perception of rural time being 'somehow' slower than urban time. This neo-Tonnien argument lacked rigour because time is a universal variable though the pace of life may differ as does pressure upon time.

Studies of rural enterprise in a British context include those of Townroe (1991), Curran and Storey (1993) and Keeble (1995). Townroe (1991) was interested in isolated rural areas in which rurality was the entrepreneurial dynamic exploited, whereas Keeble (1995) concentrated on accessible rural areas with faster employment growth leading to a migration of small businesses to the area. The village under study is an accessible locale. Rural decline in villages in the North-East of Scotland concerned Haugh and Pardy (1999) who reported on the Scottish Executive '*Villages in Control*' project to encourage entrepreneurship and social and economic regeneration in economically fragile communities in decline. Some neighbouring marginal villages are in decline.

Studies into the rural entrepreneurship in a Scottish context are rare. Exceptions include the unpublished Ph.D. studies of Anderson (1995), Jack (2000) and Nicol (2003), which embodied empirical research conducted in rural Scotland whilst focusing upon universal aspects of entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the research focus was on rural entrepreneurship and collectively this triage focus upon the dynamic of 'entrepreneurial outlook'. In particular Nicol (2003) identified a visible divide between *prosaic* businesses providing a service to their local communities and a more entrepreneurial class of in-migrants. Prosaic business owners were inward looking and static; whereas in-migrants were outward looking, had larger networks and were prone to expanding their businesses. Budge *et al* (2007) inadvertently touch upon the former referring to them as 'bucolic' because their business philosophy mirrors their rural lifestyle making them slow and inwardly focused on their business. Whilst this may have veracity it ignores the dynamics of rural and village life, by putting the onus on the individual, ignoring the mental and physical environments. Swedeberg (2006) reminds us that as a young economist Schumpeter wrote of 'static businesses' acting within the limitations of their environments. To paraphrase Schumpeter (2002) entrepreneurship is about swimming against the stream, not with it. Stasis, fear and

resistance to change are powerful (rural?) dynamics. Although for Hyrsky and Tuunanen (1996) the term 'village idiot' is an accepted derogatory metaphor to describe entrepreneurs in Western society, being the village idiot is no qualification for becoming an entrepreneur.

Scotland does not have a cultural heritage of acknowledging its entrepreneurs as illustrated by the implementation of the Scottish Executives '*Local Heroes*' initiative in 1995 highlighting successful Scottish entrepreneurs. Nor does Scotland traditionally have a strong enterprise culture - particularly in rural areas. Indeed, McLeod (1999) who researched entrepreneurship in rural lowland Scotland noted that few Scots purported to know an entrepreneur. That is not to say that rural Scots are not entrepreneurial and hard working by nature merely that they do not always present as stereotypical businessman-entrepreneurs.

Many rural small businesses are situated in the service sector with shops predominating. Smith and Sparks (2000) emphasise the community and social role played by small independent shops in Scotland. Furthermore, Smith and Sparks (2001) highlight the alleged love affair of the rural public with its small-scale retailers but stress that they use them less and less. For Spence *et al* (2004) the sector in which one is engaged in small business plays an important part in relation to levels of business practices and social capital which are influenced by context and institutional arrangements making it important for small businessmen to network within and across sectors. The village business community is not exclusively a community of shopkeepers such as those studied by Bechofer and Elliot (1974, 1981 and 1986) in urban Edinburgh. Therefore, there is no unifying business ethos.

## **METHODOLOGICAL MUSINGS**

This longitudinal study uses the qualitative research techniques of '*auto-ethnography*' (Sparkes, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and '*active reflection*', which are ideal for researching village life because they do not disturb the dynamics of the milieu being researched. Auto-ethnography connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). According to Holt (2003) it makes use of highly personalized accounts to draw on experiences extending understanding of particular cultures.

Bygrave (2007: 43) calls for more longitudinal studies because entrepreneurship as a process evolves with time and in conducting only cross sectional studies we lose richness. Bygrave (2007) further suggests we conduct more field research because at the heart of the

entrepreneurship process can be found 'descriptive background', which necessitates observing it in the field. This study is not truly a longitudinal study, but a remembered chronological narration woven from observations, individual stories and vignettes gathered by the author over an extended period. It is a neighbourhood study based on real people and businesses reconstructed from memory by active reflection in line with the naturalised methodology used by Fletcher and Watson (2006: 153) focusing upon a rural community using a mixture of formal interviews, participant observation and direct experiences of the researcher 'moulded' into crafted narratives which make the research meaningful to the reader. This paper addresses calls by Blundel (2007: 60) for greater attention to be paid to the context in which entrepreneurial activity occurs; and by Brundin (2007: 279-281) for the use of real time process studies to capture entrepreneurial activities (occurring in everyday life) to unlock entrepreneurial outcomes.

The author conducted a physical and visual audit of the village to map the business community using a 'broad-angled scan' (Etzioni, 1967). There are none of the usual crutches of respondents, quotes or carefully crafted life stories, just honest recollections reframed as stories. A deliberate decision was taken not to approach members of the business community permitting the author freedom to tell an alternative story free from the constraints of accepted entrepreneurial narrative with its clichéd plots, scripts and storylines. As a result, in conducting the research, the author had to balance an exploration of the dynamics of the village in which the entrepreneurial activities took place with the entrepreneurial individuals themselves. As a result the focus of the research often became unclear. Without interviewing village entrepreneurs and urban entrepreneurs to compare and contrast findings against existing literature it was not possible to fully articulate how or why the dynamics of village life differ from more urban settings and in turn how does this present challenges and / or give rise to new opportunities. Instead, the author focuses upon the individual in their dynamic environment concentrating upon the ways in which they managed to develop and grow successful businesses despite the difficulties of trading within restricted confines. The sampling procedure carried out was opportunistic (Neergaard, 2007: 266) but includes all businesses. The resultant narrative is a living story enacted through time and space by multiple actors authoring their own scripts.

Narrative presentation permits the active construction of a meta-narrative encompassing many facets of village life telling stories about stories that capture the essences of village life and of the business community. The data itself is used to illustrate the depth of the business community and entrepreneurial activity telling a dynamic tale of collective enterprise by focusing upon the business milieu and not on individuals. A business milieu is both a physical and mental entity, tied to location and locality and to a collective mentality of being and belonging. Businesses exist on a dual front, as a semiotic and aesthetic reality spanning both spheres in the form of physical premises and at a mental level within our minds. As well as owners it has employees, customers and patrons. Both planes assert a collective communal presence. In a village setting it is necessary for businesses to provide services that compete against but complement each other, whilst maintaining a sense of independence. This contradictory stance makes it necessary to understand the socio-economic dynamics of the village. Entrepreneur stories are primarily of and about becoming, whereas stories about mature business are of being and belonging. The sense of belonging to a community is palpable and to belong to a community whilst successfully extracting value from it poses a potential dilemma.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE VILLAGE**

The village is situated in the rural heartlands of the Buchan Area of Aberdeenshire on a busy crossroads with a high volume of passing traffic. It is not an economically fragile community (Haugh and Pardy, 1999) but a prosperous rural entrepreneurial eco-system, a hotbed of established entrepreneurial and enterprising activity. This is not immediately apparent. It has a population of approximately 5,000–7,000 (Census 2001) and has four distinct rural districts.

### **Historical and traditional influences**

The village developed on the cusp of two large country estates owned by landed gentry. Prior to their demise, these two entrepreneurial eco-systems dominated local life. The coming of the railway in the 1860's breathed new life into the village which by the 1900's had developed its architectural character with 'prosperous looking' substantial granite buildings. The villages' social and commercial life formed around the Square whose shops and pubs served the villagers and the local farming community. An 'insider element' emerged around a core

possessing a 'Rural Working Class' outlook to life which pervades the business community albeit a palpable chasm exists between locals and incomers. Class based notions of rural entrepreneurship were researched by Sociologists - Ray Pahl (1966) and Howard Newby (1971). In a similar vein, Sociologists such as Hobbs (1989) and Samuel (1981) considered the effect of place on the formation of the entrepreneurial attitude of urban working classes.

The 1960's saw the loss of its rail link. The building of a Council Estate altered the character of the village doubling its population whilst reinforcing the class based core of village identity. A lack of sewage capacity led to a capping on growth of housing in the village restricting development. Only two small-scale developments of private housing were permitted in the 1990's ensuring that the housing stock kept its value. This combined with an infrastructure of two primary schools, a secondary school, a library, a police station, a medical centre and a bank made the village a 'sought after' location to live and raise a family. The village is also a dormitory for commuters. The vitality of the business community is surprising given the spirit of functionality prevalent in a region with little tourism.

### **Socio-cultural underpinnings**

In the North of Scotland there is no cultural affinity to the entrepreneurial ideal. It is a word seldom spoken although the ideological frameworks (the Protestant work ethic, the long hours culture and a growing bourgeoisie outlook) upon which entrepreneurial narrative is built are in place. Yet there is no celebration of success or the self-belief that leads to the elevation of entrepreneurial status. For entrepreneurial identity to flourish there has to be a cultural acceptance of the paradigm. Ontologically, fitting in and being and belonging are more important than becoming - making good is a private, not public concern. It is an old fashioned outlook steeped in the heritage of the area. Boasting, bragging and hubris are frowned upon, whereas modesty and self-deprecation are preferred behaviours.

The community is split by outdated Presbyterian Parish boundaries, the congregation having a choice of two Church of Scotland Kirks in nearby villages. The usually cohesive force of religion, in village politics is divisive as respective 'Ministerial energies' are directed towards the parish and not the village. The presence of Episcopalian Churches in neighbouring villages causes further dislocation. Traditionally, this is the preferred church of the middle classes and established business community. Another Presbyterian sect and the

Church of Latter Day Saints have congregations. Thus assessing the impact of religion on the formation of entrepreneurial proclivity, theological drives and work ethics is problematic and Christian business owners may miss out on a networking opportunities.

## **THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

The business community of the village comprises of locals. There is no evidence of the in-migration of new entrepreneurial elites as encountered elsewhere although this is not the case in nearby villages. Kalantaridis and Zografia (2006) argue that it is accepted that in-migrants make a disproportionately positive contribution in the creation of new ventures in rural England because the attributes of non locals enables them to follow distinct routes to starting and running a business. In-migrants are more likely to break away from the confines of rurality and rely less upon the local setting.

To appreciate the scale and diversity of the business community the author conducted a mapping exercise detailing the nature and extent of the businesses. This entailed constructing a number of detailed figures. As a result, it became apparent that the business community is not one holistic entity but a layered construct composed of 'Visible' and 'Non-visible' elements and of rural businesses formed in supportive clusters. In the village, there are three such clusters. The first and largest is centred around the Square and on arterial roots into it. The second is situated in a formerly separate hamlet around an unsightly industrial estate. There is no shop and thus it is not in direct competition with cluster one. Cluster 3 – another hamlet is part of the wider economy of the village. The rural business community is difficult to quantify or map in that some of the businesses are up to five miles away but share a postcode and an arterial route into the village. Other businesses two miles away can be viewed as part of surrounding village eco-systems. We now turn to examine the business community. Figures 1 to 4 relate to the 'Visible' business community whilst figure 5 relates to the 'Invisible' business community.

### ***Please insert figures 1 to 5 here!***

There are also business owners who live in the village but own businesses elsewhere and retired businessmen who having extracted value from the village now live in semi-retirement albeit they still exert influence in local business affairs. There are entrepreneurial incomers

who live in the area going quietly about their business from home but have no connection to the village business community. Nor does the study cover micro-economic activities such as part-time or hobby enterprises. Two retired gentlemen earn money by making garden sheds, wooden furniture, toys or signs. They do not advertise their activities as a business but by word of mouth. The evidence of their craft and enterprise is visible in the gardens of the village. Nor does the study cover the informal village economy whereby qualified tradesmen in employment supplement their income doing 'cashers'. A 'Middle Class Elite' composed of the bourgeoisie in the form of shopkeepers, tradesmen, and a professional elite of doctors, dentists, solicitors and managers is discernable.

In relation to business deaths, Figure 6 presents details of failed businesses.

***Please insert figure 6 here!***

### **Networking**

Networking is a dynamic institution, yet there are no visible business networks in the village uniting this disparate collection of business owners. They are not a network *per se* merely sharing location, shared experiences and routine. Unless they knew each other from schooldays, or drink at the same pubs, there are no obvious nodes of connectivity. This is problematic in respect of its fit to entrepreneurship theory because networking is deemed central to entrepreneurial ability. But why should they network together? No law of business makes it a prerequisite for success. Moreover, many networked connections are enacted inter-trade. These factors limit entrepreneurial opportunity. To identify entrepreneurs in a village setting one must dislocate oneself from the village locale because entrepreneurial business owners engage in wider regional and national networks.

The existence of village business network only becomes evident when considering such issues as etiquette and accepted ways of behaving. Thus within related business sectors publicans and hoteliers and shopkeepers must behave in an acceptable manner maintaining civility and courtesy. Competition must be seen to be fair and not overly aggressive. Business must be conducted in such a manner as not to be detrimental to the running of other businesses. Jack (2002) also found this to be the case in her study of rural entrepreneurs. Those that infringe this unwritten and unspoken rule are ostracised. Therefore, for entrepreneurs being considered a local undoubtedly helps.

### **On becoming and being a village entrepreneur**

In participating in village life local businessmen must perform specific roles such as baker, butcher, publican, shopkeeper newsagent, joiner or garage proprietor. In enacting expected occupation specific roles and socially constructed scripts they face becoming a caricature of these trades wearing trade specific clothing. Thus butchers and bakers wear whites whilst garage proprietors and farmers don greasy overalls. Locals' encounter them in this attire and over time the business owner become the business, perpetually enacting an expected role diminishing their chances of being considered as entrepreneurs. The long '*Open all Hours*' culture of much of village business life dictates that the public frequently encounter them in a working environment. Many businesses are open from 0600 hours until 2200 hours. Providing a service necessitates catching commuters before they leave for work and being open when they return. This is essential in maintaining healthy income streams, making village entrepreneurship an unappealing occupation. Indeed, being a village entrepreneur often entails engaging in voluntary servitude. Husband and wife partnerships are common sharing in each other's lives, covering for each other by staggering responsibilities and working hours. Granted the life / work balance can be difficult to maintain but it becomes a way of life. Nevertheless, hard work can and does pay off in the form of slow but steady growth of income. Many rural businesses generate 'Slow Money' whereas flash entrepreneurs who accrue money too fast often end up losing it. Hard work and a slow but steady rise are features of many of the entrepreneur stories told of village entrepreneurs.

### **On the storied nature of village entrepreneurship**

One can identify village entrepreneurs by entering into narrative and biographical space. In the tales and anecdotes told by and of village entrepreneurs one can reconstruct the individuals as entrepreneurs by virtue of narrative fit (Smith, 2006). This concept relates to how well the life stories of the respondents can be fitted into the structure of traditional entrepreneur stories. If one can narrate their life as a typical entrepreneur story then they are entrepreneurs. However, gaining access to stories of village entrepreneurship is problematic. Newcomers and outsiders are held at arms length. Insider access enables one to tap into stories, rumour and gossip. There is no natural forum for telling or performing such stories.

Clues can be found in anecdotes and newspaper articles but entrepreneur stories are enacted over time and in a rural setting it can take longer to piece together the constituent elements. Being of and belonging to a community enables one to access the background richness which village life engenders in stories. Being a village entrepreneur also entails performing and acting and storytelling ability. It is helpful to consider the stories of some entrepreneurs in which one comes close to the spirit of village entrepreneurship. This is so because in narrative the idiosyncrasies of the individual are aligned to the culturally accepted template of telling entrepreneur stories.

### **Some village entrepreneur stories**

This section delves into the storied nature of successful village entrepreneurs. This is helpful in placing their entrepreneurial achievements in the context of the dynamics discussed above. Thus although variation naturally abounds in the stories told of village entrepreneurs the context of the stories are not too dissimilar from those told in more urban environments. The stories however do not provide an indication of the causes of such variation. This obviously requires further research. The stories were selected instinctively by the author on the basis that 1) they were interesting; and 2) that they had a correspondence to his perception of what constitutes an entrepreneur / entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, their businesses are more visible in the community and their local profile is higher than the less energetic business owners in the community.

Entrepreneur 1– This, down to earth, plain speaking individual is the proprietor of business 57 and is the most visible entrepreneur in the village who has built up a nationally known business empire consisting of haulage, engineering, demolition, plant hire, building supplies and restoration yard. He still owns a grain drying business and an agriculture engineering business. He is a philanthropist and gives freely to local charities.

Entrepreneur 2 – Is the son of the owner of business number 14 and is of ethnic extraction. He has an outgoing personality and strong character and is a shrewd businessman with multiple income streams. He is an accountant and Monday to Friday works 9-5 in Aberdeen. Of an evening he helps out at the village shop. He is the business ‘dynamo’ and

masterminded purchasing an ailing grocers shop in a nearby village. He spends his weekends in charge of the second shop and is one of the most competitive retailers of wine and spirits in the area and has a thriving off-licence business, which does not endear him to competitors and local publicans.

Entrepreneur 3 – This female entrepreneur runs business 13, a highly successful Garden Centre. She started the business over 25 years ago with her husband. She worked in the office, kept the books and did the ordering becoming the driving force. She diversified into selling ornaments and pet foods. She added a café / tearoom which has proved hugely successful. She has a very strong forceful personality but shuns personal publicity.

Entrepreneur 4 – Is from a business family and runs a funeral business from his home. No signage advertises the fact. He is an unassuming hard-working man with a rapidly expanding hardware business in a nearby town. His two sons have entered the business.

Entrepreneur 5 - This local man and his wife started up a business over 15 years ago selling beds from the garage of their house in the village. As business picked up they moved to a large country house with outbuildings. They diversified into furniture and have built a new showroom in the village.

Entrepreneur 6 – Was born in the village and began work as a mechanic before becoming a car salesman and started in business selling cars. He made his first fortune then took over the running of a pub in a nearby town, still buying and selling cars on the side. When an opportunity presented itself he bought a pub (businesses 2 and 3) in the village and divided it into a café and a pub. After several years he sold them at a profit before moving into the rural periphery returning to car sales. Now in semi-retirement his serial extraction of value from his environment makes him a stereotypical entrepreneur.

Entrepreneur 7 - This local third generation farming entrepreneur has built up a portfolio of shares in independent oil companies some of which are now paying dividends. He has diversified into property and owns several farms amounting to 5,000 acres in Eastern Europe. He is a Councillor and inveterate entrepreneur keeping an ear to the ground for any opportunity to extract value from the environment.

What then do these narratives tell us about the differences between village and urban entrepreneurs? In reviewing the stories of these more energetic village businessmen and women it is difficult to articulate how they managed to develop and grow their businesses in such a restrictive environment. Without conducting in-depth interviews with them to tease out the complex dynamics at play one has to resort to the realm of idle speculation. Nevertheless, one is tempted to go down the well worn route of the nature nurture debate. Obviously, this requires a further study to determine why village entrepreneurship is constrained due to limited opportunities and particular features of the trading environment. However, from a closer reading of the stories it would appear that the individuals concerned have 'somehow' used their entrepreneurial 'nous' to overcome these obstacles by trading outside and beyond the confines of the local market. This raises some interesting questions regarding the 'inward / outward' focus of the individuals which will be examined in the following section.

### **ON THE DYNAMICS OF VILLAGE LIFE AND VILLAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Various observations have been made relating to the subject of dynamics and village entrepreneurship. The mapping exercise captured the breadth and diversity of entrepreneurial activity. However, at an individual and collective level it is virtually impossible to determine why some individuals become entrepreneurs whilst others remain introverted business owners remain 'wedded' to their work. It lies in why one person decodes the environmental cues better than others and appreciates the dynamics of the situation, whilst others are content to be static. It is the directional focus of action that is important in determining whether a member of a business community becomes an entrepreneur or not. Moreover, the individual will undoubtedly be influenced by different social drivers as well as possessing differing motivations and skills needed to overcome the challenges facing businesses based in rural or peripheral locations. Persistence, vision, single mindedness and faith in one's abilities appear to be common dynamics across the narratives. These are traits which the individuals appear to have incorporated into their working routines in the absence of mechanisms and processes which support / encourage entrepreneurial activity. In a rural and village context one support mechanism stands out – namely that of familial help and support.

How then does village entrepreneurship differ from urban entrepreneurship? Most village business owners are static and inward looking waiting for customers to come to them. Many do not advertise, let alone network. The business community is '*an introverted business community*'. Those that become entrepreneurs are more dynamic actively seeking out opportunities to interact with each other and with customers and have an outwardly directed focus. It is the networks, both physical and mental, which take them into new worlds of opportunity as they '*flex their entrepreneurial muscles*' (Hobbs, 1989: 156). Although the majority of the business community may not be entrepreneurs' they are nevertheless enterprising hard working people who collectively contribute to the creation of a privileged entrepreneurial community. This is their legacy to future generations who will undoubtedly share in their '*entrepreneurial inheritance*' (Hobbs, 1989: 168). The networked children of business families (Aitken, 2006) are the future of village business.

Thus although it is not an entrepreneurial community, it nevertheless possesses an - '*entrepreneurial core*', influenced by the containment of place. In such a staid environment the momentum required to be an entrepreneur may never develop. The static businesses discussed by Schumpeter (2002) may in a rural context nevertheless be entrepreneurial because passivity and stasis are valued rural qualities not to be confused with lethargy. New entrepreneur stories are essential to unlock the key to rural entrepreneurship. The following distinctive features of rural life influence entrepreneurial propensity and output

- The small-scale nature of many businesses.
- The interconnectedness of working and personal life.
- Everyone is everybody else's customers.
- The density of the social networks versus the invisibility of business networks.
- The transparency of everyday life and occurrences.
- A lack of genuine entrepreneurial opportunities.
- The claustrophobic atmosphere where everyone knows your business.

These, and other factors, impose the dynamics of control and conformity detrimental to the growth of an entrepreneurial culture. We can surmise that village entrepreneurship possesses a different dynamic from urban entrepreneurship primarily in relation to an ingrained 'inward looking' business philosophy in which one is defined by occupation and by one's general

character making it difficult to change. Being an entrepreneur almost requires a dislocation of self. Narrow-mindedness is perhaps too harsh a descriptor for this inward focus because it takes courage to be different, to stand out from the crowd. In doing so, one faces passive and active obstruction from the community. Because entrepreneurship is an active paradigm it feeds upon action, energy and chaos. Village life presents less opportunity for action as it thrives on order and there is a definite 'comfort zone' to be found in living a slower pace of life. These are socio-economic dynamics, which village entrepreneurs have to first of all recognise and then actively overcome. One must guard against the emergence of '*communities of dis-entrepreneurship*' (Dana and Honig, 2006) that stifle enterprise.

### **SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS...**

In rural areas, unless one is trading upon a skill or one's social capital, entrepreneurial opportunity is dependant on the availability of business premises and to particular trades such as Hotels. Local markets are often saturated and business opportunities scarce. The lack of premises limits the entry of proverbial 'poor-boys or girls' to enter business. This is a question of capacity and the provision of more buildings and opportunities to allow for expansion, both to attract new blood into the community and allow for new business starts. North and Smallbone (2006) argue for a more strategic and coordinated approach towards building entrepreneurial capacity in peripheral rural areas. Moreover, Stathopoulou *et al* (2004) suggest rural entrepreneurship is highly influenced by specific territorial characteristics and argue that it requires the implementation of integrated and competent policies to support entrepreneurship. There is room for improvement, greater cooperation and organisation within the local business community itself. There is no local roundtable, or business association, to unite and represent them. The future economic livelihood of the village relies upon family businesses building up the capacity to pass onto future generations. Enterprise agencies concentrate on urban areas where their efforts are directed towards remedying problems associated with urban decline, regeneration and social deprivation.

Perhaps the entrepreneurial eco-system of the village thrives because it is left to its own devices? Nevertheless, the provision of a rural business incubation park would encourage fresh blood generating new business. A village needs a thriving public

infrastructure and commercial heart to survive and prosper. It is of significance that the village is treble the size of neighbouring villages and can thus support more businesses.

There is scope for local authorities to make a planned village expansions part of an economic regeneration scheme by upgrading existing infrastructures. It is a delicate balance because as the village expands it will alter in character as its entrepreneurial eco-system changes. The changing dynamics of village life cannot be taken for granted. Planners, policy makers and local councils can learn lessons from its economic success and sustainable economy. Doubling village sizes would regenerate their business communities and lead to the reinvigoration of the entrepreneurial spirit as envisaged by Haugh and Pardy (1999). Releasing this spirit in village communities requires releasing the entrepreneurial spirit in individuals and developing rural entrepreneurial networks. The future of the village looks assured as it is undergoing a period of rapid expansion with approximately 200 houses and a new primary school zoned. This development will alter the dynamics of village life changing spending patterns in village shops making business expansion likely.

Researching village entrepreneurship is difficult because it is harder to locate examples and there are more variables influencing the dynamics of business. This study has its limitations because in trying to assess the dynamics of a static business community it is difficult to factor in all the variables affecting the dynamics. Businesses and their owners go through life cycles and ebb and flow with time and available energies. Practicing and perpetuating entrepreneurship in a village context requires initiating new behaviours and practices thereby breaking the established habits and patterns of village life. It is not possible to observe all the factors necessary in determining why some business owners succeed whilst others 'make-do'. This study contributes to entrepreneurship theory by examining a village as an entrepreneurial eco-system in which entrepreneurs and the enterprising engage to create and extract value from an environment in perpetuity. It also makes a contribution by conducting research outside the dominant paradigms presenting a vibrant model of rural entrepreneurship worthy of replication elsewhere in the Western world because villages need not be sleepy business backwaters. But, should we interfere in the politics of village entrepreneurship or should nature run its course? It is a dilemma with no easy answer.

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## FIGURES

**Figure 1 – The Visible Business Community: Cluster One**

Cluster one (situated around a busy roundabout and spreading onto two arterial streets).	
Businesses 1 –21	<p>Consists of a Community owned Bowling Club; Public House; Chip Shop; Fireplace Centre; Butcher's shop; 2 Hair Dressers; Petrol Station / Post Office shop; Grocer's shop; Public bar; Bank; Solicitor / Estate Agents; Garden Centre; Grocer's shop; Bakers / Café; Chemist / Newsagents a Hotel; 2 Chinese Takeaways; a Gunsmiths / clothes store; and a dentists.</p> <p>Business 2 has had a succession of licensees. The previous owner owned it 20 years ago (along with the chip shop below) but sold it 15 years ago to a consortium of Peterhead businessmen.</p> <p>Business 8 is a national chain, run by a manager. Several years ago it took over the Post office business when the previous Post Mistress retired. It is an extremely busy and profitable location with a cash dispensing machine and an off licence as well as a video and CD library. The business services a local clientele and passing trade. The business employs 15 of a staff on a rota of shifts. It has acquired a nearby site and is in expansion. Had it been privately owned it would be an entrepreneurial business. Managers add a different dynamic being less visible in the community.</p> <p>Business 9 is a traditional (franchised) shop / licence is a family business. Father, wife, son and daughter have run the shop for 10 years.</p> <p>Business 10 is a busy bar formerly owned by a husband and wife team for 25 years doing a steady business. When they left two years ago another husband and wife team took over. He works as a consultant and helps at nights. The wife is the licensee.</p> <p>Business 13 has expanded rapidly since opened twenty years ago. It is a major attraction, which services the wider Aberdeenshire area. It has a café and a florists as well as a pet and hardware section. It sells ornaments and Christmas goods. It is an entrepreneurial business.</p> <p>Business 14 has been in the ownership of the same family for 17 years. It is a busy franchised grocers shop with a very competitive off-licence. The father and wife run the shop during the day. It is also a newsagent and is an entrepreneurial family business. They recently bought business 18.</p> <p>Business 17 is a chemist shop. A 'satellite' business owned and run by a local Chemist for over 20 years. The former owner was an entrepreneur from another town. On his retrial another serial entrepreneur / chemist bought and modernised the premises. This is indicative of the dynamics of this particular trade in that outlying chemist shops are viewed as a means of expanding existing entrepreneurial portfolios.</p> <p>Business 18, a profitable Hotel was formerly owned by a husband and wife. This down to earth couple built up a large clientele. In the early stages of the business they had were 'dynamism personified capturing the local wedding trade and put on dances and jazz concerts. It was a veritable gold mine. Business boomed for a number of years until the husband died. All businesses have a life cycle and in the latter years business tailed off as energies waned. The wife continued the business for several years but sold it to another couple with energy and big ideas but who ultimately failed by falling foul of village politics.</p>

**Figure 2 – Cluster Two - The Visible Business Community / Neighbouring hamlet 1**

Cluster Two (situated on an arterial road and industrial estate at the other end of the village)	
Businesses 22 -37	<p>Consists of an Oil Distribution Company; a Hotel; Bed &amp; breakfast; Garage / Car Repairs; Farming Supplies; Veterinary Surgery; Council Depot / MOT Centre; Garage premises / car sales; Auto-parts centre; Print shop; Mobility shop; Warehouse / Market; Meat-processing Factory; Saw centre / Hardware / Builders Merchants; Bed Centre/ Furniture store Garage / Car repairs.</p> <p>Business 23 is a hotel with a long history of extracting value from the environment. Over the past 20 years it has had a steady turnover of owners. Twenty years ago it was owned by a couple who made a slow fortune out of the bar, the meal trade, dances and weddings. Ten years ago they sold it as a going concern to an entrepreneurial outsider. A succession of managers came and went until a hard working staff member was appointed manager. For a time this business prospered but attracted a younger crowd with the reintroduction of dances. A children's play area in the attached hall brought in new business but such innovations are often short lived as customers' tire of the novelty. A decline in trade led to the owner selling it to a local couple from another village. They were business dynamo's had owned businesses in the catering trade both at home and abroad. The husband was an excellent chef and the wife was a good manageress. Within two years they turned around the business to make it the most profitable in the village. They discontinued the dances and concentrated upon meals and building up the bar trade. They tidied up the appearance without spending too much money and sold it as a going concern at a premium price buying another hotel in another village.</p>

	<p>Business 25 was a thriving business but the owner is now reaching retirement. A subsistence business at the end of the entrepreneurial life cycle of the owner.</p> <p>Business 29 is a thriving concern on the way up. It was formerly a bakery and food-processing business before a fire put paid to the business. Prior to that it was empty for long periods.</p> <p>Business 32 is a niche market relying on passing trade and internet sales. It was formerly a kitchen and bathroom centre.</p> <p>Business 33 is a former fish factory / warehouse in a state of disrepair. It was empty for a good number of years before being leased out to a businessman and his wife from an adjoining village as a second hand furniture store and weekend indoor market. Every second week it hosts a local auction.</p> <p>Business 34 is a former meat-processing factory was built up from scratch and when the owner retired about 10 years ago the current owners bought the premises. It employs 40 people.</p> <p>Business 36 is an entrepreneurial business situated in a modern purpose built warehouse and showroom.</p>
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**Figure 3: Cluster Three – The Visible Business Community / Neighbouring hamlet two**

Cluster Three – hamlet two	
Businesses 38 -41	<p>Consists of an Engineering business; a Warehouse; Hotel; and Bed &amp; Breakfast.</p> <p>Business 39 until recently a prosperous business part of a business portfolio. It serviced a new market but closed down when profit margins reduced. The family are an entrepreneurial but not of the village.</p> <p>Business 40, a hotel has seen a succession of owners in the last 20 years. The family who owned it then were a husband and wife team who built up a thriving pub trade and run dances every Saturday evening. They retired and sold it to a Fish merchant from a nearby town planned to turn it into a fish restaurant. He ran another business by day and worked in the hotel of an evening. The plans did not materialise and after four years of long working hours and no rest he sold it to the current owners who are a couple with experience in the hotel trade who now cater for the trade for foreign shooting parties.</p>

**Figure 4: Cluster Four – The Visible Business Community / The Rural Hinterland**

Cluster Four – Rural hinterland	
Businesses 42 - 58	<p>Consists of a Mill business; Haulage business; Digger Contractor; Joiner; 2 separate Caravan sales businesses; Garage / Car Repairs; Furniture showroom; Antique shop / Builder; Farm Shop; car Sales; Farm and pet food store; Farm Contractor; Kennels; Car Repair business; Grainstore / Builders merchant / Haulage / Demolition; and Country Hotel.</p> <p>Business 42 has been in operation as a mill for over 40 years and is marginally viable. It employs 20 people and makes a variety of clothing. The owners have extracted a comfortable living over the years and have sold houses on the site to gain an extra income stream.</p> <p>Business 43 is located at a rented farm premises and has two lorries. The owner was one of the first to register his business abroad to reduce taxes and costs.</p> <p>Business 47 is run from a house with a large outbuilding and was established about 15 years ago. The sole trader made a good living from the business and employed his nephew. Four years ago he sold it to businessman from another town.</p> <p>Business 48 was established about 18 years ago in an old mill / barn and specialises in pine furniture. The owners had been dabbling in furniture sales from a variety of rural premises before that. It recently changed hands.</p> <p>Business 51 is situated on a main road and is run from a shed. It had an attendant but is now operated on a trust basis. The farmer owns the buildings and rents them out to the owners of business 52 and 53 extracting income from otherwise surplus buildings.</p> <p>Business 56, run by a jobbing mechanic specialises in the sale and repair of camper vans. It has had varied trade over the years. The owner sub leased a part of his yard to another businessman who sold motorcycles. The owner is developing the site for houses and a purpose built garage.</p> <p>Business 57 is an entrepreneurial business group.</p> <p>Business 58 is an exclusive country hotel has regular local clients but caters for the higher end of the wedding market and for shooting parties. It does a gourmet meal trade. It was recently up for sale and was closed for a time.</p>

**Figure 5: Cluster Five – The Non Visible Business Community**

Non-visible Business Community (Have no business premises)	
Businesses 59 - 73	<p>Consists of a plumber; 2 separate driving schools; Undertaker; Chip van; 4 separate home-working hairdressers; a landscape gardener; Car sales; Lock Blocker; Blacksmith; Builder; and Painter &amp; Decorator.</p> <p>Business 61 runs his undertakers business from an outbuilding at his home and owns a hardware store in a neighbouring town.</p> <p>Business 68, run by a young entrepreneur buys and sells old Ford and Vauxhall sports cars. It started as a hobby selling spare parts but due to the internet expanded. Initially working from a garage at home he was forced to look for premises outside the village.</p>

**Figure 6: Business Deaths**

Businesses which have folded in the last 20 years	
Businesses 74 - 79	<p>A Hardware store; Post Office; newsagent/ Grocer; Joiner; Furniture store / Indoor Market; and Farming Liquid Fertiliser Business.</p> <p>Business 74 was renowned for its phenomenal stock. The owner owned a piece of land nearby and obtained planning permission to build a larger warehouse. He worked on this in his spare time until his death.</p> <p>Business 76 was the only shop in the village not in a cluster. It was several hundred yards away from cluster 1 but had no adjoining lane. The owners serviced a limited passing trade and a housing estate selling cycles as a sideline. When they retired the premises did not sell and was converted to a house.</p> <p>Business 77 was situated in cluster 1 and was run for over 30 years by a joiner whose son had other life plans.</p>