Introduction

It is clear that economic prosperity and a high standard of living are not the result of macroeconomic policies alone. The differences in economic outcomes we see across communities within a country point to the influence of local conditions, institutions and orientation in determining the economic performance of a place (Mack & Mayer, 2016; Rocha, 2013). There is compelling empirical evidence that those cities and regions exhibiting more entrepreneurial activity also generate higher levels of economic performance (Rocha, 2013; Saxenian, 1994; Stuetzer et al., 2018).

We live and work in a regional community and have long been fascinated by the differences we have observed in the types of entrepreneurial activity across regional communities. While the evidence points to innovative entrepreneurship as typically a city phenomenon in Australia (Hassan, Bucifal, Drake, & Hendrickson, 2015) and studies have demonstrated lower entrepreneurship rates in regional centres (Obschonka et al., 2015), as academics teaching and researching in a regional context, we are adamant that the manifestation of
entrepreneurship in regional communities must not be overlooked. It is impossible to universalize entrepreneurship—entrepreneurship is by its nature about variation and it varies in different dimensions (Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017)—and place matters (Bosma et al., 2020). With this foundational assumption, our aim is to make visible the doing of entrepreneurship in regional communities.

We do this by canvassing what we know about entrepreneurship from an international and national level, before we consider it at the regional level, by focusing on our two case study communities, the bioregions of Tamworth and Armidale where, through the stories of a sample of business owners, we draw on individual business owners’ experiences and insights to ‘colour in’ what the regional context means. Through the weaving together of the different levels we build our framework for the doing of entrepreneurship in regional communities. In considering the doing of entrepreneurship in regional communities, we believe we cannot ignore the doing of gender (Adapa, Rindfleish, & Sheridan, 2016; Sheridan, Haslam McKenzie, & Still, 2011a).

Existing gender and entrepreneurship research commonly positions individual women as the key unit of analysis where the focus is on their lack of necessary entrepreneurial attributes, attitudes and ambitions required to enact entrepreneurial potential (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). This simplistic representation of gender and entrepreneurship is being countered by a growing body of work pointing to the interplay of individual and societal factors—the gender regimes and gender order—impacting on women’s and men’s entrepreneurship (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Brush, Ali, Kelley, & Greene, 2017; Jennings & Brush, 2013). What we noted from the existing literature on regional entrepreneurship, either internationally or in the Australian space, is how little attention is paid to gender and location (Kalnins & Williams, 2014). Through this book we are hoping to redress this oversight and start a conversation where applying a gender lens to regional entrepreneurship is normalised.

**Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is a contested concept, with a diversity of definitions evolving with consequent impacts on the measures used (Justo, De
Setting the Scene

Castro, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2008; Venkataraman, 1997). For instance, there is dispute about whether those firms started for the purpose of self-employment should be included in the definition of entrepreneurship or whether the baseline for entrepreneurship should be set as those firms where value creation and the expectation of future growth hold. This distinction has gendered implications as women businesses have traditionally been more likely to be non-employing than men’s businesses. While some hold that small business is not a defining characteristic of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, Williams, & Patzelt, 2014), we think such a ruling should be relaxed when it comes to a regional context. Reflecting the definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the composition of our local economies and the relatively smaller size of businesses in regional communities, we have opted for the most inclusive definition, which does include non-employing businesses. It allows for the ‘average’ entrepreneur, not just the ‘ambitious’ entrepreneur (Stam, 2015).

We take a very broad definition of entrepreneurship as ‘any activity that makes a difference in the marketplace’ (Office of the Chief Economist, 2015). Entrepreneurial opportunities occur because different people perceive the value of opportunities differently. These opportunities can be leveraged through start-ups or through existing firms doing something new. Entrepreneurship is about finding the right match between market opportunity and the capabilities and passion of the business owner (Office of the Chief Economist, 2015). Entrepreneurship research has focused broadly on the development of smaller firms and more narrowly on the founding and success of firms that are introducing new products or services to the market (Busentitz, Gomez, & Spencer, 2000).

There has been a blurring of the boundaries between the fields of small and family business and entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018). Many studies reinforce the notion that real entrepreneurship means the ‘ambitious entrepreneur’ (Stam, 2015), who starts a business with lots of funding from external investors, scaling up rapidly and then taking the venture public (Pahnke & Welter, 2019). But as Aldrich and Ruef (2018) point out, the odds of any start-up following this trajectory are very low even in Silicon Valley, the most iconic of entrepreneurial regions. It seems it is the case internationally that ‘regardless of their intention, most
entrepreneurs create short-lived ventures’ (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018, p. 462) and are often drawing on family resources (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Rogoff & Heck, 2003).

The blurring of the entrepreneurship and small business fields can be understood through the notion of innovation. Being less constrained by rigid organisation structures, established routines, and lengthy decision-making processes often found in larger organisations, smaller firms may be swifter in spotting new market trends, more responsive to changes in customer needs, and more efficient in coming up with novel solutions, and so demonstrate entrepreneurial activity without necessarily being start-ups. In exploring regional entrepreneurship, we found this was the reality for firms operating within the regional communities in which we focused. The adaptability of established small businesses to changing consumer expectations, particularly with respect to technology supported solutions, exemplifies entrepreneurship in action.

Social Entrepreneurship

The literature on entrepreneurship commonly distinguishes between traditional business entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. The traditional entrepreneur is characterised as taking risks to develop their business for personal gain, and is very closely tied to the masculine stereotype (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004). Social entrepreneurship has been broadly conceptualised as covering two key components: an overarching social mission and entrepreneurial creativity (Corner & Ho, 2010). The opportunities for social entrepreneurship were traditionally seen as different to those in the commercial space (Dorado, 2006). From our observations of the doing of entrepreneurship in regional communities, how distinct these categories are may be moot.

Citing Drucker (1985) Venkataraman (1997, pp. 120–121), in his classic piece on the distinctive domain of entrepreneurship, described the three core concerns of entrepreneurship as: ‘(1) why, when and how opportunities for the creation of goods and services in the future arise in an economy; (2) why, when and how some are able to discover and exploit these opportunities while others cannot or do not; and finally (3) what are the
economic, psychological and social consequences of this pursuit of a future market not only for the pursuer, but also for the other stakeholders and for society as a whole.’ In emphasising the latter point Venkataraman (1997) points to the wider value created by entrepreneurial activity in the form of social wealth.

This has been developed further by Zahra and Wright (2016) as they identified the importance of social wealth as a key metric in evaluating entrepreneurial activities and a growing literature in this space (Nicholls, 2009). Zahra and Wright’s framing of the growing phenomenon of social entrepreneurship shifts from the distinct categorisation traditionally taken, to one that recognises that social entrepreneurial activities are concerned with creating social and financial wealth, which can be at the macro level, plugging institutional voids such as Grameen Bank’s micro finance services in Bangladesh, to micro-level technological responses to local market failures (Nicholls, 2009). They speak to a growing awareness of the importance of the philosophy of ‘blended value’—where trade-offs and complementarities between financial, social and environmental values are balanced by entrepreneurs, and there is recognition that entrepreneurs ‘draw from and give back to the social’ (Drakapoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007, p. 342). In the blurring between the framing of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship is a space to recognise the prosocial motivation for entrepreneurial actions (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2017a) and what Sieger, Gruber, Fauchart, and Zellweger (2016, p. 546) label as a communitarian orientation, where founders are motivated to provide products and services ‘that help to advance their community’. In this relational approach, there is the opportunity to reflect on how gender may inform this.

**Entrepreneurship in Context**

Entrepreneurship has been described as ‘a disciplined form of pluralism’, as it offers people the freedom to turn their ideas into reality within the constraints of an existing social structure which will rein them in, economically, if those ideas are fruitless (Bloom & River Path Associates,
In essence, this argument is that entrepreneurship is an expression of human capital with in-built constraints, too. The extent to which people enter into this process reveals their sense of independence, their ability to influence change, and the confidence they have in the future. The capacity of a region to support entrepreneurial activities is a measure of its ability to harness the energy of those within it.

The entrepreneurial identity is fluid, both temporally and spatially, shaped by the cultural norms embedded in our social and historical context (Hamilton, 2014). The regional knowledge stock, workforce and conditions for entrepreneurship are important factors in supporting the development of innovative new businesses (Baptista & Preto, 2011; Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2018), and for sustaining those businesses that have moved past the initial teething stages. The nexus of opportunity and people underpins entrepreneurship (Venkataraman, 1997).

In many earlier studies in entrepreneurship, there was a tendency to focus on individual characteristics and behaviours of entrepreneurs, with little attention to the broader social relationships and spatial contexts in which they operated and how they may facilitate or limit the agency of entrepreneurs (Jennings & Brush, 2013; Van de Ven, 1993). Traditionally both theoretical and empirical research on entrepreneurship focused on the individual and the firm and ignored the study of the context within which these are embedded. Many previous studies have drawn on aggregate data or survey evidence to draw conclusions about entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are profoundly embedded in the social context in which they operate (Drakapoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Granovetter, 1985) and ignoring the regional embeddedness of entrepreneurship can cause misleading results (Breitenecker, Harms, Weyh, Maresch, & Kraus, 2017; Delfmann, Koster, McCann, & Van Dijk, 2014).

This is now being addressed through greater attention directed to context (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014; Davidsson, Recker, & von Briel, 2020; Eriksson & Rataj, 2019). The entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) in which the individual and the firm operate, including the interconnected agents, institutions and forces that enable entrepreneurial activity in a geographic area (Malecki, 2018; Roundy,
is garnering more nuanced attention (Thornton, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Urbano, 2011).

In their framing of context in their analysis of entrepreneurial innovation, Autio et al. (2014) identify six types of context to consider—industry and technological, organizational, institutional and policy, social, temporal and spatial—in terms of the national systems of innovation (NSI). In analysing national systems of entrepreneurship, Ács, Autio, and Szerb (2014) recognise entrepreneurship is embedded within a multifaceted economic, social and institution context. A criticism of a national level framing is that it masks the heterogeneity of the sub-regions making up the aggregate. More granularity can be introduced by mapping the six dimensions at the regional level (Autio et al., 2014). Rather than being unique to entrepreneurial innovation, this criticism holds more generally for entrepreneurship at a regional level. In a large and geographically dispersed country like Australia, while the institutional/policy context may be relatively similar across the nation, the organizational, industry/technology and social contexts can vary greatly.

In developing a measure of the vibrancy an entrepreneurial ecosystem that could be applied at the community level, Stangler and Bell-Masterson (2015) proposed four sets of domain conditions for a healthy and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem: ‘density’, as captured by the number and proportion of individuals engaged in entrepreneurship; ‘fluidity’, concerning the population flux, labour market change and firm growth; ‘connectivity’, relating to program connectivity and deal making networks; and ‘diversity’ of opportunity. They framed their proposed measures as a starting point for local leaders to be able to track, and were open to these evolving through practice.

While it is gaining popularity, a critique of the EE literature is that it is not always clear in what way the proposed elements are connected (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017), and it has been observed that gender is notably absent (Brush, Edelman, Manolova, & Welter, 2018).

Geographical proximity takes on different meanings in different contexts. It is a dynamic concept, denoting the way distances are bridged in terms of actual mobility (Lagendijk & Lorentzen, 2007). Each region reflects a complex place-based natural and built environment containing different infrastructure, including technology (MacGregor & Kartiwi,
industry dynamics and human capital which will impact differently on the private and the social. When an individual creates a business, they are doing so in their local environment. The context inflects the strategic orientation of the business and the owner’s growth expectations for the business (Thornton et al., 2011).

For areas outside metropolitan Australia, proximity becomes important. Prompted by recognising areas outside major cities as ‘peripheral’, Lagendijk and Lorentzen (2007) tease out the spatial and non-spatial dimensions of proximity (Torre & Rallet, 2005). In paying attention to geographical and organizational proximity, Lagendijk and Lorentzen (2007) explain the ‘logic of belonging’ as social proximity and the ‘logic of similarity’ as institutional proximity and consider how these contribute to the performance of local economies. Within an entrepreneurial ecosystem, some firms may be geographically proximate but have nothing in common with each other so have weak organizational proximity. Other firms may not be geographically proximate, but their connections to other firms can be strong and this organizational proximity helps to bridge the ‘near’ and the ‘far’ (Lagendijk & Lorentzen, 2007). The wider network literature cautions that network structures might hamper the entrepreneurial process if they are too inward-looking and too cognitively or socially proximate (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017) but too little proximity hampers coordination.

In summary, what we have determined from the extant literature is that entrepreneurship is concerned with the leveraging of profitable opportunities for private wealth and for social wealth (Venkataraman, 1997). Despite the obsession with initial public offerings (IPOs) and venture capital (VC) financing of firms that dominates much of the entrepreneurship literature (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018), and which appears to have dazzled policy makers in Australia, the majority of firms, whether because of either market constraints or their owner’s preference, reflect a ‘lifestyle’ profile; they begin and remain very small (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). In fact, over time, the typical firm contracts rather than grows (Storey, 2011). As a result, most small firms are price takers with a small share of their market and are unlikely to pursue or demonstrate significant growth in sales, profits or staffing. As Marlow and McAdam (2013, p. 116) note, their smallness makes them more ‘marginal’ than larger
businesses, where marginality should not be ‘positioned as an accusation of detriment or critique but merely a reflection of the position and preference of the majority of small and micro enterprise owners within developed economies.’

Business owners are entrenched in place-based social, economic, cultural and political structures that impact their identity and access to resources (Hanson & Blake, 2009). The who, where, when and why of context are essential to explore in the reporting of entrepreneurship research. We are now seeing greater recognition of the role social, political or economic institutions play on the entrepreneurial process (Brush et al., 2018; Bylund & McCaffrey, 2017; Marlow & Swail, 2014), and driving this book is our interest in the impact of regional location; the where.

**Phases of Entrepreneurship**

Evidence indicates that businesses focusing on expansion and growth contribute significantly to their local economies (Santarelli, Klomp, & Thurik, 2006), yet we know that most small businesses do not grow (Storey, 2011) and that less than 30% of all new start-ups reported their products were new to customers or different to their competitors (Autio et al., 2014). Small business growth creates jobs and wealth apart from promoting innovation (Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2013; Van Praag & Versloot, 2007). The concepts of business ownership, entrepreneurial orientations (EO) and growth are complex and there are mixed findings from previous research (Miner, 1990; Santarelli et al., 2006; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2017a). It is common to assume that owner-managers involved in the early phase of businesses proactively engage in the development of the business, innovation and so focus on growing the business (Henrekson & Johanson, 2010), yet it remains the case that growth intentions of owner-managers of established firms are under researched (Levie & Autio, 2013).

While much attention is directed towards the very small percentage of firms experiencing rapid growth, with the glamorous ‘gazelles’ (or fast growth small firms) being particularly attractive, as Storey (2011, p. 304)
demonstrates, ‘40 per cent of small firms are broadly stable in size over five years, but almost three times as many shrink as grow.’ In Australia at the national level, there has been significant policy and funding attention for internationally focused start-ups. AusIndustry’s ‘Incubator Support—New and Existing Incubators’ launched in 2017 involved a $23 m support initiative to ‘assist Australian start-ups to develop the capabilities required to achieve commercial success in international markets and realise their economic potential faster than they otherwise would’ (AusIndustry, 2018). Underpinning much of this attention is an infatuation with high-capitalization start-ups, despite their tenuous fate at the hands of those investing, reflecting a similar trend in the USA (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018).

Most economics literature assumes growth is the desired state for firms as owners pursue profit maximisation. This is not the view of those who take a more holistic view of human behaviour (Wiklund, Patzelt, & Shepherd, 2009). From the entrepreneurship literature, we know there are diverse reasons for people starting and running their own businesses, beyond the simplistic framing of maximising economic returns (Davidsson, 1989; Hamilton, 2000) and this has been foregrounded most in the women and entrepreneurship literature (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Small businesses can experience a variety of complex changes throughout their lifecycle, but the most common experience for new and small firms is decline, remain stable or closure (Storey, 2011).

The experiences encountered by owner-managers over time are critical to the decision-making to continue, or not, their businesses. The owner-manager’s ability to arrive at a specific decision is neither a quick fix nor irrational, rather it needs to be recognised as a complex process. Owner-managers with no growth intentions for the firm may decide to exit the business environment. Business owner-managers exit the business environment either voluntarily or involuntarily (Prisciotta & Weber, 2005). The reasons for business exit can be manifold. Owner-managers may plan for succession, mainly evident in the case of family firms (Bjuggren & Sund, 2005); for harvest sale whereby the owner-manager exits the firm and the business continues under new ownership (Wennberg, Wiklund, DeTienne, & Cardon, 2010); for distress sale whereby the owner-manager decides to exit the business due to financial distress (DeTienne, 2010); for mergers and acquisitions where the resources for
two or more firms can be combined and continued as one single business; for business recapitalisation where the owner-manager may plan to inject equity capital into the existing business (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007); or for a management buyout where the owner-manager sells the business to existing partners (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). What exit routes owner-managers take are likely to impact differently on the vibrancy of the local economy.

The focus of small businesses on expansion to various locations, or restriction to a specific area, is linked to a variety of individual, business and environmental factors. Existing literature highlights the influence of human capital as vital to the business expansion and growth (Schaper, Volery, & Weber, 2014) and studies of women and entrepreneurship established that women may be more likely to set a ‘maximum business size threshold’ for their firms than men (Cooper & Artz, 1995; Jennings & Brush, 2013). In keeping size contained to match their situation, they enjoyed greater satisfaction. Variables such as gender, age, experience, education, life cycle stage, income and family support are identified as influencing the business start, growth and establishment stages. For example, those operating in the early stages of business creation and growth demonstrate higher entrepreneurial drive than those operating in mature stages (Armstrong & Hird, 2009). Experience in the industry in which the business operates has been identified as equipping business owner-managers with necessary skills, capabilities and competencies (Baum & Locke, 2004). The impact exerted by the business owner-manager’s level of education and the level of income on business growth presents mixed and confounded findings. The support received from family impacts on business growth intentions (Bau, Chiricio, Pittino, Backman, & Klaesson, 2019). Business related factors such as access to capital, the nature and type of business and the firm performance in both subjective and objective terms seem to influence owner-managers’ intentions towards firm growth (Autio, 2012). In regards to the prevailing environmental conditions, owner-managers’ perceptions of compliance and regulation as conducive or non-conducive for business operations have also been shown to influences growth intentions (Peck, Jackson, & Mulvev, 2018).
Within this book we apply the phases of a business lifecycle presented through the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Bosma et al., 2020) as we could see its applicability to our region. The GEM approach identifies the total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) as being comprised of two groups: nascent entrepreneurs who are in the process of setting up a business, and owner-managers of firms less than 3.5 years old. Those firms having survived beyond 3.5 years are labelled as the established firms.

**Relevance Theories for Nascent Stages**

Three popular theoretical frameworks used to explain nascent entrepreneurship are expectancy theory, the resource-based view of the firm theory and stakeholder theory. Expectancy theory emphasises an understanding of the human motivations for the creation and development of a new venture through an effort-performance and outcome model (Gatewood, Shaver, Powers, & Gartner, 2002). The application of expectancy theory is widely evident in the entrepreneurship literature as entrepreneurs’ focus on the application of skills and abilities is identified to be crucial in the formation of new ventures (Shaver, Carter, Gartner, & Reynolds, 2001; Wiklund, Davidsson, & Delmar, 2003). The skills, capabilities and competencies developed by individuals are applied during the business formation and represent the performance dimension, with an expectation of outcomes such as business generation leading to entrepreneurship expectancy (Gatewood et al., 2002). Renko, Kroeck, and Bullough (2012) found that those motivated by the personal learning and personal growth opportunities they would gain from a new venture spend more time on their nascent ventures than those whose motivations are largely financial.

The resource-based view of the firm theory posits that firms attain a competitive advantage by possessing distinct resources, skills, capabilities and competencies (Nutall, Shankar, Beverland, & Hooper, 2011). This theory takes both a structural approach and a process approach (Ravenswood, 2011; Tracy, 2010). The structural approach relies on unique resources, whereas the process approach focuses on the internal
firm-based processes that enhance human and/or firm capital over a period of time (Miller & Ross, 2003). The main criticism of the resource-based view of the firm theory is the lack of recognition of the role played by external economic factors in understanding the firm-based outcomes (De Toni & Tonchia, 2003).

According to stakeholder theory, for firms to be successful they must engage with a broad group of stakeholders to build trusting relationships from which value will be created (Pollack, Barr, & Hanson, 2017). Much of the existing work in this space is directed to existing firms (Bosse, Phillips, & Harrison, 2009; Harrison, Bosse, & Phillips, 2010), where trusted relationships enable access to resources. As Pollack et al. (2017, p. 18) make clear, managing stakeholders at the nascent stage is a different situation because ‘the question of what dimensions of trust are important changes when there is no established relationship on which to base perceptions.’ The potential stakeholders at the nascent stage are customers and financiers. The regional context may feature here as when a nascent entrepreneur is working within a local community, some of the uncertainty may be reduced as their presence in the community allows them insights that may not be as evident in urban contexts. Pollack et al. (2017) posit that the scope for high intensity relationships—where frequent and in depth exchanges can occur—helps to alleviate risk for early stage entrepreneurs.

With the advent of the SMART Region Incubator (SRI) in 2017 in Armidale and Tamworth, our focal bioregions, and its association with the university, nascent firms were made more visible. Through the regional business awards and the profiling of businesses featured through the local business networks, and as people living in the regions, we were aware of businesses that had moved beyond setting up and were well established. Recognising that growth is not the goal for many established owners, we also distinguished between established firms which are growing and those with no growth intentions. Research tells us that most businesses are started by local people and that many of these entrepreneurs are not seeking to achieve significant growth in sales, profits or staffing. They begin small and tend to remain so. Sánchez-Marín, Meroño-Cerdán, and Carrasco-Hernández (2017) make the point that that this smallness makes them more vulnerable to market
shocks than larger businesses. They describe them as more ‘marginal’. As we take up a little later, ‘marginal’ should not be seen as a pejorative term; rather it is a statement of reality. Given the importance of small business to a local community, and the prevalence of businesses that aren’t growing, we were keen to ensure all types of firms were recognized within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

When we began planning for the book in 2018, Australia was in the grip of a drought. Drier than average conditions had prevailed, with the immediate impact felt by the agricultural sector, but the wider ramifications were starting to be felt by other businesses in regional communities. Following a number of years of drought and rising temperatures, large tracts of regional Australia experienced devastating bush fires, which attracted the eyes of the world as wildlife and the landscape were destroyed. The impact on the businesses in the towns affected were unprecedented.

Recognising small businesses as the lifeblood of their communities, the Australian government unveiled a major stimulus package for bushfire recovery for impacted small businesses. This was initially directed at the ‘flame’ affected businesses—that is, those that had been burned out—but it didn’t take long for the outcry from the wider business community to be heard. It was not only flame affected business who were hurting in these regional towns. The disruption caused by the fires was impacting on the viability of small businesses. Local natural disasters have been recognised as a disequilibrating change (Davidsson et al., 2020). While in ‘normal’ times, the businesses were able to flourish, employing staff and providing valued goods and services in their communities and beyond, their scale meant there was little to fall back on when their ‘normal’ was so violently upended by the fires. External shocks have continued to be experienced throughout 2020 as small businesses everywhere navigate the treacherous terrain caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the sustained challenges faced, many will exit from their local markets, while at the same time, there is likely to be a growth in spontaneous venturing (Shepherd & Williams, 2018) as not-yet-existing ventures may grasp opportunities. Better understanding the local context is critical to supporting a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem (Malecki, 2018; Stangler & Bell-Masterson, 2015).
Entrepreneurial Identities

We touched on communitarian values above, and want to briefly explore the differences in identities first developed by Fauchart and Gruber (2011). Entrepreneurs’ social identities influence their choice of which opportunity to pursue (Wry & York, 2017; York, O’Neil, & Sarasvathy, 2016), how they leverage the opportunity and what value they create (Brandle, Berger, Golla, & Kuckertz, 2018). Entrepreneurs’ underlying social motivation, foundation for self-evaluation, and frame of reference all impact their social identity and produce three different social identity types: Darwinians, communitarians, and missionaries (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Breaking this down to the most simple terms, Darwinian entrepreneurs are motivated by economic self-interest, defining their success as being competent and their frame of reference being that of competing firms. Communitarians seek to contribute to a community or group they strongly identify with, judging themselves based on whether they are true to similar others and apply as their frame of reference their community. Missionaries advance a cause through their venture creation, defining their success as making the world a better place, and apply as their frame of reference society at large (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Sieger et al., 2016). How these apply to a regional entrepreneurial context, and may be blurring traditional gender divides, is explored through our deeper dive into two bioregions—Tamworth and Armidale.

Gender and Regional Entrepreneurship

Attention to female entrepreneurship has been growing over the past forty years (Jennings & Brush, 2013). The focus of much of the early research into women’s entrepreneurship was on why women start their own businesses, how these businesses perform and what psychological factors may be impacting activity. These questions were largely framed as how they were different to male entrepreneurs. As the field has matured, there has been a growing body of work that has framed entrepreneurship as deeply gendered and the gendering needs to be unpacked and made visible.
In taking a gender lens to regional entrepreneurship we are framing gender as dynamic and interactional (West & Zimmerman, 2002). Founded as it is on symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and social constructivism, this approach differs from more traditional understandings of gender as a sociological variable where the focus has been on differences between male and female owned businesses (Ahl, Berglund, Pettersson, & Tillmar, 2016). In employing this approach to gender as a situated ‘doing’, we allow for an examination of gender beyond the categories, ‘man’ or ‘woman’, and reflect on the ways in which culturally defined meanings of masculinity or femininity are implicated in regional businesses in different industrial and geographical contexts.

The cumulative impact of the doing of gender makes up the ‘gender regime’ (Acker, 1994; Connell, 2002; Walby, 2004) in a local context. What is clear is the subordination of the feminine within the binary hierarchy of masculinity and femininity across countries (Walby, 2004) and in the organization of work (Wajcman, 1999). Most societies have traditionally devalued women and their spheres of activity (Ahl, 2006; Loscocco & Bird, 2012; Marlow, 2002). It remains the case that deeply entrenched beliefs about gender roles continue to shape discriminatory practices in financing entrepreneurship internationally (Malmström, Voitkane, Johansson, & Wincent, 2018).

Connell’s framing of gender as multidimensional and an historically changing structure of social relations, with the sum of gender regimes comprising the ‘gender order’ reflecting the macro social pattern of gender relations (Connell, 2002; Connell & Pearse, 2015), points to the importance of recognising local and national context. While the fluidity of the boundaries between the public and the private may be slowly changing through women’s increasing participation in the paid labour force, stretching our understanding of the changing spatialities of household, family and home, many of the gendered assumptions about who should do what work, and what value is placed on it, continue to inflect employment patterns (Gillard & Okomjo-Iweala, 2020).

Brush (1992) identified that female business owner had a broader view of success than simply profit and growth. Instead, she found women’s goals included the non-economic ones of product quality, personal satisfaction, helping others and contributing socially. These findings were
reiterated in a review by Sullivan and Meek (2012) and has informed the more recent data gathering of the GEM project which probes the motivations for a start-up (see Chapter 2).

Earlier work on women’s roles in Australian regional communities demonstrated that women-owned businesses were often found in a ‘space of betweenness’ as they were more likely to own service businesses linking the private and public and in the (physical) space between the city and the farm gate (Sheridan, Haslam McKenzie, & Still, 2011b). Women were often invisible in their regional business communities because in the pervading ideology of western market economies they were traditionally framed as ‘non-economic’ (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003; Midgely, 2000). While what they did was highly valued by those in their communities, the standpoint of men traditionally dominated the local business scenes and their largely service oriented businesses were discounted in these contexts (Sheridan et al., 2011b). With the rising importance of the services sector to local economies (Bourne, Houghton, How, Achurch, & Beaton, 2020) and the growing participation of women in higher education and paid work, how these changes may impact the ‘doing of gender’ in regional entrepreneurship is explored more fully through our interrogation of the national patterns of employment, as well as the experiences and observations of our sample of nascent, established and growing and established and plateaued business owners in Tamworth and Armidale. The relational dimensions of these regional businesses suggests the traditional notion of the agentic, masculine entrepreneur, may no longer hold the same sway in the changing environment. From our sample of entrepreneurs it is clear that a sense of commitment to their communities inflects their doing of regional entrepreneurship.

**Statement of Aims**

The aim of this book is to develop a richer understanding of regional entrepreneurship. We are rising to the challenge that Shepherd and Patzelt (2017b) posed for entrepreneurship researchers; to be trailblazers. Our intention is to open up the terrain of the regional context, where regional is not an international region, but represents a local community. The concept of region has evolved as a unit of innovation, economic
growth and the right level at which to resolve the challenges of sustainable development (Bellamy, Meppem, Goddard, & Dawson, 2003; Potts, 2010). We are seeking to make visible the opportunities and challenges entrepreneurs in regional locations face, and how gender may inflect these.

We begin by drawing on the existing literature and quantitative indicators of international and national entrepreneurship (Acs, Szerb, & Lloyd, 2017; Bosma & Kelley, 2019; Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2017) to place the Australian entrepreneurship culture in the wider arena. Our sense is that the experience of entrepreneurship in a regional context, particularly taking a gender lens, may be more complex and contradictory than can be captured through responses to generalised sample surveys alone (Peck et al., 2018; Sheridan et al., 2011a). We have focused on two bioregions—Armidale and Tamworth—to take a deeper dive into regional entrepreneurship.

In this book, we take a descriptive approach to the publically available data about components of the national and local environment, and combine these with the views of local entrepreneurs in our region. In taking this approach, we seek to highlight the central ideas that can inform a robust regional entrepreneurial ecosystem, of which the interaction of component parts are bespoke to our focus bioregions. As Isenberg (2011, p. 9) notes, entrepreneurial ecosystems are unique and must be considered ‘holistically and specifically’ and understanding the local conditions is critical (Stangler & Bell-Masterson, 2015).

Definitions of Australian Businesses

Throughout the book, we apply the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definitions of small, medium and large businesses. The ABS defines a ‘small business’ as business employing fewer than 20 people (Gilfillan, 2015). Breaking this down further, categories of small business include:

- non-employing businesses—sole proprietorships and partnerships without employees;
- micro businesses—businesses employing less than five people, including non-employing businesses;
- other small businesses—businesses employing five or more people, but less than 20 people;

A ‘medium’ business employs 20 or more people, but less than 200 people and ‘large’ businesses employ 200 or more people. For employment in regional locations, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are the norm (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

**Book Structure**

This book sets out to understand more about entrepreneurship in relation to place. To help navigate the rest of the book, we have summarised the component chapters and connections between them in Fig. 1.1.

Chapters 2 and 3 are scene setting. Chapter 2 commences by considering Australia’s entrepreneurial activity in the context of the international stage. Drawing on the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) (Schwab, 2019), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Bosma et al., 2020) and the Global Entrepreneurship Index (GEI) (Acs, Szerb, Lafuente, & Márkus, 2019), we place Australia’s national environment in the wider context of international competitiveness and entrepreneurship concluding Australia is recognised as a healthy and largely benign environment for entrepreneurial activity. We briefly review the international studies on regional entrepreneurship and, while recognising the difficulty in applying findings from more densely populated and geographically contained locations than Australia, note there are common themes to emerge in terms of a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. We then consider national data capturing small and medium business activity over the same period, and the gendered patterns of the Australian workforce, reflecting on how these are reproduced in business ownership. We canvas the limited literature on regional entrepreneurship in Australia. In Chapter 3, we dig deeper in the Australian scene by reviewing the Comprehensive Australian Study of Entrepreneurial Emergence (CAUSEE) to consider the similarities and differences in
Fig. 1.1 Navigating the book

- **Chapter 2 – National versus International Environment**
  - Stable economic environment
  - Openness to innovations
  - Support for entrepreneurial activity
  - Government support

- **Chapter 3 – Prior Evidence**
  - No significant differences between urban and regional processes
  - Aggregates disguise the individual differences

- **Chapter 4 – Tamworth and Armidale**
  - Employment profiles differ
  - Population differs
  - Skilled labour availability
  - Size/scale of business
  - Increasing role of services

- **Chapter 5 – Method and Business Profiles**

- **Chapters 6, 7 & 8 – Analysis by Categories**
  - Nascent firms
  - Established growing firms
  - Established plateaued firms

- **Chapter 9 – Doing Entrepreneurship in Regional Communities**
entrepreneurship and business formation in regional and urban centers in Australia. At an aggregate level, we conclude that women and men are starting businesses at similar rates in both urban and regional locations in Australia and there are few differences between the business practices of owners in either context.

In Chapter 4 we explore the population and employment patterns across regional and urban Australia, considering how the two bioregions—Tamworth and Armidale—reflect the wider patterns. In particular, we consider the industrial configuration of the local economies and their human capital, both of which are recognised within the wider literature as shaping the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Having set the scene with a detailed exploration of the wider data and literature, in Chapter 5 we provide a brief description of the approach we have taken to better understand the experiences of entrepreneurs in our region. We provide a brief description of the profiles of the businesses we identified and interviewed. We have grouped the businesses into the three categories and consider them in each of the ensuing three chapters.

Across the three chapters we have identified themes to emerge from the interviews to build a more nuanced framework for understanding the doing of regional entrepreneurship, including how gender may play out in this space. Chapter 6 covers those owners the GEM model labels as being engaged with ‘total early-stage entrepreneurial activity’ (TEA), and which we have called the nascent entrepreneurs for convenience. Chapter 7 focuses on the established entrepreneurs who continue to grow. Chapter 8 deals with the established entrepreneurs who, for many reasons, have no growth intentions, with some anticipating their exits.

Our final chapter (Chapter 9), draws together the key findings from each of the chapters to present our framework for the doing of entrepreneurship in these regional communities applying a gender lens. The common characteristics for the firms at different stages in their business lifecycles are that they are deeply embedded in their place, they are networked within their communities and beyond, they have staff they are empowering and they are communitarian. They are motivated by goals beyond individual economic gain. For those doing entrepreneurship in regional communities there is a strong relational aspect to what they do. They value how they contribute to their community and
how they benefit from their community’s support. We then consider the entrepreneurial ecosystems. They share the same national macro environment, which we have seen from international studies is generally favorable and there are common elements to the entrepreneurial ecosystems of Tamworth and Armidale, but there are some differences too. Their industrial profiles vary. Tamworth has a growing population, Armidale’s population has had little growth for two decades. For those businesses serving their local markets only, these dynamics can impact opportunities, whereas for those serving clients beyond the local market, this may be of less consequence. Accessing skilled labour to support businesses is a challenge across both regions. Both communities are supported by a local business incubator, and appear to have embraced this reflecting a culture that values entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

We position this book at the nexus of doing business in a regional context and how gender may inflect this. The regional business context is largely overlooked by academic scholars and gender issues are even less commonly investigated in regional locations (Adapa et al., 2016; Conway & Sheridan, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2011b). In focusing on nascent, growing and plateaued firms we are rejecting the notion that the only firms warranting attention are the growing and ‘ambitious’ firms. We hope this book will contribute to the discourse among researchers, policymakers and practitioners and contribute fresh insights to those keen to support vibrant and inclusive regional entrepreneurial ecosystems.

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