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Exploring Entrepreneurship Amongst the Socially Excluded: An Introduction

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This special issue explores the interconnection between entrepreneurship and social exclusion. The meaning and conceptualisation of social exclusion is contested (Blackburn and Ram, 2006; Taket et al., 2009) but it is helpful to see it as multidimensional in nature, including economic, sociological and political dimensions (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997). Marlier and Atkinson (2010: 285) recognise this, defining social exclusion as ‘the involuntary exclusion of individuals and groups from political, economic, and social processes, preventing their full participation in the society in which they live’. This may mean living in poverty, being excluded from gaining employment, being excluded from receiving important services and the satisfaction of basic needs (such as housing, education and financial services), being isolated from social relations with those in mainstream society, being denied social legitimacy and social status, and being denied civil rights (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997; Gordon et al., 2000; Peace, 2001).

It is tempting to see entrepreneurship as a panacea for creating pathways for socially excluded individuals and groups to integrate into mainstream society. Indeed, this notion often permeates in popular governmental and social discourse, due to entrepreneurship enabling accumulation of financial capital and employment opportunities (Blackburn and Ram, 2006). Nevertheless, this viewpoint is not empirically grounded and is over-optimistic, failing to question the role and limitations of entrepreneurship in overcoming systemic structural and institutional forces driving exclusion (Blackburn and Ram, 2006; Southern, 2011). Furthermore, many individuals from deprived backgrounds remain in poverty despite becoming entrepreneurs (Kapasi et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurship can even potentially be a pathway towards social exclusion. For example, engaging in entrepreneurship can damage the psychological wellbeing of entrepreneurs (Shepherd, 2019), potentially exacerbating social exclusion that can be experienced by individuals with mental illnesses (Morgan et al., 2007). Furthermore, entrepreneurs can experience large financial losses (Shepherd, 2019), which could lead to, or worsen, their economic exclusion. Entrepreneurship can also take various illegal and destructive forms (for example, people trafficking, selling narcotics, organised theft) (Baumol, 1990; McElwee and Smith, 2015) that can push people into social exclusion.

Our motivation for this special issue was, therefore, never based on the premise that entrepreneurship is a cure for overcoming social exclusion. Instead, it stemmed from our desire to explore and advance understanding about how entrepreneurship and social exclusion may interrelate. There is a growing body of literature exploring entrepreneurship amongst groups who may experience social exclusion, for example, individuals living in extreme poverty (Imas et al., 2012), refugees and migrant communities (Ram et al., 2016), LGBT communities (Galloway, 2007), offenders and ex-

offenders (Cooney, 2012), and the over 50s (Kautonen, 2008)¹. Social entrepreneurship research also provides important insights into whether, and how, entrepreneurship may be a force for helping socially excluded groups and individuals (Teasdale, 2010). These studies represent a strong and growing appetite for making entrepreneurship research more inclusive of those who are socially excluded. This appetite creates valuable opportunities for advancing understanding about how entrepreneurship and social exclusion interact. We hope this special issue, by providing important insights about entrepreneurship and social exclusion, contributes to and elevates this movement.

Papers in this Special Issue

In *'Social Enterprise: Bridging the gap between the Statutory Sector and the Third Sector'*, Elizabeth Heyworth-Thomas and Rosalind Jones make a convincing case as to why our collective understanding of enterprise, and more specifically social entrepreneurship, should be expanded. Undertaking a qualitative study, they explore how social entrepreneurs meet the needs of vulnerable adults (stroke survivors) in the context of rural Wales. The study illuminates social entrepreneurship in action, including its short- and long-term effects on micro, meso and macro levels of society. The authors emphasise the lack of research in service demand for disadvantaged groups from a social enterprise perspective, while highlighting how social enterprise can fill the gap in public service provision in rural areas and contribute to the personal support networks of people. This valuable contribution provides a clear and important addition to the body of knowledge on social entrepreneurship while also outlining important and timely policy implications for supporting social enterprises and socially motivated entrepreneurs.

Exclusion from the formal financial system can present significant barriers to engagement in entrepreneurial activity for extant and would be entrepreneurs. By contrast, financial inclusion, or at least having access to finance can have a salutary effect. This optimistic message is borne out in the results of *'FNGOs and financial inclusion: investigating the impact of microcredit on employment growth in Ghana'*. In this piece, Victor Atiase, Yong Wang and Samia Mahmood stress the importance of microcredit, and explore its impact on employment growth in micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Ghana. Their survey of 506 MSE owners in the Volta region of Ghana provides insight in to the manner in which financial non-governmental organisations can contribute to employment growth through the loans they provide. The findings emphasise the importance of appropriate microcredit for stimulating employment growth, and provide practical insights into the steps that can be taken to provide loans that suit the needs of MSEs in this context.

The third contribution to this special issue is titled *'Poverty, social exclusion and enterprise policy: A study of UK policies' effectiveness over 40 years'*, authored by Anne Smith, Laura Galloway, Laura Jackman, Michael W Danson, and Geoff Whittam. This piece provides an incisive and critical analysis of successive UK government's attempts (or a lack thereof) to provide appropriate and effective enterprise policy for those experiencing social exclusion through unemployment or poverty. A central focus of the paper is its consideration of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS), and the more recent New Enterprise Allowance Scheme (NEAS). Two questions are addressed: 1. *What have we learned from previous policy initiatives on enterprise from unemployment and;* 2. *Can social exclusion in the context of unemployment be tackled by the new*

¹ We acknowledge that social exclusion is contextual in nature (i.e. individuals and groups who are socially excluded in one context may not be in another). Thus, we make no claim that these groups are universally socially excluded.

iteration of the EAS? To answer these questions, the work provides a bibliographic review of policy and academic literature spanning four decades, starting in the 1980s. The authors mount compelling evidence for their answers, which are convincingly critical of previous and current policy. The work is concluded with a consideration of fruitful ways forward, encapsulated in policy implications.

Bejan Analoui and Dinuka B. Herath, in '***Independent female escorts: Stigmatized, value-adding entrepreneurs***', conceptualise female sex workers as entrepreneurs and create a thought-provoking piece about the individual and societal impact resulting from their entrepreneurial activities. Drawing on morality literature and the notions of value-adding and value-extracting entrepreneurship, a typology of sex work is developed, and the authors argue that the entrepreneurial activities of independent female escorts – those who solicit clients through the internet and organise their work independently – can provide individual and societal benefits. At the same time, these individuals experience stigma and social exclusion, which the authors eloquently challenge before highlighting important avenues for future research in this area.

The article by William Martin and Harold Welsch argues that senior entrepreneurs are often relegated and excluded as productive members in society solely based on their age. In the context of an ageing workforce, their paper - '***Wasted Talent: Battling Exclusionary Forces among Senior Entrepreneurs***' – tackles this timely and important issue. It provides a succinct review of literature, identifying the lack of attention given to senior entrepreneurship research in modern scholarship. The authors propose a model of exclusionary entrepreneurship, clearly encapsulating the factors at play. They outline the importance of senior entrepreneurs and the value addition they bring through their experience and social capital, both of which have been honed over years of calibration. The article, through its well-crafted argumentation, suggests how senior entrepreneurs can be included in our entrepreneurship practices and encourages a brand of inclusive entrepreneurship which directly calls both practitioners and academics to action.

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