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Special issue in memory of professor Alistair Anderson ‘Social Perspectives of Entrepreneuring’

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ABSTRACT

This Special Issue of Entrepreneurship and Regional Development honours Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship Alistair Anderson’s memory. This Special Issue offers a range of papers that engage with Alistair Anderson’s work and extend it by taking a social science view to understanding entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS

Alistair Anderson;
Entrepreneurship;
Entrepreneurial; Social
Perspectives



Introduction

With this Special Issue of Entrepreneurship and Regional Development we honour Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship Alistair Anderson’s memory. In our call for this Special Issue, we invited friends, collaborators, and students of Alistair’s along with the broader scholarly community to ‘engage with his work and contribute with articles that; builds on and extends an aspect of Alistair’s work, takes a social science view to understanding entrepreneurship, and draws upon qualitative methodologies in terms of research approach’ (from the SI call). We received + 30 papers and decided to include 12 papers in the SI, papers that through theoretical and empirical contributions extend Alistair’s work.

It is not easy to capture Alistair’s scientific legacy. For example, his most cited article was about embeddedness (Jack and Anderson 2002), and two of his last published papers were about first, Chinese business angels (Xiao and Anderson 2022) and second, the space industry (Lamine et al. 2021). Saving this bibliographic challenge to what Alistair called ‘the tomorrow file’, we decided to search for themes in the contributions we selected from the SI call. This would, we felt, provide a reasonably good overview of what Alistair liked to work with. Finally, we decided to go for five, somehow overlapping themes.

Alistair’s view of entrepreneurship as *a socialized process* is present in all contributions to the SI but comes through in some papers more than others (Champenois & Jack; Haugh; Cunningham & Fraser). This perspective was something Alistair worked on in his dissertation (1995) and continued to develop over the years. The contributing authors to this special issue reported keywords like embeddedness, entrepreneurial, connecting, community, and entrepreneurship as practice. The concepts provide different points of departure to capture and develop the relational element in entrepreneurship.

Second, Alistair’s interest in (rural) places and the social context opened up the opportunity for studying *the family*; how embeddedness works as a facilitator or at times as a constrainer showing the power struggles in the process of being an entrepreneurial family (Radu-Lefebvre, Ronteau, Lefebvre & McAdam; Discua Cruz & Hamilton).

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Our third topic is *poverty* (Lent; Ukanawa, Xiong, Wasim & Galloway; Cunningham, Xiong, Hashim & Yunis). We know how Alistair travelled far, far away and came back and reported what he saw. We selected three papers from what we might term as 'poorer contexts': the northeast of Pakistan, northern Ghana and south east Nigeria. Again, the keywords may help us to frame what poverty could be about: emancipation, empowerment, liberation, liberty, power, social justice, hope, and Global South Countries.

Fourth, entrepreneurship *education*, from Alistair's point of view, was about closing the gap between the teachings of regular business schools and the extraordinary phenomenon of entrepre-
neuring; for student's to become, not only skilled managers, but explorers and perhaps most reflective practitioners (Dodd, Lage-Arias, Berglund, Hytti, Jack, & Verduijn; Loi & Fayolle). In addition, to the importance of economic outcomes from entrepreneurship for rural and regional develop-
ment, sustainable development, social inclusion and ethical awareness was high on the agenda in Alistair's view of entrepreneurship education.

Fifth, Alistair contributed to the *gender* literature, in particular he wrote about the poorest of the poor: women in the Global South (Ibáñez & Guerrero; Lent; Ukanawa, Xiong, Wasim & Galloway). Often this literature set its hope on a combination of microfinance and empowerment and on a longer timescale emancipation, but Alistair showed how a socialized view lifted the realities of these women and how change in practice was very slow. This is an example of the critical edge and an opening towards a moral stand in Alistair's research. In this theme of gender, we also see how Alistair's work is extended to improve our understanding of the online community and the entre-
preneuring of mothers (Vershina, Phillips & McAdam). In this work, the authors show how the mothers they studied constructed and maintained community connections and offer us an under-
standing of specific dimensions that emerged from this work: *Building, Being and Belonging*.

In what follows, we give a short story about Alistair's work life and background followed by a review of the five themes and the articles we selected to be part of the SI.

Alistair at work

Alistair Anderson was unequivocally a leading entrepreneurship academic and an outstanding scholar of international standing. On the 26th of March 2021, the academic community lost this excellent academic, researcher and mentor and someone whose kindness, generosity, support and encouragement impacted on many of us and the work that we do.

Alistair had a rich and diverse career. Before he joined academia, he was a serial entrepreneur running a number of businesses ranging from pubs to quality knitwear manufacturing, to building houses and property development. Throughout his life he retained his entrepreneurial interests while building a strong academic profile, generating respect with both practitioners and academics. His passion was entrepreneurship, both in its practice and research. His academic career started with the Open University where he studied for a BA in Social Science, achieving a 1st class honours degree, followed by an MSc in Advanced Educational and Social Research Methods. He then went on to study for a PhD titled 'The Arcadian Enterprise: an enquiry into the nature and conditions of rural small business' under Professor Michael Scott at Stirling University. It was during this time that he really began to formalize his intellectual curiosity about entrepreneurship and its research. On completing his PhD, this intellectual curiosity got the better of him and in 1997 he joined Aberdeen University, Scotland, becoming the Director of their Centre for Entrepreneurship where he drove research, outreach and teaching. In 2002, Alistair moved to the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland, taking on the position of Professor of Entrepreneurship where he led their Centre for Entrepreneurship, again building a team of scholars. In 2018, Alistair joined the Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy at Lancaster University Management School in the UK as their Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship.

Alistair was strongly anchored in a social science perspective of entrepreneurship and brought a critical but also applied approach to entrepreneurship research. Throughout his life-time Alistair remained passionate about trying to understand the phenomenon of entrepreneurship and consistently worked towards promoting a distinctive understanding of entrepreneurship. His specific interest was in the social side of entrepreneuring (Anderson 1995; Gaddefors and Anderson 2018), where he found networking and social capital especially fascinating. In working to promote a richer understanding of entrepreneuring as a social practice, he made a significant contribution to understanding the ways in which entrepreneurship is underpinned by societal influences. This was based on a strong belief that ‘entrepreneurs create our tomorrows and we have a responsibility to comprehend as well as appreciate what they do’ (Dodd, Anderson, and Jack 2021, 1). He embraced entrepreneurship as a change engine; where change is about development and not just growth (Anderson 2000; Dodd, Anderson, and Jack 2021). Alistair also strongly believed that entrepreneurship could address the numerous problems society faces and make things better for the World (Dodd, Anderson, and Jack 2021). In challenging the more orthodox view of entrepreneurship as an economic function, Alistair demonstrated that it is a socially embedded practice. He strongly believed that the narrow economic view masks the richness of the phenomenon. In contrast, he believed that a socialized process focus helps explain how entrepreneurship works. In essence, he argued that entrepreneurship is a change mechanism and comes in many different forms. From being something of an outlier, Alistair worked to build rich qualitative process studies of entrepreneuring which became regularly featured in international journals. Such studies took account of the interactions between entrepreneurs and the context.

As a leader in the field, Alistair saw his role as being the critical friend of colleagues; coaxing, cajoling and constructively criticizing their ideas, so that their work earned the publication it so often deserved. Sometimes he saw that this was best achieved through co-authoring, but at other times by merely being a sounding board for people to explore their ideas. What was critical to Alistair was that this process was built in a way that created a trusting, cooperative and fertile environment where the sharing of information, knowledge and ideas circulated freely and where everyone learned from each other. Indeed, he saw working with others as the most important thing that he did.

Alistair’s contribution to entrepreneurship scholarship was significant. He published more than 105 articles (10 in 2015!) and 17 book chapters and at the time of writing this editorial, he had received more than 18354 citations of his work. His international standing was also recognized through over 40 invitations to deliver conference keynotes and seminars. Alistair was also a member of several entrepreneurship journal editorial boards and served on a number of international Peer Review Colleges. During his lifetime, Alistair also held visiting positions across the World. He was also international faculty at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU, Sweden) and the Audencia School of Management (France). Through leading and building the development of a key journal in the field – *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* – for 12 years, Alistair continued to play a very big role in building the international entrepreneurship community. Through his leadership of this journal, he again showed his commitment to the research and practice of entrepreneuring but also in building the field as a community.

Alistair loved to travel, and his projects purposefully took him to all corners of the World. His travels were also driven by his curiosity and desire to find contexts that offered great scope for enriching understanding of the entrepreneurial phenomenon and for theorizing the social as well as the economic context of entrepreneurship. His ambition was to provoke and build better entrepreneurship theory of the socially enabled and enacted phenomenon, in contrast to what he saw as the theoretical dead end of repeated analysis of entrepreneurial variances. He welcomed research seminars as they offered the opportunity for close engagement with people but also the possibility of planting, growing and directing insight. Alistair saw that conference keynotes offered a similar opportunity, and was someone who welcomed the opportunity they gave him to float new ideas and provoke fresh thinking to a wider audience.

Contributions to the SI

In the call we asked for papers that engaged with Alistair's work. We purposefully wanted ideas that built on and extended an aspect of his work. We were not disappointed and received a wealth of rich and interesting papers. But what was in the papers was also intriguing from another perspective because they included stories about how Alistair was important, summaries about what he had written, and extensions of his thinking. Some of the papers are based on projects Alistair participated in himself. Each and every paper can stand on its own and yet they also make sense when they are brought together in the format of this SI. In many ways, this was much more than we had expected and the crafting of the work by the authors had obviously been given a great deal of thought even if for many it had been an emotional experience. Next, we present the abstracts from the twelve articles divided into five themes.

(I) Embeddedness and entrepreneuring

1. 'A non-workshop on a socialized view of entrepreneurship: building and extending a community of practice for work on embeddedness', by Champenois & Jack

This article, in an act of transmutation or world-making, replaces a workshop that was envisioned between one of the authors and Alistair Anderson. It takes the form of a dialogue with one of his main co-authors to retrospectively and analytically explore the collective work of Alistair on 'embeddedness'. Alistair initiated a scholarly community of practice on a socialized view of entrepreneurship ('entrepreneuring'), the essence of which can be captured through the notion of embeddedness. The emergence of this community and its key production phases, highlight the main features and insights of its approach, which was never theorized as such. The article also presents possible theoretical extensions by opening several research doors for future work.

2. 'Changing places: the generative effects of community embeddedness in place', by Haugh

How social structures and relations influence entrepreneurship is an enduring puzzle. The history of land ownership in Scotland is marked by tensions between the institutional legacy of private landlordism and community embeddedness in place. In this paper, the development of a community venture that was established to buy and commit land that was formerly privately owned to community ownership is examined, and how the land was managed in perpetuity for community benefit. The methodology employs archival, interview and observation data to investigate how institutional legacy, social structures, and relations motivated and shaped community entrepreneurship. The Scottish historical context elaborates the influence of institutional legacy on the embeddedness in place perspective, and the effects of transcending institutional legacy on entrepreneurial flourishing and institutional change.

3. 'Images of entrepreneurship: divergent national constructions of what it is to "do" entrepreneurship', by Cunningham & Fraser

In this article, the authors pick up on Alistair Anderson's argument that an atomized view of entrepreneurship as an economic function provides limited understanding of what it is to actually do entrepreneurship. The authors take the stance that entrepreneurship, as a process, is born of social context. What it is to be and what it is to do entrepreneurship is informed directly by the images of entrepreneurship accepted in society. To better understand the implications of this, the authors access the ways in which entrepreneurship is imagined in three ostensibly similar country settings: UK, Italy and Finland. They analyse the social discourses surrounding the concept from a sample of enterprise students across the three areas. Importantly, these participants are not entrepreneurs in their own right, but are considered interested stakeholders, in that the meaning they ascribe to entrepreneurship will partly inform their future approaches to it. The authors contrast data from 15 semi-structured interviews with policy commentary and measurable outcomes and find nuanced

differences in how entrepreneurship is perceived and enacted. The implications of the findings encourage a more holistic approach to the study of entrepreneurship, avoiding the self-affirming dogma of the purely economic or purely constructionist.

(II) Family

4. 'Entrepreneurship as emancipation in family business succession: a story of agony and ecstasy', by Radu-Lefebvre, Ronteau, Lefebvre & McAdam

Following Alistair Anderson's legacy of entrepreneurship as a process of becoming, this paper engages with entrepreneurship as emancipation in a family business context. Over a period of seven years, the authors witnessed the journey of a family business successor engaged in a challenging process of power transfer, ultimately leading him to leave the succession process to engage with entrepreneurship outside the family business, due to power struggles. In their writing, the authors theoretically elaborate on this real-time, multi-informant, multi-generational and longitudinal single-case study to offer a novel understanding of entrepreneurship as emancipation from and through power by revealing the intimate connections of entrepreneurship with power, liberation and liberty encompassing as much agony as ecstasy. What the authors also do here is take Alistair's thoughts one step further by developing the notion of emancipation and resistance in entrepreneurship when they discuss processes of embedding, dis-embedding and re-embedding in the family firm.

5. 'Death and entrepreneurship in family businesses: a complexity and stewardship perspective', by Discua Cruz & Hamilton

Based on the works of Alistair Anderson, this article explores entrepreneurship in the context of entrepreneurial families prior to, and following, the death of a leading family member in business. Until now, literature has suggested that the loss of a leading family member may bring complexity and chaos to ongoing entrepreneurial efforts. Drawing on a complex adaptive system and stewardship perspective, this study examines the role of death in entrepreneurship in four entrepreneurial families. With the loss of a leading family member in business, social processes of adaptation in entrepreneurial trajectories are revealed. The analysis shows that these processes allow members to reorganize, recalibrate, and reconnect aspects of family and business. The study contributes to understanding social processes in entrepreneurship by capturing how death can influence entrepreneurial choices and progression over time, focusing on what family entrepreneurs do. Conceptualizing the family as a complex adaptive system contributes to a theoretical perspective of stewardship as fluid and collective.

(III) Poverty

6. 'Entrepreneurship in Necessity Contexts: Effecting Change Among Widow Entrepreneurs in Northern Ghana', by Lent

This article explores if and how the entrepreneurship efforts of an endogenous NGO can entrepreneurially empower widow necessity entrepreneurs living in extreme poverty in a rural area of Northern Ghana. In reconceptualizing necessity entrepreneurship as engagement in necessity contexts, three main context specific actions and processes are foregrounded: values-based action focus, upskilling by bounded choice; and forming, organizing and maintaining symbiotic relationships. Subsequently, the extent to which these actions and processes contributed to empowerment were assessed and explained. Upon outlining how the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship in necessity contexts and broadening understanding of entrepreneurship, the article ends by discussing the implications and limitations of this research.

7. 'Microfinance and micropreneurship in rural South-East Nigeria: an exploration of the effects of institutions', Ukanawa, Xiong, Wasim & Galloway

Informed by the work of Alistair Anderson on entrepreneurship as embedded in institutional contexts, this paper explores the experiences of 30 women micropreneurs in rural South-East Nigeria. These women are amongst the poorest people in the world and live in an environment marginalized from formal institutions, where informal ones are prioritized, and where culture and tradition reflect patriarchal limitations on their activities and experiences. Findings show that while microfinance is often cited as one of the key mitigators of institutional voids and an important support for entrepreneuring in deprived contexts, in fact there are critical barriers to uptake and socio-cultural conditions are found to limit the extent to which women trust and engage with microfinance. To that end, new methodologies that might mitigate perceived risks, including deepening poverty, are called for. Implications for those who would support enterprise in poverty circumstances in developing nations include that to be effective they must engage with the socio-cultural institutions and lived realities amongst the people they seek to serve. Alongside this, further application and development of the approaches to studying entrepreneurship in marginalized environments that Alistair was such as central contributor to are advocated.

8. 'Narrating the "social": the evolving stories of Pakistan's social entrepreneurs', by Cunningham, Xiong, Hashim & Yunis

Social enterprises are often characterized by the vision and drive of an individual founder. This article challenges this perspective, taking inspiration from Alistair's arguments that social entrepreneurship is better understood as enacted within a social context. The authors move beyond linear conceptualizations to consider a more nuanced, contextually informed picture, where understandings of what it is to be 'social' in one's entrepreneuring are created at the interaction of the individual and their situation. A narrative approach is used to analyse 25 life stories used by social entrepreneurs in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan, an area of social transition. The work assesses how these entrepreneurs give meaning to the 'social' aspects of what they do. The findings present a multifaceted character, defined by their responses to changing social contexts. This is manifest in entrepreneurial practice, where there is a vacillation between acts of social rebellion and an enterprising organization of benevolence, evolving in a social context which changes with and, in part, because of the social entrepreneurs. What the authors also do here is move beyond definitional characteristics and closer to a theory of practice, by considering how social entrepreneurs interact with changing social demands and adapt their activities accordingly.

(IV) Education

9. 'Transforming enterprise education: sustainable pedagogies of hope and social justice', by Dodd, Lage Arias, Berglund, Hytti, Jack & Verduijn

Building on Alistair Anderson's work, this paper proposes transforming enterprise education to deeply address questions of sustainability, social justice and hope in these times of multiple and complex crises. The authors argue that new pedagogies, practices, vocabularies and connections help us to enact crises in entrepreneurial, ethical and creative ways, enabling us to remain hopeful in the face of unknown horizons. Drawing from critical pedagogies, from Epistemologies of the South, and from the wisdoms of Alistair, the paper outlines how transforming to a more, hopeful, socially just and sustainable enterprise education could move us beyond present alternatives. This article suggests that transforming enterprise education (TrEE) would better facilitate students as ethical change-makers when they engage with their worlds, and its unseen future horizons. TrEE emphasizes the time needed for questioning dominant meanings and space for experimenting with new ones. It invites re-placing us in the margins and with the excluded. It takes an expansive view of the ecosystem, and places enterprise within its wider context. It focuses students, teachers, entrepreneurs and various other stakeholders in learning together with the non-human and relies on sustainable stewardship, social justice and hope at the core of transforming enterprise education.

10. 'Rethinking and reconceptualising entrepreneurship education a legacy from Alistair Anderson', by Loi & Fayolle

This article aims to extend the theoretical foundations of entrepreneurship education by integrating several of the most relevant lessons from Alistair Anderson's contribution into current conceptualizations. The authors identify three main dimensions of Alistair's work: conceptualization of entrepreneurship; network and social capital as mechanisms to explain entrepreneurship as a socially embedded phenomenon; and epistemological and methodological reflection. These dimensions enrich the debate on the strategic dimensions targeting, connecting, and reflecting suggested to advance the field of entrepreneurship education. The authors highlight important implications that help us reflect on the value of entrepreneurship education by emphasizing the role of the social dimension in teaching entrepreneurship, the importance of understanding entrepreneurship as a complex phenomenon to identify goals and more specifically tailor pedagogy, and the need to question methods of inquiry as the field evolves and expands its area of investigation.

(V) Gender

11. 'Women's empowerment and emancipation through entrepreneurship: extending Professor Alistair Anderson's contributions', by Ibáñez & Guerrero

This study represents a tribute to Alistair Anderson's contributions to female entrepreneurship research. Although female entrepreneurship was only one research line in Alistair's extensive academic career, his contributions are embedded in the most contemporary discussion about the most vulnerable female entrepreneurs. Inspired by his research on the influence of entrepreneurship on the empowerment and emancipation of female entrepreneurs in the Global South countries, this study provides empirical evidence about how entrepreneurship affects women's empowerment and emancipation compared with other occupational choices (e.g. full-time employees and homemakers). The article includes provocative implications/discussion about gender dynamics, and the most vulnerable women enrolled in entrepreneurial activities.

12. 'Online communities and entrepreneuring mothers: practices of building and belonging', by Vershina, Phillips & McAdam

Informed by contributions of Alistair Anderson on the social perspective of entrepreneurship, rooted in social relationships and social capital, this article examines how members of an online community collectively interpret and negotiate the challenges of pursuing entrepreneurship alongside parenthood. The article adopts a multi-staged research design, incorporating netnography, participant observation, and qualitative semi-structured interviews. The analysis reveals the critical role of networking in how entrepreneuring women construct and maintain community connections and distinguishes between three dimensions of community engagement: Building, Being, and Belonging. Drawing on communities of practice as an analytical lens, the authors offer new insights into the form and function of communal entrepreneurial practices facilitated by the digital environment.

As Alistair would say, 'yes, but so what? What is the contribution?'

Alistair was keen to write up an interesting contribution in his papers. And fortunately, the SI papers offer real insight into the critical work Alistair engaged in. Cumulatively, they also advance our knowledge and understanding about his socialized view of entrepreneurship in so many ways while offering future avenues for research.

Alistair was interested in people and how they engaged with society, different groups of people in different parts of the world. To travel near and afar was a way to meet people and to collect impressions, that built and boosted his library of stories. From the Scottish Highlands to China, Ghana, and rural Sweden he came back with material for his own entrepreneuring lens, feeding into ideas that were then developed with colleagues.

With Alistair it was obvious how knowledge was growing in the conversations, this may be at seminars, coffee breaks, dinners or on email. Perhaps conversation is the keyword here. As Dodd et al in this SI said, Alistair was ‘the master-story-weaver’.

What we can learn from this SI is the extent of Alistair’s reach, both geographically and intellectually. However, it also indicates his breadth and depth of knowledge. While this SI provides us with a way to connect Alistair to the future of entrepreneurship and its scholarly work, it also allows us to really see and understand what he gave to the field. But first and foremost we will always remember Alistair for his friendship, kindness, and generosity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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