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The gendering of entrepreneurship context

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Working Paper



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The Gendering Of Entrepreneurship Context

Friederike Welter, Candida Brush and Anne de Bruin

Working Paper 01/14

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THE GENDERING OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONTEXT^{*}

Friederike Welter[†], Candida Brush[‡] and Anne de Bruin[§]

February 17, 2014

Abstract

The paper builds on the understanding of context as suggested by Welter (2011) who introduced different dimensions of context along a continuum of where entrepreneurship takes place and when this happens. Where context has been studied in relation to gender and women, the focus has been on the influence of social contexts such as networks, family and household embeddedness of women entrepreneurs or the institutional environment for women's entrepreneurship. We contribute to the literature by identifying three further themes, based on a systematic literature review: how to conceptualise the spatial and institutional contexts for women's entrepreneurship and their intersections, as informed by entrepreneurship, gender and geography studies; the paradox of empowering women and the debate around mumpreneurship. Our analysis highlights the influence of spatial-institutional contexts on entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurial behaviour is gendered because of place which itself is gendered, reflecting local institutions such as accepted gender norms which may "force" women into specific industries or business sizes. We also highlight the agency of women entrepreneurs in influencing their spatial-institutional contexts.

JEL-Classification: J16, L26, M13

Keywords: entrepreneurship, women's entrepreneurship, gender, entrepreneurship context

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Introduction

Recently, entrepreneurship scholars are paying more attention to the context in which entrepreneurship takes place (Davidsson, 2003; Spedale & Watson, 2013; Watson, 2013a, b; Welter, 2011; Zahra & Wright, 2011). Aldrich (2009) points to that the preferred “all are alike” approach of entrepreneurship scholars is extreme decontextualisation. Context simultaneously provides opportunities and barriers for entrepreneurial behaviour (Welter, 2011). It becomes “part of the story” (Zahra & Wright, 2011: 72), thus contributing to theory building. More recently, Spedale and Watson (2013) argue for a move beyond the “false dualism of individual and context”, suggesting that one should put the notion of entrepreneurial action at the centre of any further debate on context. In this regard, the paper aims to contribute to the emerging debate through explicitly incorporating a gender dimension into the context debate.

Where context has been studied in relation to gender, the focus has been on the influence of social contexts such as networks, family and household embeddedness of women entrepreneurs (e.g., Aldrich & Cliff, 2003) or the institutional environment for women’s entrepreneurship. This paper builds on the understanding of context as introduced by Welter (2011) who suggested different dimensions of context along a continuum of where entrepreneurship takes place and when this happens. The former reflects the manifold locations of entrepreneurship, namely social, spatial and institutional. Social context includes the relations of individuals, be they networks, families, households or friends. The spatial context covers the physical and geographical environment, the institutional context the regulatory and normative environment. These contexts overlap; for example the social context (networks, family, and households) and institutional contexts (laws, norms, regulations) both have a spatial dimension. It is the intersection of spatial with the different “where” and “when” dimensions of context from a gender perspective this paper will explore further.

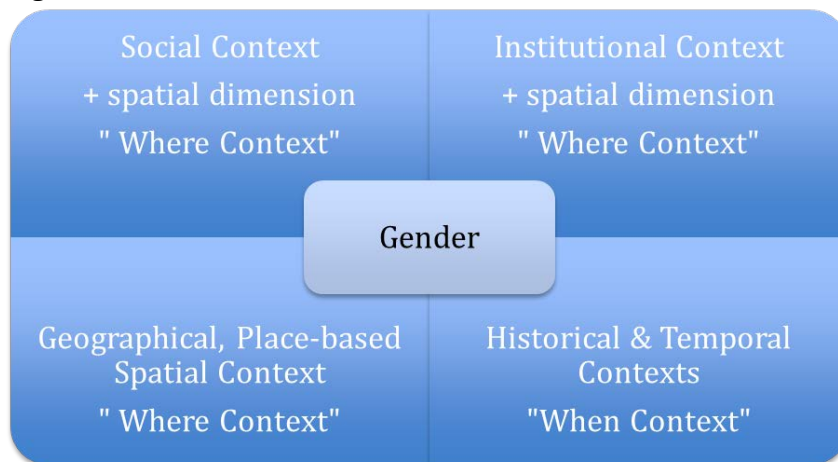
For the purposes of this paper we adopt a flexible and comprehensive definition of entrepreneurship. As such we consider entrepreneurship broadly as entrepreneurial behaviour that can occur across a range of settings. The activities of self-employed women in both the formal and informal sectors of an economy are therefore included in this definition.

We first present the method of our literature review before proceeding to review gender and context from a theoretical perspective. In this section, we draw on institutional and feminist theories, exploring their perspectives on gendering contexts. The next section presents selected themes emerging from our literature review so far. Finally, we conclude with our ideas for a gendered multi-context framework.

Method

In our paper, building on Welter (2011), we consider the where and when dimensions of context. The “when” dimension refers to historical and temporal contexts; the “where” dimension covers the social, institutional and spatial context. Encompassing the centrality of gender, these contexts are portrayed in Figure 1. Our view of the relationship between context and gender is dynamic and reciprocal: gender is affected by contexts as they exist today and as they have existed before, but gender also affects contexts and thus contributes to changing contexts overtime. Drawing on institutional and feminist theory and reviewing existing literature and studies on place and entrepreneurship, we outline a conceptual model as to the effects of the spatial and institutional context dimensions on women’s entrepreneurship and vice versa.

Figure 1: **Contextual Gender Framework**



Source: Authors.

We used google scholar to search for the keywords “gender and spaces” (ca. 1.500 results), “gender and place” (ca. 2.900 results), “place and entrepreneurship” (ca. 80 results). We then scanned the first twenty pages of each search as well as all article links since 2010 (in order to capture the newer discussion) and downloaded all articles which appeared relevant to our theme. This was complemented by a search of gender and entrepreneurship journals. Additionally, we drew on our own research related to gender and institutions and feminist entrepreneurship theories to complement the literature review. In the following sections we present preliminary results from our review.

Emerging themes from a theory perspective

In this section, we discuss emerging themes from a theory perspective. We focus on institutional theory and feminist perspectives from entrepreneurship theory.

Institutional theory: enabling and constraining boundaries

Institutional diversity helps to explain variations in the nature and extent of entrepreneurship across countries and regions, including variations in women's entrepreneurship. Institutions set constraining and enabling boundaries for individual behaviour and actions, by influencing the nature and extent of entrepreneurship and its development (Welter & Smallbone, 2011). As enabling forces, they reduce transaction costs, uncertainty and risks of individual behaviour; as constraining forces, they add to transaction costs for entering entrepreneurship and developing a business and they affect the returns from entrepreneurship. Regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive institutions (Scott, 2008) influence, both direct and indirectly, whether an individual perceives entrepreneurship as desirable and feasible (Shapero & Sokol, 1982) and whether entrepreneurs channel their resources into productive and innovative activities (Baumol, 1990).

Regulative institutions include any rules which directly influence the costs of setting up a business, conducting business activity and closing a venture. Examples are regulations for market entry and exit and any laws and rules governing commercial transactions. Secondly, regulative institutions include any policies which have an indirect influence on the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship, and, in the case of tax and social security as well as labour market policies, also business development. Examples refer to welfare policies, labour market policies, tax policies, as well as policies which also influence the individual set of skills, knowledge and resources needed for entrepreneurship, such as educational policies or, with both direct and indirect impact, financial policies. Also, government matters because it designs, implements and enforces regulative institutions.

Normative and cultural-cognitive institutions (also labelled informal institutions) are non-codified institutions which are embedded deeply within a society (North, 1990). Normative institutions refer to values which regulate what is preferred and deemed desirable, together with standards allowing their assessment, and norms as non-written rules for value-driven actions and behaviour (Scott, 2008). Normative institutions are an indirect influence on entrepreneurship insofar as they define acceptable roles for individuals in a society or in a group such as an ethnic community, thus impacting on the desirability of entrepreneurship, but also – as a result – on its feasibility (e.g., access to resources), and a direct influence as they also determine tolerated and acceptable business behaviour such as conceptions of fair business practices (Scott, 2008). For example, whether or not a career as an entrepreneur is valued in society is measured in GEM studies and there is variation around the world on this attitude (Xavier, Kelley, Kew, Herrington & Vorderwulbecke, 2013).

Cultural-cognitive institutions are closely linked to normative institutions: they reflect the interpretation of normative institutions, in other words, the shared understanding of individuals as “the way we do things” (Scott, 2008: 58), thus allowing individuals to routinize their behaviour. Moreover, they also influence the desirability of entrepreneurship, as entrepreneurial intentions are affected by individual cognitions (Busenitz & Lau, 1996; Lim, Morse, Mitchell, & Seawright, 2010). Research has indicated quite a few regulative and normative institutions with a potential gender impact. These include the constitution providing for gender equality in a society; labour market rules giving equal access to employment positions; family and tax policies, such as specific tax regulations and the overall infrastructure for childcare; and property rights that may allow or prevent female ownership of land, together with the predominant gender ideology in a particular society (Baughn, Chua, & Neupert, 2006; Verheul, Van Stel, & Thurik, 2006; Welter, 2004; Welter, 2006; Welter & Smallbone, 2008; Welter, Smallbone, Mirzakhalkova, Schakirova, & Maksudova, 2006).

Normative institutions determine gender roles within a society and also prescribe typically male or female behaviour (Ahl, 2006; Baughn et al., 2006), thus impacting on the desirability of entrepreneurship for women, its nature and the extent. Many societies continue to ascribe housebound and family-related roles to women, thus implicitly marking entrepreneurship as a less-desirable career choice for women (Holst, 2001; Pfau-Effinger, 2004a, b). Where traditional gender roles persist, entrepreneurship also is typically characterized as masculine behaviour and activity, which can further discourage women and rates of women’s entrepreneurship are generally lower than for men (Fagenson & Marcus, 1991). Research, studying entrepreneurial metaphors for Scandinavian countries where the environment generally is more favourable for female entrepreneurship, illustrates that even in the late 1990s, women still assign controversial and negative metaphors to entrepreneurship, whilst men frequently emphasised idealising aspects (Hyrsky, 1999). By portraying women’s entrepreneurship (or the general labour market participation of women) as less desirable, traditional gender norms affect self-perceptions of women (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2011; Brush, De Bruin, & Welter, 2009; Eikhof, Summers, & Carter, 2013). In this respect, Baughn *et al.* (2006) suggest that women appear more responsive to the level of normative support for entrepreneurship compared to men. Their study shows, that where a society generally admires and respects entrepreneurs, the share of female entrepreneurs is higher; and it is specific normative support for entrepreneurship women appear to require.

Women from ethnic or migrant groups might experience double or triple discrimination and exclusion because of the combined effects of sex, ethnicity and migrant status (Apitzsch, 2003; Apitzsch & Kontos, 2003; Kupferberg, 2003). For example, patriarchal cultures, where traditional norms prevail, conflict with Western modernity. Therefore, where women from such a culture set up business activities, this frequently is restricted to self-employment, often in traditional (craft) sectors, and home-bound, low-growth

activities, although over time entrepreneurship may empower them to overcome gender-based exclusion (González-González, Bretones, Zarco, & Rodríguez, 2011; Kobeissi, 2010; Welter & Smallbone, 2010). Traditional gender roles also affect the feasibility of entrepreneurship, because they render entry, business survival and development more difficult for women. Entry may be self-restricted to feminized professions, sectors and business fields such as personal services or care professions (Marlow, 2002), thus contributing to horizontal and vertical gender segregation in entrepreneurship, while a possible lack of financial resources, experiences and social capital, all due to discontinuous work careers, has an impact on entry size and consequently business development. Regulatory institutions such as restrictive property rights (can women own a business, for example, see Hampel-Milagrosa, 2010) could further restrict the feasibility of entrepreneurship and business growth for women. Once women have managed to set up a business, they may have to balance double responsibilities for family and work, while at the same time possibly experiencing disagreement and a lack of emotional support from their family, all of which can further affect business development.

Additionally, gender differences in social capital, again resulting from prevailing gender roles in a society, may influence both the decision to start and to grow a business, as well as business survival and success (Carter, Anderson, & Shaw, 2001; Elam & Brush, 2010). Research has confirmed differences in network structures for women (entrepreneurs), but no differences in the frequency of networking (Aldrich, 1989). Women networks typically appear to include fewer entrepreneurs (Allen, 2000) and their networks are more homogeneous with a larger share of kinship (Renzulli, Aldrich, & Moody, 2000). Accordingly, it appears to be less gender than kinship, which creates disadvantages in starting and developing a venture. McManus (2001: 82) concludes therefore that for women “it has yet to be empirically established that these entrepreneurial networks are effective at facilitating the transition to self-employment.”

Prevailing gender roles determine regulatory institutions, and they are simultaneously reinforced by regulatory institutions such as the respective welfare model, family policies and tax policies (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). These institutions influence the “proper” role of women in the society because they impact on the degree to which labour market participation of women on equal terms with men is seen as desirable (Sjöberg, 2004). For example, based on GEM data for 11 countries, Elam and Terjesen (2010) show how labour-market institutions (e.g., female business leadership, gender wage inequality and public expenditure on childcare) influence the decision to start a business indirectly through their effect on societal perceptions. Welter and Smallbone (2010) explore the impact of institutional change on women entrepreneurs in hostile and turbulent environments of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. While institutional change such as the introduction of private property rights created opportunity fields for entrepreneurial men and women alike, it typically had a negative

impact on women, because of the effect of a change in family policies on the subsidies for state enterprise kindergartens, which led to a lack of public childcare facilities. The authors also illustrate the diversity of behavioural responses by women to deal with the post-Soviet traditional gender role, including some who openly defied post-Soviet gender roles, while others accepted them, at least on the surface. In a post-Soviet context, business is typically considered a predominantly male territory, requiring so-called male qualities, such as strength and assertiveness. In such circumstances, women entrepreneurs break out of norms ascribing them specific roles and behaviours.

Where family and tax policies favour a dual-earner model, it can be assumed that they also foster labour market participation and entrepreneurship of women (Sjöberg, 2004) and, thus, in turn might have a – longer term – impact on modernizing gender roles as well as providing role models. In this regard, institutional contexts have been much more favourable in Northern European countries, reflecting an egalitarian-individualistic principle in labour market and family policies (Pfau-Effinger, 2004b) and providing, for example, childcare (Bourne, 2010; Kreide, 2003). Where day care is not available and/or women cannot afford to pay for it, women face a trade-off between career and family (Kreide, 2003). This in turn explains lower participation in the labour market and consequently, lower shares of women entrepreneurs.

However, contrary to expectations, more gender-equal welfare models such as in the Scandinavian countries do not necessarily result in a higher share of women entrepreneurship because of inconsistencies between regulatory and normative institutions. In fact, GEM data shows that the rates of women's entrepreneurship in Scandinavia (Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway) are comparatively lower than most other countries between 3-5% nascent rates which is less than ½ the rate of men which is between 7-10%. Western Europe overall has among the lowest rates of start up in the world for both men and women (Kelley, Brush, Greene & Litovsky, 2013). The labour market participation of women is generally affected by the extent to which women are able to reconcile family obligations and work outside the family, either as employee, self-employed or entrepreneur (Sjöberg, 2004: 111): Where “women feel that employment is incompatible with being a good mother, they may feel considerable role-conflict and strain”. Based on the example of female entrepreneurship in Denmark, Neergaard and Thrane (2011) show how regulatory institutions that create equal treatment in public life and labour markets, at the same time perpetuate a male pattern of life at home, thus discriminating against women entrepreneurs who have to take on the double burden of entrepreneurship and family responsibilities.

With regard to tax policies, Holst (2001) demonstrates how, for example, the German tax system does not incentivise female labour market participation (including female entrepreneurship) by favouring a male breadwinner model: the spousal splitting system, originally introduced to benefit married couples with children, has been shown to favour

high-income families with one income earner (i.e., the person who realizes the highest income in the labour market), which reinforces traditional role patterns with men who normally earn the higher incomes, working and women staying at home. Were Germany to tax individual incomes of married couples, the labour market participation of women would increase by 2.4% points, their average working hours by 7.4% points (Bach *et al.*, 2011) and they would gain access to financial resources (own income). Sweden institutionalized a dual-career household model in 1971, when the tax laws were changed in a way that individuals rather than the family were taxed (Bourne, 2010); and Gustafsson (1995) confirmed that if West Germany introduced the Swedish tax system, women employment would increase by 10% points, whilst vice versa, if Sweden would introduce the German system, women employment in Sweden would decrease by 20% points.

In addition, social policies could influence the level of women entrepreneurship with respect to a lower level of social security connected to entrepreneurship. In this respect, maternity leave provisions have been confirmed to impact on the general likelihood of female entrepreneurship, but interestingly, without any significant effect on those women wanting to start high potential businesses (Estrin & Mickiewicz, 2011). As regards the rule of law, Hampel-Milagrosa (2010) suggests that women may profit from one-stop agencies, which shorten the contact points between women and officials, thus to some extent also preventing potential gender discrimination and bribery. Recent studies confirm that societal, country-level ‘gendered institutions’ can constrain women’s entrepreneurship (Pathak, Golz, & Buche, 2013; Mabsout & van Staveren, 2010). These findings reinforce the role that policy can play in enabling or constraining women’s entrepreneurial activity.

Feminist entrepreneurship perspectives

Feminist theory and research is predicated on the more specific assumption that gender is not merely fundamental in the structuring of society, but that this process disadvantages women. Thus, as noted by Calás, Smircich, and Bourne (2009), a primary goal of feminist scholarship is to seek an end to this condition. Consistent with this aim (but not always acknowledging the affinity with feminist approaches), much women’s entrepreneurship research has been devoted to documenting differences between male and female entrepreneurs and their ventures—and the obstacles faced by women business owners in particular (as noted by Greene, Brush, & Gatewood, 2006 and James, 2012). A feminist lens, however, tends to be implicit rather than explicit within the vast majority of women’s entrepreneurship research.

Two main feminist perspectives are notable in entrepreneurship arena. First, liberal feminism argues that social structures such as occupational segregation limit women’s ability to gain experience in certain sectors (Fischer, Reuber & Dyke, 1993; Greer &

Greene, 2003). This suggests that the uneven participation of women in traditional male-dominated and often high technology sectors is due to structural factors in the economy that prevent women from gaining experience, access to markets, or resources. For example, emerging work in transition economies finds women comprised significant portions of the illiterate society, thereby limiting their ability to become self-employed (Welter & Smallbone, 2008). This extends to the glass ceiling where women are often denied the chance to gain high level managerial decision-making experience which could be beneficial in an entrepreneurial start-up. Organizational hierarchies are frequently male-dominated limiting the chance for women to gain this experience (Brush, et al, 2004). These limitations also can influence their ability to assemble start-up resources, in that they often come from lower paying jobs (Verheul & Thurik, 2001). Similarly, women are left out of certain networks, especially financial. Research by the Diana Project found less than 10% of all people in the venture capital industry were female, and that during the burst of venture capital financing, 1995-2000, their numbers did not increase accordingly (Brush, Carter, Gatewood, & al., 2004). Since most would argue that venture capital financing is based on connections and networks, the lack of women in the networks could be viewed as a structural barrier.

Alternatively, social feminism would argue socialization of women creates different perspectives, goals and choices for women. Instead of being denied opportunities in certain sectors, they instead choose to move into retail and/or services where they have stronger self-confidence and the businesses may be more in keeping with their social values. This choice to pursue businesses in traditionally female service sectors also limits start-up resources and perspectives on future growth. Studies of social roles and social learning support this view. For example, women's levels of self-efficacy and expectations were lower showing less preference for entrepreneurship (Matthews & Moser, 1996). Relatedly, research in sociology shows the relationship between family and work is stronger for women finding examples of women integrating more compassion and support into their ventures (Holliday & Letherby, 1993). At the same time, it is arguable whether aspirations for growth are personal, and that women may choose to keep their ventures small and manageable in order to care for families (Brush et al., 2004).

Some more recent articles have explicitly considered feminist theory. For instance, Bird and Brush's (2002) gendered perspective on organizational creation as well as a smattering of empirical studies (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2011; Bourne, 2010; Cliff, 1998; DeTienne & Chandler, 2007; Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993; McAdam & Marlow, 2012; Orser & Leck, 2010). The explicit use of feminist theory is most visible in critiques of extant research (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009; Hurley, 1999; James, 2012; Mirchandani, 1999). These critiques attempt to reappraise the received knowledge and suggest alternatives methods for studying women's entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006; Hurley, 1999).

Emerging themes from the literature review

In this section we present emerging themes from the review of the literature. Generally, the literature on geography and space concentrates on how gender is distributed in space and place, the mechanisms spatial constraints influence women, on elaborating different spaces such as urbanity or rurality (Forsberg, 2001b); workplaces, household and homes (Estrada, 2002); specific peoples (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Karplus, 2013; Devika & Thampi, 2010; Essers & Benschop, 2009), countries or groups of women and their role in creating, influencing and changing space and place (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Estrada, 2002; Kern, 2013; Rudaz & Debarbieux, 2012; Ude, 2008). We subsequently focus on three themes: the discussion around how to conceptualise the spatial context, informed by geography, gender and entrepreneurship studies; the paradox of empowering women and the debate around mumpreneurship.

(Re-)Conceptualising the spatial context

From a theory perspective, we can distinguish between physical space (where will women locate their businesses: home, away, incubator etc.) and place (which “unwritten” rules, norms, values dominate in this particular place). Feminist geographers put an emphasis on place, highlighting the recursive links between local places, gender relations and gender identities (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Karplus, 2013; Forsberg, 2001a) and the social construction of places and spaces (Löw, 2006). Some also argue that gender relations produce spatial structures which then in turn help maintaining gender relations, as explored by Stuyck, Luyten, Kesteloot, Meert, and Peleman (2008) in their study on the household role patterns of women in two Belgian regions. Place then contributes to gendered identities (Longhurst, 2001). Geographers also point to “spatial mismatch” which reflects “the geographical barriers to employment for inner city residents that arise from changing social and economic relations and the impacts of those barriers on labor market achievement.” (Preston & McLafferty, 1999). From an entrepreneurship perspective, Berg (1997) suggests that place can be conceptualized in three ways—first, location theory, or locations (e.g. households); second, there is the notion of “location” which can be objectively described with economic variables (e.g. location of retail outlets; and third, the sense of place or “locale” which is a setting where social interactions take place and social relations are constituted. Each of these concepts can be gendered.

Work by Hanson and Pratt (1991, 1995) examines contemporary Worcester, Massachusetts and find that social and economic geographies creates occupational segregation, placing women into poorly paid jobs which is reproduced over time. Their analysis of the labour force over time finds that variations in commuting patterns and travel time between men and women, women tending to commute shorter distances and be more often placed in female dominated occupations. Further, containment theory

suggests that spatial mobility can be a constraint when women are located in largely suburban settings, which will constrain their networking ability. Spatial segmentation, together with sectoral segmentation, also has been shown to shape women business ownership in high-tech entrepreneurship (Mayer, 2008), indicating that the spatial context has a wider impact also for women in non-feminized professions and sectors (James, 2008).

Women entrepreneurs draw on their strong ties more than men and exhibit a high degree of place embeddedness often being located in close geographical proximity to their close relatives (Ekinsmyth, 2011; Hanson, 2009). However, delving into individual location behaviour of self-employed entrepreneurs in Germany, Reuschke (2013) finds contrary to the expectation drawn from the literature, self-employed women in particular, tend to live further away from their close family members. It is suggested that this may be because women often are pushed into self-employment by migration or even due to or despite their lack of strong localised networks. Furthermore country-specific factors such as the rise of self-employment in the creative industries in Germany coupled with a preference for the creative class to cluster in creativity conducive regions, may also support low place embeddedness findings. In the light of such findings and suppositions, there is a robust case for future research to examine place embeddedness of women entrepreneurs, including self-employed women, across different economies, regions and institutional contexts.

The “space” decision will be a result of the interactions of spatial and institutional contexts. In other words, institutional factors will influence and push women towards one or the other space, which in turn will influence the nature and development of their entrepreneurial ventures. Mirchandani (1999) discusses the implications of the physical business site for venture survival and development, based on the example of women entrepreneurs who often start home-based: Home-based ventures experience difficulties in gaining legitimacy with clients and creditors; they are frequently seen as leisure activities and their growth potential is limited. Additionally, she points to a gendered effect of industry which often accompanies the social and spatial embeddedness of women entrepreneurs because they prefer (or are forced to prefer) industries they can operate from home. Wang (2013), albeit not incorporating a gender view, frames ethnic entrepreneurship processes within the spatial context. Wang’s emphasis (2013: 98) that “[t]he social, cultural, political, and institutional dimensions of contexts where entrepreneurship starts and develops always have their spatial scopes and scales” is in keeping with our stance where the spatial dimension is configured as an important aspect of the social and institutional contexts (see Figure 1). This intersection of contexts is epitomised by what we describe in terms of an empowerment paradox and elaborate in the next section.

Paradox of empowering entrepreneurship

In situations of marginalised, poor, subordinated and migrant women, home-based and informal sector business is emerging as a means of female empowerment through entrepreneurship (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Ghani, Kerr & O'Connell, 2013; McAdam & Marlow, 2013; Pardy, 2013; Williams & Gurtoo, 2011; Wrigley-Asante, 2012). As Ghani et al. (2013, p. 1) document the persistence of the unorganised sector in India is supported by a rapid increase in the share of women owned businesses which “are typically based out of the household”. Although the informal sector is characterised by low income and low productivity, for many of the women owned enterprises and especially those in the manufacturing sector, it also represents an opportunity and stepping stone for women who would otherwise have not engaged in market work (Ghani et al., 2013). The flexibility, ability to work from home and the freedom from harassment that is experienced in the formal sector has also been cited among the advantages of informal business (Williams & Gurtoo, 2011). A protected and safe space of home and a sense of power and control over domestic and community resources make home-based businesses a site for empowerment for women (Al-Dajani & Carter, 2010; Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013).

There is however, a flip side to the empowerment opportunities narrative of women's home-based and informal business. Paradoxically empowerment is achieved within an existing institutional context of constraint. As Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013, p. 519) warn “we are in danger of celebrating entrepreneurial activities as an idealised solution to poverty, marginalisation and subordination”. Women work within the patriarchal society they are situated in. Women in paid formal sector employment similarly adjust to cultural expectations. “I'll be like water” and a formulation of “flexible aspirations” poignantly articulates the flexible adjustment of women's aspirations to an institutional context of rural middle-class Indian expectations of domestic femininity and simultaneously reflects “the gendered language of neoliberal self-improvement for the global economy” (Vijayakumar, 2013: 1). The neoliberal ideology inspired individual responsibility, agentic and entrepreneuring agenda as a generic solution to poverty and marginalisation combines with cultural institutional norms to drive female agentic activities (McRobbie 2009). The temporal context of contemporary globalisation and the politics of globalisation (Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, & Hanson, 2002) must therefore be factored into the empowerment discourse. Acharya and Lund (2002: 209) eloquently phrase the gendered implications and tensions that underscore the intersection of ‘when’ context of a more-market driven agenda with the ‘where’ of spatially and socially constituted entrepreneurial activity: “Because the freedom of choice is thwarted for women, their options are deformed. Intellectually, as well as practically, men and women are no longer partners with complementary functions, but rather competitors in the new market-driven society”

Recent findings demonstrate the constraining effect of societal, country-level ‘gendered institutions’ for women’s entrepreneurship (Mabsout & van Staveren, 2010; Pathak, Goltz & Buche, 2013). Despite the study being limited to women who are nascent or new entrepreneurs, findings across 53 countries Pathak et al. (2013) suggest that the social and cultural context has an overwhelming influence. Social context may be advantageous, with women entrepreneurs deriving greater benefits than men from family-to-business enrichment and support to entrepreneurial success (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Nevertheless such benefit must be offset against postulation that women entrepreneurs pursue such benefits because relative to men they “lack (of) access to other resources such as human, social and financial capital and because the female gender role encourages them to pursue work-family synergies” (Powell & Eddleston, 2013: 261). Piacentini (2013: 7) too highlights specific market failures, such as the serious credit market failure to provide sufficient finance to poor and inexperienced women entrepreneurs that, combined with the institutional context, leads to marked ‘gender entrepreneurship gaps’. However, Piacentini (2013) also emphasises that designing targeted support policies for female entrepreneurs is complicated and quantification of returns is difficult since monitoring and evaluation is rare.

The sectoral context of ethnic minority women’s business can also illustrate how the gendering of contexts plays out. The experience of migrant African women’s small business owners in the highly competitive black hairdressing and less lucrative legal sectors of London highlights how structural factors of ethnicity, class and migrant status combine with gendered cultural settings at the societal and sectoral levels, to impact on the navigation of work-life balance (Forson, 2013). Class can however, moderate the impact of the institutional context. Thus the resources of middle-class women business owners enables the buying of domestic help with chores such as cooking and cleaning that male partners are reluctant to take on (Forson, 2013).

Hanson (2010) picks up the empowerment theme in terms of how mobility can shape gender and vice versa. Defining “mobility to signify the movement of people from one place to another in the course of everyday life” and to also include virtual mobility facilitated by the internet and technology, mobility and immobility can be perceived as empowering or disempowering (Hanson, 2010: 7). From a gender and entrepreneurship standpoint, mobility in relation to access to opportunity should be a key consideration; and those few studies that exist show the value of considering mobility and its influence on women’s labour and entrepreneurship (Mandel, 2004). Hanson (2009: 247) argues that women’s entrepreneurship can help us understand “how people and places recursively shape each other through their interactions.”, and she points to the agency women acquire by using entrepreneurship to change their own and other’s lives in particular places.

Mumpreneurship

The label of ‘mumpreneur/mompreneur’ emerged around the middle of the last decade (circa 2005) in practitioner circles, blogs and discussion fora. The academic literature too has cottoned on to the phenomenon as indicated by a small flurry of recent literature on the topic (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Ekinsmyth, 2011, 2013a, b; Richomme–Huet, Vial, & D'Andria, 2013). Mumpreneurship is essentially a capitalist developed economy, middle-class phenomenon (Ekinsmyth, 2011), which distinguishes mothers engaged in child care who run their own businesses, from other women entrepreneurs.

Ekinsmyth (2013b: 2) views mumpreneurship as “a spatial phenomenon. [where] Mothers are creatively building businesses around the socio-spatial routines of daily childcare.” Ekinsmyth’s spatial interpretation is therefore different from a standard geographic, physical location spatial context. Instead it represents a hybrid context of entrepreneurial activity of women. On the one hand, it represents the social context of women in terms of their household embeddedness, childcare work and the networks and support that a particular group of entrepreneurs can tap into. On the other hand, it represents the temporal context of mumpreneurs in relation to their motherhood and childcare lifecycle stage.

The phenomenon of mumpreneurship also highlights the contestability of feminist interpretations in relation to women’s entrepreneurship. From a feminist perspective mumpreneurship may be viewed either as reinforcing traditional gender role attitudes or as the embodiment of greater choice for women. The latter view sees explicit incorporation of motherhood and active configuration of the business around its caring demands rather than mere juggling of the two, as ‘the new feminism’ (Ekinsmyth 2013b: 1). As such traditional female activities of caring are no longer deprecated but valorised and the agency of women to carve out and create an identity that embraces motherhood is celebrated. In this sense, the socio-institutional context has a neutral impact on entrepreneurial behaviour of mumpreneurs, while the socio-spatial context of daily routines is converted to an entrepreneurial asset. Mumpreneurship is empowering. In contrast the former view sees the label of mumpreneur as anti-feminist, unnecessary and a normalisation of the separateness of the work and family spheres. An interpretation of this view could be that mumpreneurship has disempowering potential and mumpreneurs remain bounded by a static socio-institutional context.

Outlook

With our paper which presents work in progress, we hope to contribute to our knowledge on women’s entrepreneurship. Brush et al. (2009) called for a framework that makes explicit the embeddedness of women entrepreneurship and considers the

multiple levels of influence on their entrepreneurial actions. We add to their call by specifically demonstrating the influence of the spatial context on entrepreneurial behaviour. For example, women entrepreneurs may select physical spaces based on their understanding and interpretation of the place they live in. In other words, their entrepreneurial behaviour is gendered because of place whilst place itself is gendered, reflecting local institutions such as accepted gender contracts (Forsberg, 2001a) which in turn may “force” women into specific industries or business sizes.

We also highlight the agency of women entrepreneurs in influencing their spatial context. Here, we implicitly relate to the current debate on “institutional entrepreneurship” (see Welter, 2012 for a literature review) Weik (2011: 472) argues that most institutional entrepreneurship literature has a bias towards a “managerialist view of the creation and destruction of institutions”, portraying institutional change behaviour as rational, planned, intended and linear. Our discussion on entrepreneurship and empowerment of women (entrepreneurs) through spatial contexts contributes to the view that agency need not be intentional (Welter, 2012), but that institutional change also could result as an unintended consequence of behaviour which occurs in an institutional context that “never reaches equilibrium but instead continually develops through cumulative reinterpretation.” (Carstensen, 2011: 160). Once more, this points to the complexities and recursive links between spatial and institutional contexts in empowering or hindering individuals, in this case women entrepreneurs.

To sum up, the multi-faceted context of women’s entrepreneurship is a gendered terrain. Our simplified and stylized framework presented in Figure 1, barely captures the fluid entanglement of gender with the multiple and intersecting when and where contexts; and we recognize that our journey to operationalize the complex spatial-institutional relations has barely started. We will continue our work by developing propositions as to when, how and why women experience different spatial contexts as asset / liability relative to men and through which mechanisms they are enabled to turn a boundary spatial context into an opportunity.

Yet, we suggest that our paper will add interesting avenues to the ongoing debate around women’s entrepreneurship. For the academic research community, this will help expand the foundation for coherent research on women’s entrepreneurship. For the woman entrepreneur, this analysis has implications for understanding the sources of the challenges they face by providing insights on the importance of the interplay of both individual and spatial factors that impact on their enterprise. For policy makers, it turns the spotlight on the need for an integrated approach for fostering female entrepreneurs that is not blind to overarching spatial and institutional structures and gender asymmetries.

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