

Transcript of 'Regional Development, Inequalities and Entrepreneurship'

Season 3, Episode 35, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]

Paul: Today we're rethinking about regional development and how entrepreneurship fits within that.

[Theme music]

Jan: Do you feel that the work you do, Jan has a positive effect on the region?

Jan: Uh, which region are you talking about? Because isn't that an interesting question about local to, to regional, to national, to global?

Paul: I'm not here for a philosophical conversation. [Jan laughs] Um, I was purely talking geographically.

Let's say within 50 miles of where you are currently sat, in any direction. So if you're affecting the basking sharks that are currently swimming up the Irish Sea, that would be acceptable.

Jan: That would count? Uh, yes. Although a lot of our, well, the Centre itself does have a global focus. So a lot of our, my personally, a lot of my work is actually more globally orientated. But many of our members have, have interests that really land in this place.

And I think the best thing is to be bimodal. So you, you land in the place and you, and you're global as well, and everything in between. But, if you like, there are, sort of, mainly two focuses.

So great colleagues with the Morecambe Bay curriculum, for example, really embedded here. But that also will have a, an effect outside of the 50 miles as well.

Place matters.

Paul: Is bimodal not having two feet?

Jan: Uh, no, that's, um, bipedal...

Paul: ...okay, right...

Jan: ...I think you're thinking of... [laughs]

Paul: ... yeah, yeah. Just checking. Okay. If your Centre only has two feet and lots of members, I want to know who's has them and whether they're on some kind of rota basis...

Jan: ...yes.

Paul: Do you feel, obviously that you're engaging though with businesses and communities, uh, to have an effect on business operations?

Jan: Oh, yes. And sometimes it's working closely and deeply with individual businesses, but sometimes it might be working with people that represent businesses, or who advise lots of businesses.

That's why, in the Pentland Centre, we're really interested in, like, professions because they spread out and they advise many businesses.

So there's, but, but there's nothing, I mean, there's nothing more exciting than a researcher than spending, you know, quality deep time over a period of months, weeks, years with...

Paul: ...analysing a spreadsheet... [chuckles]

Jan: ...no, with organisations and getting to know them and to love them and to really feel enthused about their, their priorities and their ambitions.

And I mean the, the Lake District Farmers, um, you know, miniseries that we had...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jan: ...I was so thrilled to have known those folk well and to see them carrying on doing great things.

Paul: Have you ever been called an anchor?

Jan: [laughing] Well, yes.

Paul: I'm not talking about when you've misheard, uh, just generally, have you ever been called an anchor institution?

Jan: Uh, not an anchor institution. I have been called a sea anchor. We were in high seas once in quite a small yacht, and they needed more weight at the back. And so they yelled Jan, come and be the sea anchor. So I don't know what that says, but I'm trying not to relive it, quite frankly.

Paul: [laughing] But they didn't throw you over the side?

Jan: No, that would've been counterproductive. [laughs]

Paul: No, I'm, I'm just checking because I, you know, people who spend enough time with you may be tempted...

Jan: [laughing] ...yeah...

Paul: There's a reason I'm talking about all of this.

Jan: Oh, good.

Paul: [laughs] Yeah. And I'm, I'm not just, you know, bringing up bad memories of you being referred to as a sea anchor.

Because today we're going to be talking about how universities play a role within regional development, how entrepreneurship ties in with universities, how universities, entrepreneurship, regional development businesses all come together at a regional level.

Jan: Brilliant. I like that.

Paul: In order to investigate that further away, join by someone who is a Professor Emerita here at Lancaster University Management School.

She was a founder of the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development, and her research still, even though she's retired, and I've had words with her about this, encompasses entrepreneurship, innovation in dialogue with business and community.

And she's also the co-author of a recent book called Rethinking Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, alongside some former colleagues from here at Lancaster.

We're joined today by Professor Ellie Hamilton. Hello, Ellie.

Ellie: Hello. Thank you very much for inviting me. Very pleased to be here.

Jan: Is it nice to pop back...

Ellie: ...yes...

Jan: ...during your retirement?

Ellie: It is, very to see old friends and faces, yes.

Paul: We're not pretending here that Ellie hasn't been back at the University for such a long time. [Jan laughs] Ellie spends too much time at the University for someone who's retired, Ellie.

Ellie: [laughs] Perhaps, but only for enjoyable parts of the job.

Paul: Yes. You have at least stressed that now you're really only doing the stuff you really enjoy and want to do.,

Ellie: Yes, yes. Which is, is a privilege and great fun.

Paul: Which is good news for us because it suggests that this podcast is something Ellie really wanted to do.

Jan: Yes, that's true.

Ellie: Indeed, that's true.

Paul: Can you tell us, to get started, Ellie, a little bit about your background and what it is that you really have focused on across your career?

Ellie: Well, I think you could describe me as an accidental academic, really. Um, my husband and I set up a construction company when we were very young, and had just, just met.

And neither of us had business backgrounds whatsoever. So, you know, the word clueless might spring to mind.

So I went, took myself off and did a Business Studies degree so that I would be able to read a spreadsheet and, but I got, I got hooked. I got hooked into, into studying and came to Lancaster to do a Master's in Marketing on an ESRC scholarship and, and basically never left.

But that experience, if you like, then drove the kind of central questions for me that I was interested in, which was like, what is this mysterious thing of trying

to set up a business? What role does family play in that? Because I was getting dragged into it all and, as well, and what's the gender dynamic in, in that?

And um, and, and so these, these, questions sort of drove me on. And then it was there, where I was work working in this world class management school that didn't engage with small business at all.

We were working with large corporates, providing executive education, but not the small businesses. And when we were reeling from the downturn in the nineties, having been thinking, oh, this is a lark, this is easy, you know, and then you get hit with a recession.

And I thought, why are we not helping people? You know, we had friends who'd suffered and we were suffering. Um, and that drove me to, engage with regional development funding, which was available at that time to work with small businesses in the Northwest.

So that was the sort of start of, it all. But that was the driving, you know, it was a personal experience that made me very curious about entrepreneurship and all, its, its mysteries.

Paul: It's hard to believe, given the Management School now and its reputation for working with small businesses, SMEs, family businesses, all different things across the region, that there was a time when that just wasn't the case at all.

Ellie: Yes, it wasn't, it was not the case in, in the 1990s.

And, uh, it, the other big change in the University was the, and all the universities across the northwest, which is one of the regions, I did like the way you describe what region are we talking about.

Uh, but at that point the Northwest universities got together and bid for big European structural funds. And then that provided an ongoing resource to establish that work across the University and all the faculties and very much so in the Management School.

Paul: So before we get onto other questions, I'm, I'm intrigued. You started off here because you were running a construction company with your husband.

Did the construction company survive?

Ellie: It did. [laughs]

Paul: Is it still going?

Ellie: It's still going. Much, much more selectively, 'cause my husband is, um, and, and we haven't got anybody to pass it on to. 'Cause that's the other thing that I'm really interested in is in a family business, how does succession work?

So, I mean, my PhD I looked at what's happening between the generations. So I'm really interested in intergenerational learning, because so much changes in a generation, doesn't it?

If anybody's taking over a family business, the world has changed, hasn't it? Technologically, socially, culturally. And so the next generation have to be entrepreneurial in their own way for the business to survive and thrive.

Paul: Well, I'm glad to hear. I, I would've been really disappointed if you'd come here, suddenly got yourself absorbed in the Management School and the University and the business was, oh sorry, nah, sod that, we don't need that business anymore...

Ellie: ...oh, no. It, It, went on to great to, uh, great things.

Paul: I'm glad to hear it.

Ellie: I'll send you the, um, website link.

[Paul and Ellie laugh]

Paul: Always drumming up new customers. Good to see. [Ellie laughs]

Jan: So let's turn to this book that you've, you've, um, created with a couple of colleagues and the book is titled 'Rethinking Entrepreneurship and Regional Development'.

And so I think what would be really great for our listeners is to unpack each *piece* of that and make sense of it.

So if we maybe start with entrepreneurship, which is a fantastic word, which I can never spell, quite frankly. So I'm really impressed that you can.

Uh, tell us about what's the essence of that, that idea and why is it hard? And also, you know, do you need different kinds of entrepreneurship at different times and places?

So, just, everything about entrepreneurship, just like that.

Ellie: Yes. Well, and it's a concept that's been around sort of since the seventeen hundreds, the French came up with it, which is why it's hard to spell. [Paul laughs]

And, uh, but as, as if, it's perhaps helpful to think about how it, how entrepreneurship's been researched over time. And there's been some very good book, reviewing books, reviewing the kind of history of the research in entrepreneurship.

And they talk about, sort of, three eras. The first being when entrepreneurship was being studied very much as an economic phenomenon. And then it moved into a, a period when it was a, a, slightly more, sort of, social sciences side, but very much on the psychology. It was kind of hunt the entrepreneur time, you know?

The born, these creatures were born, these strange creatures called entrepreneurs who were usually middle-aged white males. Um, and, and so what characteristics did these strange humans have? And there was that sort of period of finding the traits. And you can still find stuff online that is describing, and still very much in the media, what are the traits of an entrepreneur.

And thankfully that has moved on, and there's some really good critical work done. And across all the management sciences, if you like, are looking at aspects of entrepreneurship and moving it much on into different contexts.

A lot of the early research was very much Anglo-American, assuming a, a neutral context in which everybody could, was on a level playing field. And uh, and, but times have moved on and I'm sure we'll talk a bit more about that.

So entrepreneurship and what is considered to be entrepreneurship is, is something that's moved over time as, as researchers have moved their thinking.

For me, my, sort of, gut feeling about entrepreneurship is, if there's kind of fresh air at the end of the day or the end of the month, you know, you have to make something happen in order to create resource and put food on the table.

And that happens to people in all, many different kinds of circumstances. So not just the kind of tech giants, um, but people, there is necessity entrepreneurship. There's, there's many places in the world where people have got no choice but to make something happen in order to survive.

And so there's everything, and that in between. And that we, we once made a sort of a list in the early days of the Institute of things that we thought were myths about entrepreneurship.

That it's all about making money, that's not true. So, people, community-based entrepreneurship where it's a, and place-based entrepreneurship. Um, the, the, uh, social entrepreneurship is, is a form of entrepreneurship that's been much studied.

There's a whole literature on that where, but if you get social entrepreneurs in the same room as people who are for-profit, they, they start to sort of, the social entrepreneurs say, well, we have to make profit. And the for-profits say, well, we've got value. [Ellie and Jan laugh] So I, I dunno if that's a, a false dichotomy really.

So yes, in answer to that part of your question, Jan, entrepreneurship can take many shapes and forms. Um, and, and as you were talking, Paul, about family business. I mean, most of the business that gets done in the world is done in small firms, family oriented, and that people have made estimates about various percentages of that work that, is, but it's despite the giants and the corporations and all their power, much of the work in the world is done in small business context and in family, and with family context of, of different kinds.

Paul: So if that's us defining entrepreneurship, how about regional development then...?

Ellie: ...oh...

Paul: ...what does that mean?

Ellie: [laughs] Gets even worse, doesn't it? Um, I think policy makers have, have really determined a lot of the way that that regional development is thought about. So it's convenient for area, geographical areas to get parcelled up into, into regions.

And the different ways that that gets done, um, varies, obviously. And there are some, difficulties in it. I mean, for example, on a global scale we talk about the Global North and the Global South. But as people have written in, within what we might think of as the Global North, you'll find, um, measurements that, of pockets, which would be Global South measurements. But it's the way

that places like the United Nations can start to think about parcelling out any resource that they might have in order to provide assistance.

Um, and of course in England where we all are, we've got the famous North-South divide, which you know, is very stubbornly in place. Um, despite best efforts of policymakers, uh, from government over different times in, and very different ways trying to make a difference.

But regional development is, is, at the heart of it lies the notion that you, you want to remedy inequalities. That if there are inequalities, mostly people are talking about economic inequalities at that point, then there must be some sort of development that's needed that will remedy those inequalities.

And the inequalities, usually from government, are seen as pretty much focused on an economic question. And the economic development is about wealth creation, job creation, and, and is, and to be economically measured. And having worked in, very close to policy makers in the Wave Two cities programme, it was that that measurement, that whole project was measured on job creation and private sector investment.

So that focus of regional development remains and, and, in that way can, can stop the progress, if you like, of a regional development that might be much more focused on sustainability, on air quality, on health outcomes, on other measurements.

So in our, in this book, we are kind of calling out for a more transdisciplinary approach, if you like, to regional development. That there are other, there are other questions that should be asked other than economic outcomes.

Paul: I think you've just hinted at it there, but we've just defined entrepreneurship and regional development. Why do we need to rethink them?

Ellie: Well, yes, very, yes. I think because of, those shortcomings about the way we are thinking about them now, and the shortcomings about the outcomes, uh, at a time when really we, I'm sure that you will be having sustainability in your mind, Jan...

Jan: ...mmm...

Ellie: ...so, you know, how often is that front and centre of a regional development outcome? And so the rethinking of, it's the rethinking how might

entrepreneurship play a role in, in shaping regional development? Does it have a role? Should it have a role? If so, what that, what that role look like?

And the regional development part is, is, the, is in the same place of needing some fresh thinking if we are to remedy some of the inequalities that, that we face. Which in, in some cases can be access to green space, or there are other questions to be asked, I think. And um, and for policy makers, very much so, who are often holding the purse strings.

Jan: And what I really like about that description is that you could think about, uh, your regional development in terms of natural assets. So sometimes you kind of see, like, coastal communities, um, sort of development, um, ambitions, which might be faced around, you know, what's in the, the local seas and et cetera.

But then also, I remember, um, talking to a regional development agency in Scotland that was focused on the Highlands and the Islands, and that was a big economic inequality story.

And so part of the, the addressing that is that they address culture. So people's language and their music and their dancing, et cetera, was sort of reinvigorated alongside other things.

So I think, you know, that focus just on the economics maybe misses all these feeder elements as well, to get us going.

Ellie: Absolutely. And, and what is valued. I think, you know, what, what are we placing, what do we value in our lives? And, and so those are some of the things I think that, that would provoke that rethinking. Very much so.

And in, in entrepreneurship, there's been some very interesting work. Ed McKeever, here in Lancaster, says, um, looking at very, uh, deprived communities and placed-based entrepreneurship in those communities that can make an enormous difference to the qualities, quality of lives of the, of the community. But that if you came along with your, calculator and tried to turn, to monetise it, you wouldn't necessarily be able to demonstrate, in those terms.

But just as, as you've hinted at there, Jan...

Jan: ...yeah...

Ellie: ...and what you expressed in terms of community cohesion, wellbeing, and so on, make a huge difference...

Jan: ...yeah, and confidence...

Ellie: ...and hope!

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

Paul: And what about sustainability then? [Jan and Ellie laugh]

So you, you said Jan will always be thinking about sustainability, when she's not thinking about spreadsheets, [Jan and Ellie laugh] um, and the like, and various mathematical formulas.

We had one episode where she delighted in saying how she'd spent days on end in a Scottish archive somewhere looking at, uh, accounting sheets from the 18th, 19th century.

And that seemed to be the highlight of her life at that particular point...

Jan: ...every girl needs a hobby. [everyone laughs]

Paul: Exactly. And so how does sustainability fit within this whole sphere of entrepreneurship, regional development?

Ellie: I think it's probably something I, I, think that's part of the rethinking part of the, the story.

Um, there, there's a sort of stubborn path dependency in terms of the way that people think about regional development. And there's some very interesting new ways of thinking about entrepreneurship that, that one would hope would pull sustainability questions and answers much more to the fore.

Things like the place-based, community-based entrepreneurship being much more, highlighted, shining a light on that work. Um, and other, other sort of very interesting research avenues that are coming to the fore now, like, entrepreneurship as emancipation, Rindova. Um, but that would, again, what kind of emancipation and, and what would, what would drive that is how do we pull sustainability to be the first and foremost question rather than a tag on at the end.

I mean, I seem to remember on, in, I was talking about the European funding coming into play, and at one point you had to ask a, sort, of a whole raft of questions of people who were participating in programmes that we were

running. And one of them was, if you drove here today, what was the engine size of your car?

So it would just be a kind of tick box at the end of the day. And really what you would want would be the sustainability to be the number one driver of regional development programmes. But that's not the case at, at the moment.

Much more so. And, and I need to mention my fellow co-authors who were wonderful, wonderful. We had a, um, great fun and a wonderful time writing this book. We did, it was tough, but it was fun. So Rhiannon Pugh is an economic geographer. And Danny is entrepreneurship, but much more innovation and tech transfer.

So we'd worked in the same department and are all entrepreneurship scholars, you could say. But what we realised when we started working together was that we are, we were all immersed in very different literatures.

So we had quite a job finding the kind of common ground. We were quite shocked because we thought, you know, we worked in the same department, but, but we are immersed in different literatures.

So if Rhiannon were here, I think she would be able to give us examples of where that *is* happening. And, and she would argue that communities are much more resilient, uh, as a result of that focus rather than the purely economic drivers.

Jan: Part and parcel of the sustainability agenda, which many people think is purely environmental, but it's not. It's also social, and particularly in around inequalities as being, and the pursuit of justice is absolutely core to that.

So, so how do you think about the inequalities in, in this book and how to address them?

Ellie: we started by finding a, a common ground between us as co-authors was context. The context that things were happening in was, was critical in, in each of each of our contexts.

And so that we, we, we started the book by considering the, the concept of context, and regional context, be it, you know, the geographical context or the, um, you know, the institutional context and so on and so forth.

And Welters has written about entrepreneurs being, *doing* context so that the context is not something that is just a given, that they are able to have agency in that context.

But as soon as you have that notion about who has got the agency, then power inequalities come into play. Uh, gender, race, ethnicity, it all is up for grabs then about who, who has voice and who has, has power in those contexts.

So it's, it's all very well saying, you know, that that, for example, the, the emancipation, uh, entrepreneurship is emancipation, but one of the caveats of that is that some of the structures, or structural inequalities, are so stubborn and so well embedded that, it's a real challenge.

And coinciding with that, in a regional development stage is, is the notion of who has the knowledge. So if you're wanting to develop or make a change, what are you basing those changes upon? So you know, what, what, research is going to inform that, that work?

And there was a lovely piece of work done in, in America, an inductive piece of research, where they looked at all the case studies that were being used in the teaching of management students in the, in the States. And looking at cases that were referring to Indigenous Native Americans.

So, kind of unsurprising but shocking at the same time was, they concluded that the, the case studies assumed that the Indigenous people didn't know how they needed to be developed. Uh, that they would be resistant. Uh, that was always translated into, sort of, clinging onto old ways. And that always economic measurement in terms of growth or profit activities. And the final sort of assumption was that the, uh, the people who were not the Indigenous people knew better than the Indigenous people did about what their development should look like.

And that is just one example, is it not, of how, um, assumptions? In the same way all the research about women entrepreneurs assumes that that see women as a difference. So what are they doing differently, that's not quite right? That means that they're not quite the entrepreneurs they should be. Um, not risk averse enough, or not.

So who has voice? What is the knowledge that should then be applied in terms of making change, essentially, uh, becomes critically important in understanding those structural inequalities and how if don't, if we don't know

them and don't understand them, then we can't change them. And I think there's an enormous amount of work to be done in that.

Jan: And even for people who are holding some of the views, finding a, a safe way for them to be surfaced so they can come to a better realisation, rather than get all defensive about, you know, their models or whatever...

Ellie: ...yes. Absolutely.

Paul: And it seems there must be a danger of exacerbating inequalities if, when it comes to regional development in particular, the people who are planning the regional development are not hearing those important voices for what is really needed to change to address it.

Ellie: I think that that is still a, a huge issue. Certainly in any of the regional development that, that we, we still see going on.

I mean, there often, there's a consultation, isn't there? But sometimes those voices are hard to hear.

Jan: Yeah. And I suppose we're sitting right at the heart of something that could be a force for entrepreneurship, a force for regional development. And often we think about universities as being what we call anchor assets...

Ellie: ...mmm...

Jan: ...um, so it's probably worth, you know, you know, telling our listeners what anchor assets are supposed to be. And also, you know, what great practices of universities as anchor assets have you found and been able to reflect in the book?

Ellie: The, the notion of an anchor institution is, is usually a public sector organisation that kind of is not going anywhere. So a local authority, the universities, they're, you know, they're gonna be here for a while, they're not gonna up sticks.

Um, and so that's the idea that that, that they are there. And universities, in particular, I think are marvellous anchor institutions because they, in way that you described your work earlier, Jan, as being both locally embedded but also globally focused at the same time. And I think universities do that all the time.

And we, we bring, we attract people from all over the world. That diversity brings enormous strength and, and an asset to the, to the region. And so, and, and the regional, the region can have a voice through, it can be like a flow, if

you like, from local to global and global to local, and I think universities work that very well.

And then I think how it's been, how the universities uh, might engage and make a difference, if you like, as an anchor institution has, thinking has changed, again, over time.

When it was first understood that you might want to encourage universities to, to make an effort to make a difference. Um, by the way, I think this has always happened. For, for example, you know, when they built the red brick universities in the industrial towns. I mean, I know, knew Sheffield University very well, you know, very strong metallurgy department, and town and gown was very strong. So it was embedded in that industrial heartland, if you like.

So there's always been the link, but it, it, kind of moves over time, I think. And certainly, after the Research Excellence Frameworks were introduced in the eighties, I think that encouraged researchers to turn inwards, it was all focused on journal publications really.

And then the first sort of movement came with saying yes, but the university was also has, has to help its economies another way. And the first wave was to say, well they've got lots of clever science in there. Let's build businesses out of the clever science. So it was all about having university incubators and there was the science enterprise challenge, a huge swathe of money in the 1990s to, to, encourage spin outs, tech transfer.

So that was the, the day at the time that, that was what universities would be useful for. And that it soon became apparent that that was a very small number of, of people that, a) had assets, b) were interested in, c)...

So that then, uh, developed and expanded into a much more broad understanding of how universities might engage. And that of course in turn became translated back into the Research Excellence Framework in terms of, of the, the need to produce impact cases, these days, demonstrating how we've changed the world.

Paul: Do you feel that your work then, you mentioned right back at the start where you were bringing more involvement with SMEs, with smaller companies, is part of this whole thing of universities as anchor institutions? 'Cause you're working with those organisations that do have that more regional, local focus.

Ellie: Yes. If I, on reflection, when I look back, that was the funding. You had to find your own resource, 'cause there was no resource for doing that kind of work. So the, the fact that we had regional funding meant that we, and because the businesses were on our doorstep, meant that we worked initially.

But the principle of embedding our research insights into programmes for small business that, I mean, we used to have a COGS model, if you like, that had policymaking, driving research, driving teaching, driving engagement, driving policymaking a sort of, that, that each should inform the other, if you like.

Um, and that, I think that's the importance of it, that as a university, what have we, what have we got to give? All we've got is our understanding derived from our research that we then can translate into, somehow, some dissemination that then makes a difference.

Jan: And I think I remember, um, you know, many, many years ago, we used to talk about knowledge transfer...

Ellie: [laughing] ...yes...

Jan: ...so we had it all and you sort of 'bleeugh' down to someone else...

Ellie: ...that's right.

Jan: And once we got into realising that knowledge exchange is what's going on is actually really important, in that, you know, some of the best things you, you can learn as an academic is from practice.

Ellie: Yes.

Jan: So that was sort of like a mind shift. I think that was probably eighties into nineties that that came about...

Ellie: ...yes...

Jan: ...but I remember us tripping over the word knowledge exchange, whereas now you'd never talk about knowledge transfer... [laughs]

Ellie: ...no...

Jan: ...just a dreadful notion.

Paul: Knowledge transfer. That sounds like how you, you teach small children more than anything, doesn't it...?

Jan: [laughing ...yes...

Paul: ...and if you're teaching businesses as like being small children, I don't think you're gonna get very far.

Jan: And then you're right back to the inequality thing that you were talking about, Ellie, is that, that assumption...

Paul: ...yeah...

Jan: ...about who, who is...

Ellie: ...who holds the knowledge...

Paul: we know best. Yes. Yeah.

Ellie: My colleague, who I established the Institute with, Professor Mary Rose, was a business historian, you know, Mary. And she, um, she said that when she started working with Mike Parsons, who was, who had built Karrimor and was a great innovator in textiles, um, she said it changed her research questions...

Jan: ...yeah...

Ellie: ...she put a finger on it for me that, that exchange is, it just makes for better research.

Paul: I've come across it so many times in research that's still going on now. And you mentioned earlier on the Global North, the Global South, who we've, how attitudes from the Global North can be applied to environments in the Global South without any consideration of the totally different environment that there is there, and the circumstances, and how that needs to change.

And you see research coming out from even people who are coming through as PhD researchers now, because it's still an issue that needs to be addressed and, yeah, in so many different circumstances.

Ellie: That's another kind of important aspect that we, we talk about in the book, is that linking really to context. The assumption that, I mean, you still hear, here quite recently it was deciding that we were going to have a Silicon Valley in around the Oxford, Cambridge area, you know, and there's a whole Silicon Valley, somebody wrote a lovely article, Silicon Somewheres.

You know, people just decide they're going to pick up this model and they're gonna reinvent it anywhere. And one of, one of the, I don't know Jan, you'd have to help me out here, but there was some, a lovely piece of work came out

of Australia, O'Connell and Read, where they said it's a bit like doing, opening a botanic gardens and planting the plants without any consideration to what they need in terms of temperature, water, light. [laughs] That you'll just plonk it there and it'll be okay...

Jan: [laughs] ...yeah...

Ellie: ...a lot of that goes on in regional development...

Jan: ...absolutely, absolutely.

Paul: Yeah. The stories you hear from, what, the twelve, thirteen hundreds. Polar bears being brought to London and just being left to fish in the River Thames [Jan laughs] because oh, they'll be fine, you know, all they need's a bit of water.

Not, yeah, not considering the environment at all. We've learned in that aspect with regards to zoology and biology and botany but haven't necessarily...

Ellie: ...but not in regional development... [laughs]

Paul: ...yes, yeah.

Jan: So from your perspective, you know, what's, what's next in this area? Where, where is the sort of like the frontiers of the thinking and what, and in practical terms, you know, what could we be pursuing that would really make a difference?

Ellie: We, we live in hope, don't we? And so there are these, in entrepreneurship, certainly, these, um, the idea of the emancipation, the place-based entrepreneurship, I think is, a very important area of development. And the embeddedness idea that, I think that brings us, us hope of, of, where next.

Um, I think more, more work be done about the contexts and, and inequalities and, and drive us forward on along those lines. They dynamics of how knowledge is created, I think is, is something that it would, I don't, I don't know what, what might happen in that bit.

But, for example, Rhiannon, my co-author, she wrote a lovely article about, um, the economic geographers and how that is a very, it's a very controlled by, male space. And another author, she's not on her own, another author writing about regional development said it's a 'man shaped space'.

And as, like entrepreneurship was, you know, with this, this stereotype of, that an entrepreneur was male, middle-aged with a cigar, that then became a young male living in a city who was a tech entrepreneur. And, and the power, the patriarchal power still across, the world, that dominates.

So who are the gatekeepers and how, how does, how do the mechanics of new knowledge get made? You were talking, Paul, about, you know, there's still huge gaps in understanding how these things might be applied in very different contexts across the world, and in very different populations.

And, so that's a much deeper question. I don't know that there's a, there's a whole lot we could do about that, but I think being aware of it is important. And that then you might need to find other ways to find voice.

Jan: Yeah.

Ellie: And not rely on one way. Well, you are doing it with your podcast aren't you? [laughs]

Jan: [laughing] There's another way.

And what, what your observation made me remember is a, a really, you know, brilliant conversation again, I, I had in Scotland many years ago. In that up on, um, you know, east of Inverness, there's an intentional ecological community called Findhorn that's been there for many, many years and, sort of, founded, must have been in the 1970s.

And I was talking to somebody who was again, involved in, in a regional development thing and he said, well, he said, they're all just hippies. And then we realised that all of the businesses that were being spun out in the region were coming from them. So we thought we better go down and have a conversation with them. 'Cause clearly they were doing something different.

So their, their sort of entrepreneurial spirit, because they wanted a new kind of world and a new kind of future, did eventually get picked up by the, you know, sort of core economic development folk... had encounters

Ellie: ...by the bean counters.

Jan: Yeah. [everyone laughs]

But he had, he was a very, you know, blunt and, and you know, quite, sort of, you know, hardcore economic guy. He said [loud, indignant voice] 'they're hippies, for goodness' sake, hippies, but they're spinning out businesses!'

[laughing] And so, so inside I was sort of rejoicing at, at this statement 'cause I thought it was brilliant...

Ellie: ...yes...

Jan: ...yeah. So, so innovation, um, incubating entrepreneurship, it comes from all sorts of places and, and being open to that means that we're maybe gonna have stronger regional economies.

Ellie: Yes, indeed. And, um, Danny sort of drove, drove the work in the book around incubators and eco...

Jan: ...yeah...

Ellie: ...entrepreneurial ecosystems. We should have a talk about about ecosystems. [laughs]

Jan: Yeah, we should. [laughs]

Ellie: How, how words get appropriated.

Um, and Danny, sort of, was making, well, we all started to think about, well how does that fit in then? Because the well-intentioned incubators that, they call 'em wave one, wave two, wave, the, the first wave was give somebody a desk and a chair in a room, and that would support 'em.

Then it was give them a desk and a computer, and put 'em in a room. And then it moved much more into, how do you, and it's what Danny's model, we worked on modelling. And, we, we sort of put together the idea that, that it's all about being embedded in the networks. That then, is so the incubator and the ecosystem are really kind of interchangeable.

Um, and Danny did some lovely work at Daresbury where they had an innovation centre. And it was the people with products, you know, geeks...

Jan: ...yeah...

Ellie: ...that had, were developing products, things that did whizz-bang things. And he ran workshops, but he made them, kind of, think about, draw their networks. Who, who did they know, and who did they work with, or who did, had they met?

So map your networks and, and also think about who will your first customer be. Well, this was a huge shock...

Jan: ...yeah...

Ellie: ...so they were much more interested about how many revs per second their [Jan laughs] whatever was doing.

And, uh, the whole supporting the business, of the, the notion of how you might support people in business. And imagine what it's like now when you've got the, the digital connectivity...

Jan: ...yes...

Ellie: ...to think about as well as the, you know, the local. So we're back to local, global, needing to think about it all at the same time.

Paul: Well, you've certainly given us a lot to think about, Ellie, all around this topic. Thank you so much for joining us.

Ellie: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

[Theme music]

Paul: It shows what can happen when you wander into a university for one purpose and you end up staying there for 30 or 40 years.

Jan: [laughing] It's a very dangerous place, a very, very dangerous place.

Paul: Anything can happen when you come in. [Jan laughs] You can, you can come in intending to help your family business in construction, uh, become more successful, and end up as a leading scholar in entrepreneurship.

Jan: But isn't that lovely? That, that lovely sort of slide in from one, one area to another.

And quite a few of the folks we've talked to who have maybe been graduates here, again, it's, you know, you pass through Lancaster University and, you know? Yeah, next thing you know.

Paul: And it shows unintended consequences, much as some of the things we were talking about. How there can be unintended consequences of actions that are taking place around entrepreneurship, and particularly regional development.

If the thought processes that have gone into them, and I'm not saying Ellie's thought processes hadn't been working right, but maybe the thought processes of certain regional development programmes aren't always focused

on the right areas, and may lead to exacerbation of inequalities or various other things, hence the need to rethink it.

Jan: And when, um, you were gonna, talking about inequalities, I thought much more about, um, partly because, I guess, my disciplinary background, those economic inequalities.

But what I liked is the way she reached back into the drivers of some of those patterns that are less visible, um, not seen by, by those people who are not affected by them. And so to really be able to surface them and then actually remedy, um, lack of access to, you know, resources or lack of confidence or whatever it is. I thought it was really, um, insightful.

Paul: Ellie briefly touched on it, and it is covered more in the book about this issue of the obsession with having Silicon what have you.

So Silicon Valley, Silicon Glen in Scotland does exist, but then the Silicon Borough or the Silicon Valley, uh, not the Silicon Valley 'cause that actually exists. The Silicon Dale and the Silicon whatever. Taking no account of the people who actually live there, the skills that they might have, the backgrounds that they might have, the industries that are around it, that may or may not be able to work in conjunction with this desire to just have a massive tech sector there. Just because, oh, it sounds great, let's do that.

Jan: And what I liked about this book is the size of it. It's, I think this is an ideal, um, particularly for the Northern hemisphere, an ideal summer or holiday reading project. 'Cause it's nice and slim. It's gonna be interesting and it's going to, while you're laying on your sun lounger, or wherever you are spending your holidays, this will be ideal.

Paul: I'm weighing it up and I'm thinking, decent heft to it. [Jan laughs] It's got nice solid corners. I reckon you could, you know, if someone's really annoying you during your summer holidays, you don't need to be reading it. Or maybe even if you are, you just pick it up and you can swat them with it quite well.

Jan: Ah...

Paul: ...like, double purpose.

Jan: Well, I don't wanna know what your summer holidays are like, but my summer holidays I would enjoy reading this, I think.

Paul: Well, are you saying no one ever annoys you on your summer holidays?

Jan: No, no, no.

Paul: You're more lucky than most people, is what I would stress there. [Jan laughs]

Um, I liked the idea when it came to mentioning how universities fit into all of this. The, the COGS there from policymaking to research, to engagement, teaching, research. Again, policymaking again, engagement, everything is intertwining and working well.

And just hearing how Ellie came into a university, a management school that wasn't doing all that much with the smaller SMEs and that is just not the way now. The majority, I would say, of collaborations, certainly within the Management School and possibly the wider university take place with those regional firms.

And having that effect and being what we, you would call not just an anchor institution, but a civic university.

Jan: Yeah. And, um, uh, we'll put something in the show notes about what a civic university is, because I think all universities are now actually embracing that role as well in terms of, of how they can, you know, create opportunity in, in the, the places where they reside.

Paul: So what are we gonna be looking at next?

Jan: Well, I think we should look at more citizens and more civic-ness.

Paul: And, and take, taking into account people's views and the importance of them.

Jan: That sounds a perfect segue.

Paul: Right, in which case shall we talk to someone about citizens assemblies for addressing the climate emergency, and all the implications that arise from that?

Jan: Perfect.

Paul: Great. Well in that case, we'll welcome Andy Yuille, who's a former colleague here at Lancaster, is now down in Manchester. But he's still keeping up on his work on citizens assemblies and it'll be really good to speak to him.

Jan: Ideal.

Paul: Until then, thank you very much for listening. It's goodbye from me, Paul Turner.

Jan: And from me, Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]