

**Exploring regional complex adaptive ecosystems (CAE): Case of tourism
micro-enterprise engagement**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Management

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Statement of originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Signed: *Clare Keogh* On: 28 February 2020

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Publications from this research

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis resulted in the following publications listed on this page, of which I am a joint author. For each publication, I was the lead author and made a major contribution to its publication.

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1. *Exploring engagement in regional business clusters: Australian tourism MEs* (Nov 2015)
2. *An exploratory study: micro-enterprise engagement in regional development initiatives within changing tourism clusters* (Nov 2016)
3. *Orchestrating cluster collaboration in complex adaptive systems (CAS): an interaction framework to explore micro enterprise regional engagement* (Nov 2017)
4. *Sharing economy operator engagement in regional tourism: Case of Australian short-term rental accommodation* (Nov 2019)

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Keogh, C., Johnson, P., & Kriz, A. (2014). *Is the Party Over for Second Homes in Australia? Investigating an Organisational Model to lead a fragmented and threatened micro business sector*. In Müller, & Marjavaara (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Second Homes - Program and Abstracts*. Commission on the Geography of Tourism, Leisure and Global Change of the International Geographical Union

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Abstract

Tourism, vital to many world economies, contributed over US\$7.6 trillion globally to GDP in 2016 and comprises a high proportion of micro-enterprises (MEs) compared to other industries. Currently, tourism MEs are attracting academic interest following major worldwide industry disruption from online marketing platforms such as UBER and Airbnb resulting in millions of new ME operators. In this evolving global context, where tourism's international body, the United Nations World Tourism Organization, calls for regional engagement of all-sizes of enterprises for sustainable tourism growth, this research seeks to explore micro-business engagement in regional tourism development programs.

While the benefits of regional firm engagement are well-recognised and numbers of MEs often dominate totals of regional enterprises, many MEs have little interaction with their over-arching regional organisations. An absence of literature exists on understanding ME engagement in government and private sector regional development initiatives. This thesis addresses this knowledge gap and aims to explore ME engagement in regional business ecosystems, using a tourism context. Adopting a case study design, the qualitative framework draws on complex adaptive system theory and business relationship literature, to investigate ME business engagement interactions. The research focuses on a rapidly growing ME tourism accommodation sector, known as short-term rental accommodation (STRA) owned by private individuals, to explore the research problem: how do MEs engage in regional tourism systems?

Using an interaction perspective of actor bonds, activities and resources (AAR) to understand micro-business engagement practices in regional complex adaptive ecosystems (CAE), a multi-level case study investigates the nature and perceived factors influencing ME regional tourism engagement. Three Australian case regions are investigated, to explore ME engagement in tourism initiatives, such as local tourism organisations, networks, marketing, events and skills training. Data collection focuses on in-depth face-to-face interviews with Stage 1 'tourism experts' and Stage 2 'STRA operators'. Analysis of qualitative interviews and secondary information develops deep and rich insights of STRA interactions in regional initiatives, to help understand tourism MEs' regional ecosystem engagement. Tourism documents and website observations were analysed to provide background information and validity.

Key findings identify several barriers and enablers influencing ME engagement in tourism business ecosystems undergoing disruption from sharing economy platforms, tourism power shifts and governance changes. Results highlight challenges and opportunities associated with ME engagement in complex adaptive ecosystems and provide practical guidance to government and business to improve regional tourism outcomes. This research makes a theoretical and applied contribution to academia, policymakers and practitioners.

Table of Contents

Statement of originality	2
Acknowledgements	3
Publications from this research	4
Abstract	5
Table of Contents	6
List of Figures	10
List of Tables	12
List of Abbreviations	13
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	14
1.1 Background	14
1.2 Micro-enterprises (MEs)	15
1.3 Complex adaptive systems theory (CAS)	16
1.4 Tourism context	17
1.4.1 Regional tourism development initiatives	18
1.4.2 ME engagement in tourism initiatives	20
1.4.3 Micro-tourism short-term rental accommodation (STRAs)	20
1.5 Theoretical interaction lens – AAR model	21
1.6 Purpose of study and research questions	21
1.6.1 Justification and contribution	22
1.6.2 Practical and theoretical importance	23
1.7 Method	23
1.7.1 Methodology	23
1.7.2 Case study	23
1.7.3 Data collection and analysis	24
1.8 Organising of thesis chapters	25
1.8.1 Key terms	25
1.8.2 Boundaries of research	26
1.8.3 Summary	26
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	27
2.1 Introduction	27
2.1.1 Choice of selected concepts for literature review	29
2.1.2 Outline of literature review	32
2.2 Micro-enterprise (ME)	33
2.2.1 ME definition and size	33
2.2.2 ME business topics and themes	36
2.2.3 Choice of theoretical concepts to explore ME engagement	38
2.3 Theory of complex adaptive systems (CAS) and ecosystems (CAE)	39
2.3.1 Introduction to CAS theoretical foundation	39
2.3.2 CAS multidisciplinary overview and definition	40
2.3.3 Business development to CAE (complex adaptive ecosystems)	40
2.3.4 Streams of business ecosystems literature	41
2.3.5 Managerial problem concerning ME engagement in regional CAE	43
2.4 Tourism context to explore ME engagement in CAE	43
2.4.1 Tourism management CAE approach	44
2.4.2 Tourism as a regional CAE	45
2.4.3 Tourism clusters	46

2.4.4 Tourism destinations.....	51
2.4.5 Tourism networks.....	53
2.4.6 CAE framework encapsulating tourism clusters, destinations and networks	54
2.5 Regional tourism development	55
2.5.1 Defining regional tourism.....	55
2.5.2 Regional development initiatives.....	55
2.5.3 Regional tourism development initiatives	56
2.6 Short-term rental accommodation (STRA) in tourism literature.....	59
2.6.1 ME operators and tourism destination initiatives (micro level)	60
2.6.2 Defining ME within STRA tourism accommodation.....	60
2.6.3 Tourism STRA in Australia	62
2.6.4 Regional tourism micro-accommodation	64
2.7 Disruption in regional tourism	65
2.7.1 Rise of sharing economy platforms engaging regional MEs	65
2.7.2 Defining ‘sharing economy’ (SE)	66
2.7.3 Tourism accommodation disruption.....	70
2.7.4 Disruption: Changes in governance of tourism regions.....	72
2.8 Engagement.....	73
2.8.1 Overview engagement theory.....	73
2.8.2 Regional tourism CAE engagement	76
2.8.3 ME tourism accommodation engagement in CAE.....	78
2.8.4 STRA online platform engagement.....	80
2.8.5 STRA engagement problem.....	81
2.9 B2B Interaction theoretical lens	82
2.9.1 Rationale for IMP interaction lens for ME engagement study.....	82
2.9.2 Development of business AAR network management research	83
2.9.3 B2B actor interaction in CAE.....	85
2.9.4 AAR model	85
2.10 Synopsis leading to research problem and research questions (RQs)	88
2.10.1 Overarching research problem and (RQs)	89
2.10.2 Conceptual framework	90
2.11 Literature review conclusion.....	91
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY.....	93
3.1 Introduction	93
3.2 Research paradigms.....	93
3.2.1 Ontological assumptions	93
3.2.2 Methodology choice	95
3.2.3 Choice of critical realism paradigm for qualitative research	96
3.3 Case study research design	98
3.3.1 Generalising from case study	99
3.3.2 Multi-level case study with multiple cases	99
3.3.3 Limitations of case study.....	101
3.3.4 Case study process for this study	102
3.3.5 Comparative regional case study	103
3.3.6 Case context – regional tourism ME accommodation	104
3.4 Sampling selection	105
3.4.1 Regional cases: Selection tourism CAE.....	105
3.4.2 Number of participants recruited and rationale	107
3.4.3 Stage 1 elites/experts: Theoretical foundation to sampling approach	109
3.4.4 Stage 2 ME operator: Sample selection techniques.	110
3.4.5 Classification and number of interview participants	110

3.4.6 Secondary data and website observation sample selection.....	111
3.5 Data collection techniques.....	112
3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews	113
3.5.2 Interview instruments.....	117
3.5.3 Documents secondary data collection.....	120
3.5.4 Website observation data collection.	121
3.6 Data analysis techniques	122
3.6.1 Content analysis of documents and website observations.....	123
3.6.2 Computer assisted qualitative data analysis (NVivo) software	123
3.6.3 Codes and coding	124
3.6.4 Thematic analysis.....	125
3.7 Rigour in case studies	127
3.7.1 Trustworthiness.....	127
3.7.2 Quality and validity of qualitative research	128
3.7.3 Avoiding personal bias.....	129
3.8 Methodology conclusion	130
CHAPTER 4 - DATA ANALYSIS	131
4.1 Introduction.....	131
4.1.1 Data analysis process	131
4.1.2 Organising data analysis chapter.....	132
4.2 NSW state and case-region profiles	133
4.2.1 NSW state tourism profile	133
4.2.2 NSW and case-region profile comparison	136
4.2.3 Interview participant profiles	145
4.2.4 Observation of STRA online platforms	148
4.3 RQs 1-3 Interview transcript coding development.....	155
4.3.1 RQs 1-3 Broad coding frame.....	157
4.3.2 RQs 1–3 Transcript word frequency findings	161
4.4 RQ1: How does the regional tourism CAE support MEs to engage?	164
4.4.1 Stage 1: Expert perceptions – RQ1	165
4.4.2 Stage 2: STRA operator perceptions RQ1 – knowledge support	173
4.5 RQ2: How do MEs interact for mutual benefit?	174
4.5.1 STRA operator perceptions – RQ2	175
4.5.2 Observation of STRA online platform – RQ2: How do MEs interact (online)?	184
4.6 RQ3: Barriers and enablers to ME engagement	189
4.6.1 Stage 1 Expert perceptions: Enablers to ME engagement in CAE initiatives	189
4.6.2 Stage 1 Expert perceptions: Barriers to ME engagement in CAE initiatives	193
4.6.3 Stage 2 ME perceptions: RQ3 enablers to MEs engaging in CAE	196
4.6.4 Stage 2 ME perceptions: RQ3 barriers to MEs engaging in CAE	199
4.6.5 Summary: Data analysis Stage 1 and 2 interviews	205
4.7 Integrating micro, meso and macro emergent themes	206
4.7.1 Differences of note: Stage 1 experts and Stage 2 STRAs	206
4.7.2 Differences of note: Tourism case-regions	208
4.8 Emerging parent themes.....	214
4.9 Data analysis conclusion	217
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS	218
5.1 Introduction.....	218
5.1.1 Organising discussion and findings chapter.....	218
5.1.2 Updated conceptual framework	219

5.2 CAE inputs addressing RQ1	220
5.3 CAE engagement addressing RQ2	226
5.4 CAE enablers and barriers addressing RQ3	228
5.4.1 Enablers to ME engagement	228
5.4.2 Barriers to ME engagement in CAE.....	231
5.5 Micro themes discussion	233
5.5.1 Parent Theme 1 – Lack of shared value	234
5.5.2 Parent Theme 2 – Online platform hero	236
5.5.3 Parent Theme 3 – Dissent in the ranks of STRAs.....	238
5.5.4 Parent Theme 4 – Socialising	240
5.6 Meso level themes discussion	240
5.6.1 Parent Theme 5 – STRA sector invisible	241
5.6.2 Parent Theme 6 – DMOs redundant	242
5.7 Macro level themes discussion	250
5.7.1 Parent Theme 7 – Disruption	250
5.8 Theoretical discussion	254
5.8.1 Use of macro, meso, micro ‘actor engagement’ model	254
5.8.2 Limitations of cluster theory in DMOs	254
5.8.3 Tourism regions as CAEs	257
5.9 Discussion and findings conclusion.....	258
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS.....	260
6.1 Introduction.....	260
6.2 Implications for research, practice and policy.....	262
6.2.1 Implications for theory	262
6.2.2 Implications for practice.....	264
6.2.3 Implications for policymakers.....	266
6.3 Limitations of the study	268
6.4 Directions for further study	268
6.5 Conclusion	270
REFERENCES.....	272
APPENDICES	289
APPENDIX A: ABS 8165.0 Counts of Australian Business.....	289
APPENDIX B: Complex adaptive systems development to ecosystems construct.....	290
APPENDIX C: Theories/frameworks/strategies – reviewed for this thesis	291
APPENDIX D: Heat map of 110 nodes - first coding of Stage 1 transcripts	293
APPENDIX E: Ethics approval	294
APPENDIX F: Participant Information Statement	296
APPENDIX G: Protocol ME interview guide.....	298
APPENDIX H: Consent form	301
APPENDIX I: Airbnb Host Voice Forum top 10 posts April 2018.....	302

List of Figures

Figure 1: Australia's tourism agencies: Total of expenses	19
Figure 2: Situating the research problem in bodies of knowledge and theory	27
Figure 3: Literature review chapter map	28
Figure 4: Literature review theoretical lens development map	30
Figure 5: Total Australian businesses, by size	35
Figure 6: World Economic Forum's tourism cluster model – associated with a destination	49
Figure 7: Porter's tourism cluster	50
Figure 8: Journal articles featuring 'destination management' and 'tourism cluster(s)'	52
Figure 9: Four sharing economy platform frameworks	70
Figure 10: Conceptual framework of factors influencing tourism policy implementation	78
Figure 11: SE service ecosystem: Engagement platforms and actor engagement	81
Figure 12: Major research streams in network management from 2000-2016	84
Figure 13: Analysis of business relationships: Activities, Actors and Resources (AAR) framework ..	86
Figure 14: Conceptual framework: STRA operator engagement in regional tourism CAE	91
Figure 15: Ontological continuum: Subjectivist (phenomenological) to objectivist (positivist)	94
Figure 16: ME regional case study research design framework	101
Figure 17: ME regional case study steps	102
Figure 18: Destination NSW tourism regions	106
Figure 19: Case-region locations	107
Figure 20: Six new State 'Destination Networks' replace eleven RTOs in 2018	135
Figure 21: Map location Central Coast case-region	139
Figure 22: Map location Hunter Valley case-region	141
Figure 23: Overview of the Hunter Valley tourism business CAE network	143
Figure 24: Map location Ballina-Byron Coast case-region	144
Figure 25: Central Coast map of Airbnb listings	152
Figure 26: Hunter Valley map of Airbnb listings	153
Figure 27: Byron Bay map of Airbnb listings	153
Figure 28: STRA guest capacity: Airbnb suburb concentration, Hunter Valley example	154
Figure 29: Broad category coding totals of Stage 1: expert transcripts	158
Figure 30: Stage 1 expert participant data coding counts, by broad category	159
Figure 31: Broad category coding totals of Stage 2: operator transcripts	160
Figure 32: Stage 2 STRA participant data coding counts, by broad category	160
Figure 33: Expert AAR transcript data counts	165
Figure 34: Stage 1 experts Activity links available to STRAs	166
Figure 35: Stage 1 experts 'marketing activities' sub-category	167
Figure 36: Stage 1 experts Actor bonds category	169
Figure 37: Stage 1 experts Resource ties available to STRAs	170
Figure 38: Stage 2 AAR transcript data counts	175
Figure 39: Stage 2 operators STRA-nominated Activity Links	176
Figure 40: Stage 2 STRAs marketing activities sub-category	177
Figure 41: Stage 2 STRA-nominated Actor bonds and networks	179
Figure 42: Stage 2 operator STRA-nominated Resource ties	181
Figure 43: Airbnb website landing page: Central Coast case	186
Figure 44: Airbnb accommodation new product page, 'Airbnb Plus in the Central Coast'	187
Figure 45: Stage 1 expert view of enablers to STRA engagement	190
Figure 46: Stage 1 expert view of barriers to STRA engagement	193
Figure 47: Stage 2 STRA operator view of enablers to STRA engagement	197
Figure 48: Stage 2 operator view of barriers to STRA engagement	200
Figure 49: Conceptual framework – updated Chapter 2 framework	219
Figure 50: Disposition of ME operator to rent and movement of STRA to long-term rentals	223
Figure 51: Regional tourism ecosystem: Micro-enterprise key interactions in CAE	239
Figure 52: Defining actor engagement in regional service ecosystems	254

Figure 53: Cluster Complex Adaptive ME Model.....	256
Figure 54: Complex adaptive systems in tourism.....	258
Figure 55: Framework – Regional tourism steps to ME engagement.....	261
Figure 56: Implications: Visual depiction of case-region strong ties to online Airbnb	263
Figure 57: STRA sector calls for government initiatives for bushfire recovery	267

List of Tables

Table 1: Situating research problem within bodies of knowledge and theory	15
Table 2: Different use of micro-enterprise term	34
Table 3: Themes in ME entrepreneurial literature	37
Table 4: Literature from B2B research articles using an ecosystem approach	42
Table 5: Differing business cluster definitions	47
Table 6: Micro-accommodation, variation in terms.....	61
Table 7: ME and small-business topics and themes in tourism literature	64
Table 8: Sharing economy terminology and author definitions	67
Table 9: Peer-to-peer accommodation: Topic frequency in literature 2010-2017	71
Table 10: Marketing literature engagement concepts	75
Table 11: Four categories of scientific paradigms	96
Table 12: Philosophies: Theory building from case studies	97
Table 13: Participant type and regional location.....	108
Table 14: Secondary data sample selection	111
Table 15: Website observation sample selection	112
Table 16: Summary of data process linked to RQs.....	112
Table 17: Interview guide development – RQs and literature sources	120
Table 18: Phases in thematic analysis.....	126
Table 19: Data analysis chapter outline	132
Table 20: Total NSW regional tourism expenditure and overnight visitor numbers 2014–2015	133
Table 21: Longitudinal change in RTO names and areas	134
Table 22: STRA importance to NSW	136
Table 23: Overview of case-region tourism visitor numbers.....	137
Table 24: Case-region overview at study commencement	137
Table 25: Central Coast tourism accommodation types as defined by case-region RTO	140
Table 26: Hunter Valley Wine Tourism Alliance	142
Table 27: Profiles of Stage 1: Expert interviewees.....	146
Table 28: Profiles of Stage 2 STRA operator interviewees	147
Table 29: Service charges of observed accommodation online platforms.....	149
Table 30: STRA website listings at research commencement	149
Table 31: Top 10 Google rankings: Accommodation platforms in NSW 2008 v 2019.....	151
Table 32: First round coding frame.....	156
Table 33: First round descriptive broad code sections aligned to conceptual framework	157
Table 34: Stage 1 transcript word frequency	162
Table 35: Stage 2 operator transcript word frequency (nouns, verbs, names)	164
Table 36: Stage 1 expert view of how CAE support STRA engagement	171
Table 37: Stage 2 STRA perceptions - CAE knowledge support:	174
Table 38: Stage 2 STRA participant view of how they engage in their tourism CAE.....	182
Table 39: Stage 2 STRA transcript count of ‘Airbnb’	184
Table 40: Observation: Airbnb communication with STRAs and hosts	188
Table 41: Stage 1 expert view of enablers to STRA engagement in CAE.....	192
Table 42: Expert view of barriers to STRA engagement in CAE	196
Table 43: Summary of Stage 2 perceived enablers to STRA engagement	198
Table 44: Summary of Stage 2 perceived barriers to STRA engagement	203
Table 45: CAE geopolitical components by case-region	213
Table 46: Case comparison of tourism organisations’ mission statements.....	213
Table 47: Discussions and findings chapter outline.....	218
Table 48: Case of Airbnb: Facilitating ME engagement	230
Table 49: Government disruption to DMOs	249
Table 50: Accommodation platform types: from SE to commercial	251

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
B2B	business to business
CAS	complex adaptive system
CAE	complex adaptive ecosystem
DMO	destination marketing organisation
DNSW	Destination NSW
GDP	gross domestic product
LTA	local tourist association
LGA	local government authority
ME	micro-enterprise (fewer than 5 employees including sole traders)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
R&D	research and development
RTO	regional tourism organisation
STO	state tourism organisation
STRA	short-term rental accommodation
TRA	Tourism Research Australia
VIC	visitor information centre
VisitNSW	NSW state government tourism organisation
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization