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Rural entrepreneurship in times of transformation

The focus of scholarship on entrepreneurship and regional development has long been dominated by studies about how industries and new ventures enable the economic development of regions (Armington and Acs, 2002, Lee et

al., 2004). Economic growth has been considered the desired outcome, and industrial clusters (Klofsten et al., 2016), triple helix collaboration (Etzkowitz and Zhou, 2017) and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Stam, 2015, Acs et al., 2017) have been considered the primary geographical phenomena of interest. Consequently, the level of analysis has often been national and/or county-based, with urban centres as the presupposed engines of growth (Iacobucci and Perugini, 2021, McKelvey and Zaring, 2016).

Yet, long term change patterns related to an increasing awareness of climate change and increasing regional inequalities within and across countries have accelerated rural and urban transformations with a global pandemic, populist movements, social unrest and devastating regional floods, droughts and forest fires (see e.g. Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). As these changes have taken centre stage, the classic paradigm of cities as drivers of economic growth is challenged. Regional development now means more than economic growth, as sustainability transitions, social value creation, resilience or even degrowth become desired policy aims as well as relevant outcome variables in empirical research in economic and human geography, organisation and even entrepreneurship research (Hudson, 2010, Kallis et al., 2018).

With this displacement of focus in regional development, rural entrepreneurship is of renewed interest (Hunt et al., 2021). While rural entrepreneurship takes many forms, our primary interest is not solely in entrepreneurial activities that happen to take place in sparsely populated places. Rather we would seek to emphasise rural entrepreneurship as activities that in various ways engage with rural spaces, communities, resources, values, histories and imageries, thus conceptualising rural entrepreneurship as a multifaceted socio-material activity (Korsgaard et al., 2015). While it was always the case that the rural is where food, energy, and water originates, the importance of the connectedness of the urban and rural stands out when resource flows need to become circular and environmentally sustainable. What happens in urban centres is dependent on the rural in complex and changing ways (Sarmiento, 2017) and vice versa. For the great transition (Rockström, 2015) to be possible, a broad range of entrepreneurial changes are needed. It is our contention that many ‘good seeds’ needed in the anthropocene (Bennett et al., 2016) comes from rural areas and from entrepreneurs who have a business situated in a sparsely populated area and who are embedded in the social and material reality of the rural (Korsgaard et al., 2015), including networks within and beyond familial circles (Anderson et al., 2005). The use of exaptation (Gaddefors et al., 2020) and bricolage among rural entrepreneurs are examples of sustainable strategies, as are the production of values beyond financial ones (Bosworth, 2012).

There is still much to learn from farmers and other rural entrepreneurs who are already using a circular logic (Rosenlund, 2021), for example, in terms of regenerative agriculture (Vlasov, 2021) and the development of alternative, prefigurative farm-to-fork circuits (Pascucci et al., 2021). In doing so, farmers and rural entrepreneurs create and reframe value by imbricating agentic matter (e.g., thriving plants, perishing food, or eroding lands cf. (Contesse et al., 2021, Cherrier, 2017) with their own agency (Muñoz and Branzei, 2021). In doing so, there is a need for a deeper understanding of diverse rural contexts (Muñoz and Kimmitt, 2019, Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017), which call for additional studies.

Hence, recent macro trends - involving existential threats such as climate change (Ranjan, 2015), pandemics (Korsgaard et al., 2020), biodiversity loss (Jia and Desa, 2020) and new technological opportunities such as digitalization (Bowen and Morris, 2019) – are shaping the value and the values of rural areas in novel ways. For example, urban families in the northern hemisphere migrate *to* the rural, craving for space, time, and direct access to food and cleaner air (Deller et al., 2019, Kalantaridis, 2010, Tillmar et al., 2022). The organizational thinness that has been a rural liability (Clausen, 2020) is now also valued for attracting both inhabitants (labour force and customers) and business opportunities. But the nature of rural entrepreneurship and the paradigm of regional development also seem to be changing in an even more fundamental manner. An institutional change is ongoing in the rural, where traditional rural values are amplified and challenged by movements towards more sustainable patterns of production and living. As such popular sustainability movements are rife with rural imagery of slowing down and connecting with nature, while they simultaneously fundamentally challenge the systems of agricultural production that are also engrained in traditional rural ways of living. Previous studies have shown that rural areas struggle with xenophobia (Tidholm, 2017) and traditional gender contracts (Forsberg, 1998, Bock and Shortall, 2006). For example, women entrepreneurs contribute social and community values, but receive very

low incomes (Tillmar et al., 2022, Muñoz and Branzei, 2021). As scholars we should not fall into the trap of romanticizing the rural, nor should we be overly critical of rural life when it manifests as resistance to change (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019). The question of rural values is thus a complicated one involving constant renegotiation and change as rural values are e.g. commodified (Anderson, 2000) the subject of intra-community tensions (Cucchi et al., 2021), and migration (Tillmar and Lindkvist, 2007, Fredin et al., 2019, Deller et al., 2019).

Submission to the Special Issue

By exploring these and related themes, we anticipate that this special issue will be relevant to entrepreneurship academics, as well as to those in business and the social sciences. This special issue contributes to ERD's mission of publishing interesting, courageous papers, which contribute to theories for understanding the extraordinary phenomenon of entrepreneurship.

This Call for Papers includes the option of participating in a paper development workshop (PDP). Participation in the PDP (scheduled before the Call for Papers deadline) is strongly encouraged for consideration in the Special Issue.

We invite contributions that reimagine and reflect on the current trends and the changing paradigm of entrepreneurship and rural development. Interdisciplinary approaches are welcome (cf. Hunt et al, 2021), as are empirical studies from various contexts.

Possible Topics:

- Sustainable entrepreneurship turning the climate crisis into rural opportunities.
- Initiatives to rejuvenate rural places or premises through new combinations.
- New avenues for reawakening rural/urban links.
- Development of rural areas and rural entrepreneurship over time.
- How values have been created as well as utilized in rural entrepreneurial processes over time.
- Links between the rural and the urban ecosystem for entrepreneurship.
- The rural/urban divide in various parts of the world, particularly in the Global South
- Insights on the rural from indigenous and non-western perspectives
- Gender and diversity aspects of rural entrepreneurship.
- Migration patterns – in-migration in relation to space and place.
- Dynamics of rural values over time, given varying patterns of migration.

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Submission Instructions

Timeline:

Papers for the conference and PDW workshop for SI: 1 May 2023

Confirmation of acceptance to the PDW workshop: 7th of May 2023

PDW SI Workshop in Kalmar, Sweden: 12-16 June 2023

First submission for the SI: 31 January 2024

Review comments received: 1 July 2024

Second submission: 1 October 2024

Review and decision: 1 December 2024

Publication: April 2025

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