

## **Staging rural entrepreneurship**

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Presented at the Rural Entrepreneurship Conference 2014, June 18-19, Harper Adams University, Shropshire, UK

This research is part of a project funded by The Kamprad Family Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Research & Charity. Students involved in the research were Oskar Andersson, Sanna Östmark, Hampus Meisner, Anna Persson, Sixten Engström, Anna Johnsson, Linnea Nilsson, Amanda Lewis, Clara Bredberg and Josephine Karlström. A former student, now designer, Andreas Klippinge also contributed to this project.

## **Introduction**

In this paper we are interested in how rural entrepreneurship unfolds over time and who is involved. Our ambition is to discuss the idea of extending the entrepreneurial process in time and when it comes to who is involved.

Entrepreneurship is often discussed as an individual practice despite the evidence of the relevance to integrate for example social and spatial contextual dimensions (Dodd and Anderson, 2007, Welter, 2011). There are several reasons for this persistence. We might refer to an inherent need for agency and structure in entrepreneurship theory development, a need that amongst other things recreates a subjectification of entrepreneurship. This links to what we might call the spectacular dimension of entrepreneurship where the individual is described in heroic terms (Dodd and Anderson, 2007). A number of stakeholders draw from the construction of entrepreneurship understood as the spectacular entrepreneur; the entrepreneurs themselves in their efforts to for example get funding or develop a market, researchers when for example looking for survey material, politicians looking for someone who can produce new jobs and growth. The question of who is also pressing from a practical policy perspective where there is an urge to put the resources where the payoff is at its best (Labrianidis, 2006). Obviously, the entrepreneurial action and its output are the evident focus in entrepreneurship research. Nevertheless, this demarcation how we chose to frame the process leaves out more or less of the before, the parallel and after activities, agents and effects depending on approach and methods used.

Our action research approach (McDermott, et al 2008, Reason and Bradbury, 2001) located to three, small, rural regions in Sweden gave us an opportunity to observe a less discussed part of the entrepreneurial process: how a mix of local people consciously prepare for entrepreneurship. From what we saw we will in this paper focus on the people involved and how interaction between social and spatial context unfolded. To study this is particularly relevant when the context is seen as the scene and the material (Anderson, 2000) for the more spectacular, and more studied output related parts of entrepreneurship. What we saw was how local people worked to improve local context for entrepreneurship to come.

Entrepreneurship theory suggests that one of the particular skills of the entrepreneur is to discover or create opportunities (Korsgaard, 2013) under harsh conditions or in an inhospitable environment, for example in the shape of an information advantage (Shane and Venkatraman, 2000). Context is referred to as something that has to be overcome and the entrepreneur is special just because she can handle the difficult conditions. In rural entrepreneurship research context is described as challenging because of long distance to market, low availability of capital, and low education level of manpower (Labrianidis 2006; North and Smallbone 2006, Baumgartner et al 2013). These observations recreate an undesirable view of the possibilities to improve living conditions in rural settings, but at the same time it underlines the spectacular characteristics the successful rural entrepreneur must possess. From a critical stance this is put

forward as the mything (Ogbor, 2002, Dodd and Anderson, 2007) of the entrepreneur; how she unexpectedly overcomes obstacles and turns difficulties into opportunities.

In our empirical research project we focused on social and spatial context and we saw how the work with providing a good breeding ground for entrepreneurship was high on the agenda of local citizens, including the more spectacular local entrepreneurs. We observed how this was a collective process involving local people with different background, experience and intentions. In this group of people some were regarded entrepreneurs and some not. This highlights how people come together and interact to create a more favourable social and spatial context for life in the region. Thus, our results points to how context was created through social interaction and was framed by local spatial conditions. This observation draws from theoretical developments that emphasise the importance of embeddedness to the entrepreneurial process (Anderson, 2000). The embeddedness approach (Granovetter, 1985) aim to explain how an active entrepreneur purposefully interacts with a passive context. Later developments in rural entrepreneurship research show how an interactive process shapes context and entrepreneurship (McKeever et al 2014, Mueller, 2014). What we will discuss is how the context is actively being prepared for entrepreneurship and how this logic involves more people and a longer timeframe into the entrepreneurial process than is usually accounted for. We wish to investigate conditions for entrepreneurial activities in interaction with rural context and describe the interplay between entrepreneurial activities and context.

## **Theory**

Entrepreneurship has been discussed in economic research as the agency that disturb (Schumpeter, 1934) or restore (Kirzner, 1973) the market equilibrium with the purpose to earn a profit. One of the more recent debates in discussing how this happens is through the concepts discovery (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000) or creation (Baker and Nelson, 2005) of opportunities (Korsgaard, 2013). Although the first view is probably the strongest proponent supported by them who wants to establish one theory of entrepreneurship, the enterprising individual has been given a disproportionately large part of the explanation, to the expense of the context for entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2010, Anderson, 2000, Steyaert and Katz, 2004, Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). Dodd and Anderson (2007: 341) explain how they “explore the persistence, in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary, of the notion that entrepreneurship is a purely individualistic practice”. This ambition to give increased attention to the context around the entrepreneur has developed in slightly different directions and for different reasons. Welter (2010) discusses business, social, spatial and institutional dimensions of context and argues for how a contextualised view contributes to entrepreneurship theory. Anderson (2000) shows how the extraction and the creation of value from an environment constitute entrepreneurship. Although both authors emphasise the interaction between entrepreneur and context they stay with the basic plot holding an individualized entrepreneur strong in initiative acting in interaction with an unfriendly environment.

We have seen how entrepreneurship have broadened its scope when it comes to what kind of output that is discussed, for example; societal (Steyaert and Katz, 2004, Berglund et al, 2012), social (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011), and community business (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004). These developments have resulted in an increased focus on context, but also on the process or the time aspects of entrepreneurship. By this we refer to theories that wish to integrate a longer time frame into the entrepreneurial process. This is often closely connected to the output studied, for example when business start-up or rapid growth is studied these output factors tend to limit the time frame of the study.

To sum up, entrepreneurship theory has broadened its focus in space and time, but also when it comes to relational aspects. But still, how agency and structure are integrated is not very well understood. Agency is often narrowed down to the enterprising individual and the depersonalized structure is still passive and surprised over the entrepreneurial activities that unexpectedly come in from the outside. We wish to contribute to research that develop ideas about how rural context is shaped by entrepreneurial activities and how context makes entrepreneurial activities possible.

## **Methods**

The aim of the research project we report from was to develop our understanding of as well as mobilize entrepreneurship in rural areas that had faced a longstanding decrease of population and belonged to what is in Sweden classified as remote rural areas (more than 50 km to a city of more than 10.000 inhabitants). We selected three communities that met with these criteria but still were relatively easy reachable from the location of Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden. All three communities represented rural areas which have faced longstanding depopulation but still was characterized by an entrepreneurial spirit despite their smallness, unfavorable location and dependence of the municipalities they were part of.

We found action research to be promising for exploring the relationship between context and rural entrepreneurship as it is an approach to researching change that takes both process and context into account (McDermott et al 2008). Action Research is the general term for many different action oriented forms of research aiming at resolving problems together with those who are experiencing them. Participation is the main defining character of action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 9) as the world consists “not of things but of relationships which we co-author”. It differs from both basic and applied social research in terms of people’s involvement in the research process. Participation in action research often implies the involvement of community members in the research process. The researcher is also invited to participate in action as knowledge is seen to be enriched when the researcher is involved in processes of social action (Fals Borda, 2001). With this involvement follows an integration of action with research (Park, 2001). Action research thus focuses research *in* action rather than research *about* action, and

aims at research *with* people rather than *on* people (McDermott et al 2008, Reason and Torbert, 2001, Greenwood and Lewin, 2007).

Our action research project was designed as a sequential six stage process; (I) to identify and establish contact with local stakeholders, (II) to conduct a series of semi-focused groups, (III) to identify dominant themes and topics to work with, and (IV) to incorporate undergraduate students in project groups in order to manifest actual projects, (V) to follow and be part of the developing projects, (VI) to withdraw the students and ourselves from the ongoing projects.

When we approached the communities we contacted representatives of the banks, the Folklore Society, the municipality, the community board, voluntary community associations, municipality community developers and small business owners. We soon identified one or two key contacts in each community and with their help arranged a reconnaissance tour. Soon afterwards we arranged a focus group in each community.

Each group included about eight people. We used the focus groups in two ways (Bill & Olaison, 2009). First we involved the local participants to be part of the fictitious recruitment (from among four different candidates) of a rural developer for their own region. The participants were encouraged to take on a role that is close to their actual lived experience and then to solve the task before them together. They were, however, not given any information regarding the research topics until after the session, thus obliging them to focus on problem-solving (that is using their knowledge of how to solve the problem) rather than representing the knowledge of how to talk about a specific topic. By these exercises we could observe and document how the local people discussed a practical issue concerning the development of their community. After this exercise we asked the group about what concrete projects they felt were currently keen issues to develop a living countryside. In the discussion that followed a number of possible development projects were identified. Afterwards we found out that several of these projects had been in the pipeline for shorter or longer time.

To carry out the projects we involved altogether ten students. In each community there were three to four students involved and one researcher responsible for the overall process. The group of researchers acted as tutors to the groups of students. Additionally, the researchers took part in various meetings during the project work. In this sense they were involved in the process together with the students. The logic of the overall research initiative was that university students and academic researchers launched projects in the three communities based on what was considered by the local stakeholders themselves. The projects were in this way planned and performed with support from the local community. By initiating projects in the three municipalities, we anticipated that processes would start that could lead to new initiatives. A side effect of this was also that through initiating action and interaction we would be able to, in an experimental way, see how entrepreneurship was mobilized in rural areas, thereby shedding light on how activities developed in the municipalities as a result of the research project, and how conflicts and resistance influenced the process. In this manner, the research project was designed

upon an involved and attached research role, where co-production of knowledge with collaborators and intervention at the scene of the research was seen as important. The involvement of university students in the project added an extra dimension to the collaboration since the academic group had to collaborate across the border that separates researchers from students, and rely to a significant extent on the students in building new relationships with inhabitants in the three communities. After about 6 month, when the projects were terminated, the students presented their work to the communities. Their reports were also communicated to the communities on a website that was created for this purpose.

### **The empirical field**

In this chapter we present the basic data about the three communities (see table 1) together with an account of how the processes developed.

The three locations we chose to work in are all part of rural Småland in Sweden. Urshult has about 1.800 inhabitants located with about 800 in the central village and the rest spread out in very small villages or single houses. Älmeboda has about 900 inhabitants with 300 in the central village of Rävemåla, 100 in Älmeboda village. Both Urshult and Älmeboda are communities in Tingsryd municipality. They are situated about 50 kilometres from Växjö (60 000 inhabitants), the central city in the region, 230 kilometres from Gothenburg (550 000 inhabitants) and 450 kilometres from Stockholm (1,4 million inhabitants).

Table 1 Cities, communities and number of inhabitants

City/Number of inhabitants	Tingsryd/12 000	Tingsryd/12 000	Emmaboda/9 000
Community	Urshult	Älmeboda	Långasjö
Total number of inhabitants/number in central village/smaller villages	1 800/800	900/300/100	900/350

Tingsryd have altogether seven communities with a total of just above 12.000 inhabitants. Långasjö has about 900 inhabitants with some 350 in the central village. Långasjö is part of Emmaboda municipality with a total of 9.000 inhabitants. The three communities have had a decreasing number of inhabitants since the 1970: ies, thus accumulating rural downside factors of urbanisation.

## *Långasjö*

In Långasjö, we entered a community where “business as usual” prevailed in the sense that no extensive public undertaking, positive or negative, was planned or going on. Långasjö is known for “the Långasjö spirit”. People from the community often mentioned this spirit, carried by the mantra “It shall work”. This message was for example sent out by media (a local radio station) during our involvement in the community. The Långasjö spirit is considered to have been manifested in several collective efforts like the emptying, digging out, embankment and refilling of the lake next to the central village.

The group of local inhabitants consisted of eight people. Two senior citizens representing the folklore society and the local community association, the manager of the local Bank together with the former manager (now chairman of the municipality development centre), the manager of the local tourist hostel, one representative from the municipality working with service and development of local business and her husband who is a business owner, and finally the administrative chief of the sawmill (the biggest employer in the community). The members in the group are recognized as active citizens in a more general sense, participating in community associations and informal groups in several ways. As was the case in the other focus groups as well, the participants knew each other quite well.

In Långasjö two projects were identified; one about creating a meeting place and one about creating a communicative platform for the community as a whole. One student took the lead of each of these two projects. During a half year's time the students met with their respective group of locals to develop these projects. The members of the focus group were initially important contact persons for the students. After some time the network expanded and more local inhabitants got involved in the process. Another two students in building construction were eventually also recruited to the meeting place project.

The outcome of this project was that the previous indecisiveness concerning whether the meeting place should be a small scale café in existing buildings or a larger new building came to an end. The larger new building should include a restaurant as well as other meeting spaces. The small scale idea was taken care of by preparing for activities that could be launched even before the new building was in place. The two building construction students in dialogue with members from the local group of inhabitants and the third student prepared a detailed visualisation of the new building, how it could be situated in the landscape, with a panorama view of lake Långasjö, as well as what facilities it should contain.

The communication platform project involved the way Långasjö should be marketed to visitors and potential immigrants. This project involved formulation of messages to be communicated as well as how to communicate these messages through homepages, the local bulletin “Träskoposten”, etc. Another outcome was the initiation and start-up of a business network for small business owners in Långasjö.

The outcome of these two student projects was processual in kind. The meeting place had been discussed since long but the process guided by the student led to a decision of which route to take and how to start the planning process. The student's role as leader of the process was only temporary and part of the process was to secure future leadership of the process. Also the communication platform was built upon existing resources, such as the existing small local news bulletin, but added with some new initiatives and resources where the responsibility to carry on the project was negotiated in the process. The business network was a new idea in the community.

### *Urshult*

In Urshult there was at the time a lot of energy and resources directed towards developing the community as a tourist site. When the research group entered the process, there were funding, people and ideas already mobilised. For example the establishment of a nature reserve in the community was in process together with a planned touristic cycle road in southeast part of Sweden. The cycle road is planned to pass by the village of Urshult. The community was working towards exploiting the planned public investments by developing the village of Urshult and in particular the lake area. The local efforts were concerted under the visionary name "Playa del Urshult". The scale of the ideas was relatively extensive and there was probably a sense in the community of positive energy and optimism. As these plans involved the municipality, representatives from the municipality took part in the initial focus group within the research project.

In Urshult the focus group consisted of one business owner recognized as one of the driving forces in the community, one woman from the local nursing home, three representatives from the municipality responsible for the development of business relations, community development and environmental planning, and finally the chairman of the folklore society. As was the case in the other three communities all participants new each other quite well. They were also recognized as engaged inhabitants who participate in local development in several ways. They are typically members of several formal as well as informal local associations and groupings. They are recognized as driving forces in the local community.

From the focus groups and initial meetings, the problem that crystalized in Urshult was that of the need for radical change, as one local entrepreneur formulated it: "this really is our last chance to turn the negative spirals". In focus in Urshult was therefore the nascent phase of the entrepreneurial process where the local community visualized a new business model for their community as a whole, rather than searching for new firms, jobs, growth opportunities and entrepreneurs. Hence, the focus for Urshult was on business model innovation (visualizing of new strategic opportunities for their community) rather than on creating new innovative businesses. The concrete outcome was a visualisation of the future of Urshult made by the students into a coherent business plan for Urshult, as well as the anchoring and mobilising of this

plan at a large community meeting with over 100 Urshult habitants and the regional newspaper present.

### *Älmeboda*

In Älmeboda the situation was one of resources actually being withdrawn from the community. Here, instead of public funding being directed towards the community as was the case in Urshult, the municipality planned to reduce their service in the community. As a result the community mobilised people to react against cutting down. We entered Älmeboda in a situation where the relationship between the community and the municipality was strengthened due to this conflict.

In Älmeboda the focus group consisted of nine people. One married couple running a local advertising firm, the owner of the local grocery store, a man and a woman working in the local bank, a woman representing the association of parents working together with the local school, two men working with farming in different ways (one as a farm owner and the other as employed in the agriculture sector) and finally a woman representing one of the local political party associations. Compared with the focus groups in the two other communities, in Älmeboda no representative from the municipality participated. In retrospect this could be due to the fact that the relationship between the municipality and the community at the time was strengthened because of a controversy concerning the organization of the local village school.

Based on the discussions in the focus group, two projects were identified. The first project was related to the school organization. In the community there has historically been a municipality run compulsory school at the low and middle stages. In the year 2009, children aged 11-12 was moved from the local village school. This decision by the municipality was debated and contested by the inhabitants in the community. In the year 2012 the municipality was investigating the option to move also the children aged 10 from the village school. The plans stirred up a lot of emotions in the community. One of our students created a project with the aim of sorting out some of the question posed by the parents in the community regarding the suggested new school organization. This was to be done for example by studying the social milieu in different schools and investigating the perspective of the effected children. The result of the project however turned out to be different. Due to the constrained dialogue between different stakeholders, the aim of the project gradually shifted towards facilitating the dialogue between the community and the municipality on the issue of the school organization. Within the research project the initiative was taken to arrange meetings between school officials and the community. The research group also explained their involvement in the school issue in a document that was sent from the community to the politicians in the municipality.

The second project was about making Älmeboda more attractive in the eyes of visitors and pleasant for the inhabitants. Around the lake, inhabitants were active with a number of projects intended to make the area more accessible and attractive. One student chose to organize those

on-going or planned initiatives in a concerted effort towards creating a meeting place around the lake. The ambition was also to recruit new people to the process. Questions were asked about what visions inhabitants had for the area. People suggested that it would be possible to build a recreation area that could include a sauna and a boardwalk. A former design student was recruited to the project in order to visualise the ideas. In this way the student through her project wanted to stimulate and energize the efforts. At this particular time however, the community inhabitants were occupied with the school debate and there seemed to be little energy left for anything else when it came to community development. The students documentation and visualizations were appreciated by the inhabitants, but it was clearly communicated that the process would continue first after the school issue was sorted out.

## **Findings**

The empirical outcomes of the projects in the three rural communities were similar, but the process differed. The similarities between the outputs of the projects surprised us and have been further developed in another paper (Gaddefors et al, 2014). Here we wish to further investigate the process. We start by summing up the output of the project in the three enclaves (see table 2).

In Långasjö the tangible result of our research project was the planning and sketching of a physical meeting place, the development of a digital communication platform and the launching of a local business network. The common denominator is communication. They are all supporting people getting together to do something for the future of Långasjö.

In Älmeboda the students run two projects; in the first sketches of meeting places around the local lake were produced and in the second project seminars were organized along with a missive submitted to municipality officials, all with the purpose to take part in and open up the debate about how compulsory school in the municipality ought to be organized.

In Urshult the tangible result was the presentation at a seminar about a regional business plan including suggestions for how to exploit local seaside, develop municipality marketing efforts, improve internal communication and events and to renew local services.

Regarding the process in the communities (see table 2), in Urshult the ideas were immediately communicated and our role was to contribute by making these ideas more concrete. In Långasjö the ideas were there but needed much dialogue as to find the direction to take with the ideas, small scale or large scale initiatives were negotiated throughout the process. At the end of the research project both communities were likewise eager to carry on with the projects. In Älmeboda the ideas were there but the energy to carry them on was not the same as the community was paralyzed by the village school process. Given that the aim of our research project was to mobilize entrepreneurship one could conclude that in Långasjö our project seemed to contribute to actual mobilization of ideas being there since long. In Urshult we seemed to add

inspiration and increase focus and direction to a process that was already mobilized. In Älmeboda the issue with the village school made mobilization of entrepreneurship less meaningful as the people in the village felt distrusted and discouraged by the municipality in a way that blocked collective entrepreneurial efforts. So while the ideas seem to be conforming, what happens with the ideas seems to have quite different routes to take.

Table 2 Output and processes in the enclaves

	<b>Långasjö</b>	<b>Älmeboda</b>	<b>Urshult</b>
<b>Output</b>	Explore seaside	Explore seaside	Explore seaside
	Communication and events	Communication and events	Communication and events
	Improve local services	Improve local services	Improve local services
<b>Process</b>	Intense dialogue to find direction	Ideas but no energy	Quick decision followed by information
	Balanced development process	Passive development process	Offensive development process
<b>Who</b>	The open inviting dialogue group	The blocked group	The five strong, dominating men

Even though the people in our three communities independently chose to work with the same solutions to achieve regional development, our analysis show how history shaped the local development processes in different ways. In Långasjö the old idea of a physical meeting place reappeared on the agenda. The dialogue was intense and billowed between on the one hand building a new multipurpose facility including everything you could dream of and on the other hand renovate existing buildings and allow the growing buildings to develop as the needs emerge. The choice fell on the first alternative. A number of factors of course were involved in this decision, but one of the most discussed and given weight to was the fact that they had a history of succeeding when taking on big projects, such as the lake project and the building of

the horse sport center. This example shows how historic place-bound events influence the practices of today.

Three types of development processes were identified and described; the five strong, dominating men, the open inviting dialogue group and the blocked group. In Långasjö the negotiations that were part of the process seem to have been a constructive part of entrepreneurial processes. The different directions needed to be discussed and criticised in order to find out a way to go. In Urshult the project was dominated by five strong men with a history of taking the initiative and run activities. In Älmeboda the community felt threatened and restrained by an external enemy and thus sunk into defensive actions blocking entrepreneurial activities. The blocking of entrepreneurship in this community could be related to limited internal reflexivity, or the lack of communication between the local people of Älmeboda, the municipality organisation and the city council. Here a reinstated dialogue seems to be needed. An opening of such a dialogue might be in the decision taken by the city council to consider the possibility for a unified school organisation in the three communities where Älmeboda is in the middle. As this correspond to what was asked for by representatives from the parents of the school children, this could be a way to start a reflexive process which eventually could open up for ways of unlocking the paralyzing effects of the process so far.

Our interaction in the communities showed an urge to attract people into the projects for several reasons; to take part in local activities, to improve the community in the eyes of tourists and as incoming residents. We saw how people worked purposefully to guard local culture and how this in some situations blocked communication.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Our ambition was to problematize the framing of rural entrepreneurship by discussing the idea of extending the entrepreneurial process in time and when it comes to who is involved and to develop eventual advantages with this take related to rural entrepreneurship. We wanted to investigate the conditions for entrepreneurial activities in interaction with rural context and in detail describe some of the interplay between entrepreneurial activities and context.

Our study show how local people build conditions or set the scene for entrepreneurship and how this involvement engage with entrepreneurial activities. Perhaps better articulated, our study show how the entrepreneurial process is partly the building of conditions and the setting of the scene for continued entrepreneurial activities. In this way we build on and contribute to research that wish to emphasise context factors in the entrepreneurial process (Gartner, 2010, Anderson, 2000, Steyaert and Katz, 2004, Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011, Welter, 2011). The cases illustrate when rural entrepreneurship is not something that is happening against all odds. People in the communities do not appear to question that there will be entrepreneurial activities, but they have no idea of when or what it will actually happen. As suggested by entrepreneurship scholars planning is rarely a suitable tool for entrepreneurial activities, but to prepare for entrepreneurship

is another thing. The activities we have described occur at a time when the community have experienced spectacular entrepreneurial activities and we suppose more is to come. In other words, we are not talking about what happens before but rather parallel to spectacular entrepreneurial activities. Thus, the activities we observed were interlinked with previous history and done with an eye on the future. The people in the communities are well aware of the predicament they are in due to spatial factors and the cases show how they are working to increase the probability for entrepreneurial activities to happen around them. To us, this observation indicates the intricate socio-spatial web of activities that precedes the output of spectacular entrepreneurship (Anderson, 2000, Steyaert and Katz, 2004). Thus, our thought complements the individually focused opportunity view on entrepreneurship (Korsgaard, 2013).

When we emphasise the socio-relational organisation of rural entrepreneurship more people are included in the process compared to a focus on particular businesses as is often the case in the literature (North and Smallbone 2006, Baumgartner et al 2013). One consequence is that the conversation around reorganising life in the community in itself becomes a key issue. Thus, narrating the region is regarded a decisive part of rural entrepreneurship. The socio-relational aspect of the entrepreneurial process in rural settings has been discussed as the translation of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Cronsell, 2009), how people co-produce the context for entrepreneurial activities by interacting. It was clear in our cases how people were eager to communicate and come to action together. There were times when a smaller group joined together to be able to produce results and other times when everyone was invited and welcome to participate in whatever was at stake. Nevertheless, people were cautious about how they voiced themselves, in a way that expressed a care for the image of the community.

The spatial factors listed in table 2 show some of the output from our projects. These are examples of how people came together to improve spatial conditions for living in the community. They were very much acting strategically based on their understanding of what may increase the number of incoming tourists and inhabitants, and at the same time what would improve their own living conditions. Thus, we saw how the reconstruction of place emerged in interaction with entrepreneurial activities, how spatiality was the material and the result in the process (Anderson, 2000).

Our results suggests that place specific entrepreneurial activities doesn't by necessity lead to different, spectacular outcomes. Previous research suggests entrepreneurial activities in rural settings to result in place-specific socio-economic development paths (Trettin and Welter, 2011). However, what we saw in the three communities was conform when it came to output, but different when it came to how the process developed. Our analysis show how history shaped the local development processes in different ways, but surprisingly our results suggests that place specific entrepreneurial activities doesn't by necessity lead to different, spectacular outcomes. We might say spatial idiosyncrasy is out ruled by a dominating national discourse about what spatial factors characterise a successful region.

When rural entrepreneurship is discussed without taking context into consideration it is as if rural development does not require structural change, but is temporally in need of a boost of employments and an increased tax base to cover community expenditures (North and Smallbone 2006, Baumgartner et al 2013). Thus, the entrepreneurial process in rural settings is looked upon as a source for new venture creation and growth in existing businesses. Integrating context into the entrepreneurial process will broaden the unit of analysis from the relatively well framed business firm to organisation processes in the community. Rather than studying emerging and growing businesses only, focus have to cover also the reorganisation of socio-spatial factors of rural entrepreneurship.

In this paper we wanted to discuss the conditions for rural entrepreneurship and describe some of the interactivity between spatial and social context, and entrepreneurial activities in rural entrepreneurship.

Three different development processes were discussed in order to acknowledge the idiosyncrasy of development processes in rural settings and at the same time provide points of departure for discussing the topic.

Our focus on social and spatial context in rural entrepreneurship processes opened up for a more elaborated view on context and its interactivity with entrepreneurial activities. One result is how the entrepreneurial process begins earlier and includes more people than theory suggests.

Social context was not something unhospitable the entrepreneurs had to cope with against all odds, but rather something welcoming and supportive for entrepreneurial activities to grow in. When it comes to improving spatial context this was high on the agenda of local people.

In this research project we dived into three rural communities. We saw how social and spatial context was at the heart of what people cared for and put their energy into. Occasionally we observed what might be termed entrepreneurial activities. These were highly valued by the people involved and often given the lion's share of attention. Nevertheless, local people's daily efforts to improve context were some of the preconditions for entrepreneurship.

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