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Pablo Muñoz & Jonathan Kimmitt

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## Rural entrepreneurship in place: an integrated framework

Pablo Muñoz <sup>a,b</sup> and Jonathan Kimmitt <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Management School, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; <sup>b</sup>School of Business and Economics, Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile; <sup>c</sup>Business School, Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK

### ABSTRACT

Agglomeration-oriented theories have grown significantly in the past decade in the explanation and promotion of entrepreneurship. Theoretical frameworks and normative models such as entrepreneurial ecosystems are insufficient to observe, explain, and inform policies at the communal level in rural contexts. In this paper, we propose a socio-spatial lens as a more fruitful way of understanding the holistic picture of rural entrepreneurship. By means of abductive research, we explore the distinct elements of entrepreneurial places in rural contexts and derive an integrated meso-level framework, comprising place-sensitive determinations and dimensions, to observe and further analyse the enabling conditions of such places. The findings obtained and the framework developed will be of great use for the evaluation and decision-making, regarding entrepreneurship in rural communities.

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## Introduction

The relationship between entrepreneurship and context has gained significant attention in recent years (Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad 2014; Welter 2011). Research analysing this relationship has been dominated by theoretical approaches such as agglomeration theory (Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Tobio 2014), innovation systems (Lundvall 2007), economic geography (Boschma 2005), and/or innovation networks (Wineman, Kabo, and Davis 2009) among others. Based on this richness and conceptual diversity, researchers have sought to develop relevant knowledge about critical factors and enabling processes, as well as normative models that have informed relevant policies aimed at promoting entrepreneurship at national and regional levels (Acs, Autio, and Szerb 2014). These macro-level frameworks have been predominant in the discussion of entrepreneurial ecosystems, providing a conceptual basis for understanding the social, political, economic, and cultural elements of an entrepreneurial context (Spigel 2017). In other words, these frameworks have sought to understand the relationship between entrepreneurs and their systemic context.

However, this stream of literature is fundamentally problematic in how it can be applied to entrepreneurship in rural areas. The emphasis on high growth, high tech, and innovative entrepreneurship that dominate current approaches (e.g. Autio et al. 2014; Acs et al. 2016), under the assumption that these outcomes equal productive entrepreneurial activity, seem to imply that the absence of supporting features for this kind of entrepreneurship leads to unproductive entrepreneurship or renders business in rural contexts as lacking in resource, networks or expertise. In this sense, the idea of an ecosystem, where many factors interact in a complex manner to effect entrepreneurial outcomes (Stam 2015), seems to principally be a descriptive category for understanding what rural contexts *are not*. Yet, rural areas have distinct qualities

that assist entrepreneurs (Garrod, Wornell, and Youell 2006; Ring, Peredo, and Chrisman 2010) and it has been argued that these places are indeed 'similarly strong in entrepreneurial capital' (Müller 2016, 1148).

Therefore, despite the relevance of this knowledge and current macro-level frameworks, such as ecosystems, the emphasis on macro institutional and infrastructure factors (Acs et al. 2016; Acs, Autio, and Szerb 2014) does not allow for explaining factors affecting rural enterprising and thus informing policies at the communal level in rural areas. This represents a serious shortcoming, constraining our understanding of entrepreneurial enablers and dynamics in rural contexts. While macro-level representations provide insufficient explanations of the mechanisms that affect rural entrepreneurship, micro-level accounts of rural entrepreneurship are deemed too granular for understanding the holistic picture of rural enterprising.

Building on our critique, in this paper we adopt a place-based lens (Cresswell 2013) to understand the meso-level holistic context for rural entrepreneurship. A place lens assists in explaining issues of location and proximity (Boschma 2005) but also, and particularly, the social, material and symbolic dynamics of entrepreneurship in particular places (Müller and Korsgaard 2018). Thus, such a contextualised approach lends itself to understanding the unique meso-level features and supporting mechanisms of 'smaller' (Müller 2016) or 'thinner' (Gaddefors and Anderson 2018) rural entities currently missing from the literature, bridging the theoretical tension highlighted previously. We argue that a place lens offers a more appropriate method for understanding the holistic picture in which rural entrepreneurs operate. As such, in this study, we ask: under what distinct conditions does entrepreneurship flourish in rural contexts?

In order to answer this question, we conducted exploratory qualitative research in 17 entrepreneurial rural places throughout the emerging market context of Chile. Through interviews with 117 entrepreneurs, public actors and civil society members, we identified critical variables that affect the development of an adequate place for entrepreneurship with a broad focus on processes, business training, institutional support, and social dynamics. We analysed this data through a place (socio-spatial) lens (Cresswell 2013), and subsequently used abductive theorising to propose an integrated, place-sensitive framework to observe and further analyse the enabling conditions of entrepreneurial contexts in rural areas. Drawing from multiple determinations of place (Cresswell 2013), it identifies the key determinants and dimensions, laying the ground for the future development of instruments that are sensitive to the reality of these communities – an area where the current high impact, high growth oriented conceptualisation of the current literature falls short.

The paper offers three key contributions concerning the growing discussion and relationship between entrepreneurship, rurality and place more broadly. Firstly, drawing on our results, we propose an integrated framework for rural entrepreneurship that identifies and organizes four distinct elements of a rural entrepreneurship place, namely: material location, rural locale, rooted enablers and collaborative places. We label this integrated framework REFLECT: *Rural Entrepreneurship Framework for Local Economic and Communal Thriving*. REFLECT echoes the work of Welter (2011), Anderson (2000), Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad (2014) and Gaddefors and Anderson (2018), and expands it further by delineating and operationalizing the ways in which rural entrepreneurs interact with and use their socio-spatial contexts at different levels. Our integrated framework, REFLECT, shifts the focus of analysis from macro institutions to identify a more place-sensitive meso-level holistic picture of the rural entrepreneurial socio-spatial context. Thus, by departing from the current agglomeration foci, we provide an account of the moulding force of a rural entrepreneur's milieu in a localised and contextualised manner (Müller 2016).

Secondly, this allows us to make an important contribution to research and policy interested in how value can be created through entrepreneurship in rural contexts (Bosworth 2012; Moyes et al. 2015). Given the limitations of the ecosystems approach in explaining entrepreneurial dynamics in rural contexts, our place-based lens is able to identify the core enabling features of the rural milieu for entrepreneurs. In doing so, we reconcile previous efforts across different literature streams aimed at assembling the contextual attributes forming a rural entrepreneurial context. Thirdly, and at the same time, the findings obtained and the framework developed will be of great use for the

evaluation and decision-making from a policy perspective. It enables a more fine-grained understanding of the functioning of a contextualised entrepreneurial place that is sensitive to the dynamics of rural areas; setting the basis for the development of support mechanisms and localised programmes that would reflect this contextualisation.

## Background literature

### *Entrepreneurial context at the macro-level*

Entrepreneurship research has taken a contextual turn in recent years by recognising and helping to explain how entrepreneurs are moulded by their milieu (Anderson 2000) and that their actions may also shape features of their environment (Mair and Marti 2009). Müller (2016) identifies that this literature has focused on either understanding (1) how particular structural conditions of a context produce entrepreneurship (e.g. Kibler 2013) or (2) how entrepreneurship produces particular structural conditions of a context (e.g. Shane 2009). In the former, literature has typically highlighted the presence of human capital, financing, innovative firms, mentorship and support systems, knowledge spillover capacity, robust regulatory frameworks, and major universities (among others) as enabling pillars of entrepreneurial contexts (Acs et al. 2016; Audretsch and Lehmann 2005; Audretsch et al. 2016; Feldman 2014; Isenberg 2010; Stam 2015). Other contributors have highlighted the importance of boundary spanning activities through strategic thinking that links entrepreneurs across different contexts (Zahra and Nambisan 2012), mostly within socio-economic urban areas (Audretsch and Belitski 2016). Recent work from Acs, Autio, and Szerb (2014) brings together classic literature on innovation systems with macro-examinations of entrepreneurial behaviour across various institutional contexts (Lundvall 2007).

In the latter, there is a consistent thread across this literature concerning the focus on high impact start-ups with an emphasis on job creation and new market creation (Shane 2009). This stems from the need for normative models capable of delivering country-level outcomes that promote innovation, competitiveness, growth, which are understood as the main drivers of economic performance (Acs et al. 2016). As the World Economic Forum (2013, 5) points out: 'Rapidly growing entrepreneurial enterprises are often viewed as important sources of innovation, productivity growth and employment....Many governments are therefore trying to actively promote entrepreneurship through various forms of support.' The inevitable result of this idea is an overemphasis on a type of entrepreneurship that can presumably deliver such outcomes, leading consequently to the articulation of policies, resource distribution mechanisms, and market incentives specially designed to promote a narrow set of commercial activities (Liguori et al. 2019).

Acs and Armington (2004) discuss the relationship between growth, proximity and human capital in urban contexts; Mueller, Van Stel, and Storey (2008) highlight the link between high start-up rates and employment growth across contexts with higher rates of entrepreneurship (and vice versa); Audretsch and Fritsch (2002) adopt a similar view with a focus on regional growth, entrepreneurs and incumbent firms. What draws this body of work together is a consistent understanding of the interdependence between entrepreneurship and notions of context such as cluster formation (Trettin and Welter 2011), and the underlying focus on systems and innovation understood as high impact, high growth new ventures (Acs, Autio, and Szerb 2014).

One particularly notable example in this stream of literature is the emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems perspective (Stam 2015; Acs et al.). Given its recent emergence, a widely accepted definition is yet to be established. However, Spigel (2017) provides a relational definition of ecosystems as: 'combinations of social, political, economic, and cultural elements within a region that support the development and growth of innovative start-ups and encourage nascent entrepreneurs and other actors to take the risks of starting, funding, and otherwise assisting high-risk ventures' (p.50). The ecosystem component of the definition refers to the interdependencies between actors within the system – this system can be viewed within a locale, community, cluster or regional agglomeration. It, therefore, involves a complex web of relationships and arrangements of which the entrepreneur is only one component.

The ecosystem approach, prominent in entrepreneurship literature, has typically focused on understanding how these broad contexts, as systems, lead to the most innovative entrepreneurial outcomes (Thompson, Purdy, and Ventresca 2018). As Brown and Mason (2017) similarly establish, ecosystems have an overwhelming focus on start-ups, technologically driven firms, university spin-offs and innovation which assumes that all of these are components are always a central force in prosperous and dynamic economies. Consistent with other approaches such as agglomeration theory, cluster formation and innovation systems, if these are used together as a template to observe rural contexts, the inevitable conclusion is that in those contexts entrepreneurial activity is minuscule and/or lacks impact. Thus, the ecosystem view is seemingly insufficient to understanding how a particular social-spatial context may actually support entrepreneurship outside of this 'high growth' world, but where entrepreneurs may still provide the products and services to sustain and improve local livelihoods (Johnstone and Lionais 2004). This terminology seems inherently problematic in terms of how it informs our understanding of the entrepreneurial milieu within rural contexts.

### ***Macro-micro tensions in understanding rural entrepreneurship***

Despite the emerging literature in this domain, we know very little about what an entrepreneurial place may look like in rural contexts and the main attributes supporting its emergence and development. The previously highlighted macro-level ecosystems approach suggests that the current understanding of entrepreneurial contexts may only be partially applicable to rural areas. The contrasting attributes of rural areas and the distinct focus of outcomes that may not be characterised as innovation in a traditional sense but non-material and aesthetic (Anderson 2000) or concerning community benefits (Peredo and Chrisman 2006). As such, contexts for entrepreneurship should instead be understood and shaped around in terms of their relationship to local conditions (Isenberg 2010).

The rural entrepreneurship literature provides some initial clues as to what may be a set of relevant attributes for such contexts. A large body of research has looked at the role of networks and business in rural contexts (e.g. Ring, Peredo, and Chrisman 2010). Moyes et al. (2015) highlight the dynamic construction of social capital by entrepreneurs to create sustainable rural service-based businesses. Such a network approach is also closely linked to the support mechanisms provided by institutions as a type of network tie that can support business development (McKitterick et al. 2016). As such, networks and social capital are viewed as a critical ingredient for entrepreneurs, concerning how rural contexts access services and resources (Besser and Miller 2013).

Indeed, capital is a familiar term across studies looking at rural entrepreneurship, yet in a different way to traditional entrepreneurship ecosystems literature, which understands capital in terms of access to angel investors, venture capitalists or fundamental financial services. Garrod, Wornell, and Youell (2006) discuss the relevance of 'countryside capital', indicating the inherent value of the landscape, biodiversity and other material features that make up a rural area. Although not mutually exclusive, this suggests that the resource bundle required for emerging start-ups and provided by the context will be distinctively different from current conceptualisations of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Prior research has also indicated the importance of local leadership qualities in rural areas – simultaneously challenging but working with governments to achieve productive outcomes (Beer 2014). Supporting our argumentation, in Table 1 we provide an overview of key literature at the intersection of rural entrepreneurship and place, comprising papers, focus, key concepts and main derived constructs.

In examining recent developments in the field, we found ourselves trapped in between differing macro and micro levels of understanding. On the one hand, agglomeration-based approaches offer well-developed macro-level frameworks emphasising a particular firm type and performance outcomes. These, while comprehensive, are deemed unsuitable since their applicability to rural areas is likely to be limited. On the other hand, rural entrepreneurship literature offers a deep micro-understanding of local factors affecting rural enterprising, which, while relevant and provide some insight into our research question, fail to provide a holistic picture of what rural entrepreneurship in place looks like.



**Table 1.** Summary of key literature.

Rural entrepreneurship papers	Focus	Key insights	Main constructs
The Context of Social Capital: A Comparison of Rural and Urban Entrepreneurs in Uganda (Rooks et al. 2016)	Explores how social capital differs between rural and urban communities in a developing country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family relations and social capital creation.</li> <li>Distinct socio cultural contexts</li> <li>In collectivistic societies, the motivation to share resources is value based.</li> </ul>	Sense of community Resource sharing and trustworthy
Roots to Grow: Family Firms and Local Embeddedness in Rural and Urban Contexts (Baù et al. 2019)	Analyses the nexus among business growth, ownership structure, and local embeddedness in rural and urban contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family firms benefit more than nonfamily firms from local embeddedness, which is more salient in rural areas.</li> <li>Local embeddedness enables higher levels of growth.</li> </ul>	Local embeddedness Family support
Business Networks and Economic Development in Rural Communities in the United States (Ring et al. 2010)	Explores how community-level conditions in rural areas might increase the probability of business network effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business networks enhance rural economic development.</li> <li>Community-level characteristics may favour or inhibit the formation and success of rural networks.</li> </ul>	Community features and rural business networks
Resources and bridging: the role of spatial context in rural entrepreneurship (Müller & Korsgaard 2018)	Explores the role of spatial context for rural entrepreneurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two modes of spatializing rural entrepreneurial activities: endowments and spatial bridging.</li> </ul>	Spatial diversity Place-sensitive rural entrepreneurship
Conceptualising animation in rural communities: the Village SOS case (McElwee et al. 2018)	Introduces and discusses the concept of animatorship (art of animating others to achieve their objectives) in relation to rural enterprise and community development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Animation influences entrepreneurship in rural areas.</li> <li>Distinct community entrepreneurship and mentorship processes in rural areas.</li> </ul>	Distinct community support mechanisms
Resourcefulness of locally-oriented social enterprises: Implications for rural community development (Barraket et al. 2018)	Explores how resourcefulness practices in rural areas inform community development activities of social enterprises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural entrepreneur act as embedded intermediaries</li> <li>Rural social enterprises make greater use of the financial and physical assets accessed through networks within their communities.</li> </ul>	Biophysical assets Access through social networks
Rural social entrepreneurship: The role of social capital within and across institutional levels (Lang & Fink 2018)	Develops a nuanced and multilevel understanding of the social network arena in which the rural social entrepreneur operates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Networks play a particularly significant role in accessing and leveraging resource.</li> <li>Rural social entrepreneurs mobilize distinct dialectic of horizontal and vertical networking strategies.</li> </ul>	Multilevel rural networks
Rural social enterprises as <i>embedded intermediaries</i> : The innovative power of connecting rural communities with supra-regional networks (Richter 2018)	Explores how social enterprises foster social innovation in rural regions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural social enterprises mobilise ideas, resources and support from external sources not primarily for their own benefit but for that of their rural region.</li> </ul>	Rural community as main beneficiary

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Rural entrepreneurship papers	Focus	Key insights	Main constructs
Unlocking the potential of rural social enterprise (Steiner & Teasdale 2018)	Develops a conceptual framework that helps to understand how to unlock the potential contribution of social enterprises to rural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural enterprises create locally responsive services that fit the rural context</li> <li>Rural social enterprises can potentially enable an integrated approach to addressing local issues at the local level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural products</li> <li>Rural community as main beneficiary</li> </ul>
Romancing the rural: Reconceptualizing rural entrepreneurship as engagement with context (s) (Gaddefors & Anderson 2018)	Criticizes current approaches to rural entrepreneurship, arguing that the romancing of the rural has had detrimental effects in theorizing about rural.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural as unique spatial configuration</li> <li>Rural and entrepreneurial action interactions</li> <li>Deep engagement with rural contexts</li> <li>Socially situated nature of rural enterprise</li> <li>RE is mutual and interdependent</li> <li>Socially organised RE enable a livelihood for many</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spatial configuration</li> <li>Social construction of rural spaces</li> <li>Social processes</li> <li>Mutuality and interdependence</li> </ul>
Enterprise as socially situated in a rural poor fishing community (Anderson & Obeng 2017)	Looks at the social and spatial processes of rural entrepreneurship. Economic "systems" in rural areas can be understood and explained, as social processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological economics</li> <li>Rural resources</li> <li>Rural production systems</li> <li>Fabric of the countryside</li> <li>Rural economic development</li> <li>Rural entrepreneurships and enterprises</li> <li>Human and social capital</li> <li>Financial and non-financial assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural fabric</li> <li>Countryside capital</li> </ul>
Re-conceptualising rural resources as countryside capital: The case of rural tourism (Garrod et al. 2006)	Focuses on the case of rural tourism in order to illustrate how sustainable development thinking can be applied to addressing the problems of the countryside.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural economic development</li> <li>Rural entrepreneurships and enterprises</li> <li>Human and social capital</li> <li>Financial and non-financial assistance</li> <li>Positioning</li> <li>Local identities</li> <li>Locality, place and history</li> <li>Rural business</li> <li>Rural products</li> <li>Local embeddedness</li> <li>Interaction with nature</li> <li>Resource-based view</li> <li>Diversification and entrepreneurial activities</li> <li>Interactions between local resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional assistance</li> <li>Identity positioning</li> </ul>
Rural entrepreneurs and institutional assistance: an empirical study from mountainous Italy (Meccheri & Pelloni 2006)	Examines the role and function of rural entrepreneurs (driving force behind the birth, survival and growth of rural enterprises) in rural economic development		
Provoking identities: entrepreneurship and emerging identity positions in rural development (Berglund et al. 2015)	Develops knowledge about how discourses are used in the positioning of identity in regional development		
Characterising rural businesses - Tales from the paperman (Bosworth 2012)	Deconstructs the concept of a rural business, shedding light on specific features of 'operating in a rural area' and 'serving a rural population'.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Categorising of rural product</li> <li>Nature at the core</li> </ul>
New venture creation in the farm sector - Critical resources and capabilities (Grande 2011)	Explores critical resources and capabilities for farm businesses engaged in entrepreneurial activities through on-farm diversification		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource (re) configuration</li> </ul>

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Rural entrepreneurship papers	Focus	Key insights	Main constructs
Leadership and the governance of rural communities (Beer 2014)	Examines local leadership and governmentality in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local and regional leadership</li> <li>Relations across spatial scales.</li> <li>Oppositional activities</li> <li>Inclusion and exclusion in decision-making and problem-solving</li> </ul>	Rural governance Local leadership  Local leadership
Entrepreneurship and place papers*	Focus	Key insights	Main constructs
The Relational Organization of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (Spigel 2017)	Provides a relational view of entrepreneurial ecosystems, comprising 10 cultural, social, and material attributes that provide benefits and resources to entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attributes of entrepreneurial ecosystems</li> <li>Place-based beliefs and outlooks about entrepreneurship</li> <li>Regional social networks</li> <li>Tangible material resources</li> <li>Institutions and economic life</li> <li>Institutional economic geography</li> <li>Multiscale institutional architectures</li> <li>Local economies</li> <li>Community business entrepreneurship</li> <li>Community goals</li> <li>Depleted community</li> <li>Place as location of social life</li> <li>Situated practices</li> <li>Embeddedness</li> <li>Value transferring across spheres</li> <li>Sense of place</li> <li>Geographical location</li> <li>Physicality of place and social life</li> <li>Investment with meaning and value</li> <li>Ecological respect and reciprocity</li> <li>Caretaking</li> <li>Gathering ecological information</li> <li>Organizations in Place</li> <li>Determinations of place</li> <li>Organizational studies of sustainability</li> <li>Sense of place</li> </ul>	Cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship Stories of entrepreneurship regionally defined  Joint business practices and community goals  Entrepreneurship and identity of place  Meaning of place Materiality of place  Ecological embeddedness  Integration of material dimensions of place into practices and processes
Rules of the Game: The Place of Institutions in Regional Economic Change (Gertler 2009)	Examines how locally distinctive institutional architectures shape evolutionary trajectories, leading to differentiated social and economic outcomes.		
Depleted communities and community business entrepreneurship: revaluing space through place (Johnstone & Lionais 2004)	Focuses on community business entrepreneurship, arguing that depleted communities can act as hosts to a unique form of enterprise that combines good business practices with community goals.		
Embedded entrepreneurship in the creative reconstruction of place (McKeever et al. 2015)	Examines how the relationship between entrepreneurs and communities influences entrepreneurial practices and outcome		
A space for place in sociology (Gieryn 2000)	Elaborates on the notion of sociology of place, by examining how places come to be way they are, and how places matter for social practices and historical change.		
Ecological embeddedness (Whiteman & Cooper 2000)	Examines relationships between organizations and natural ecosystems and introduces and elaborates on the notion of ecological embeddedness		
Place and Sense of Place: Implications for Organizational Studies of Sustainability (Guthey et al. 2014)	Elaborates on the idea that place and sense of place should be integral components in the organizational literature on sustainability		

\*Entrepreneurship and place papers, particularly relevant to rural entrepreneurship



This macro-micro tension represents a serious theoretical shortcoming, constraining our understanding of rural entrepreneurial places. Yet, it represents equally a missing opportunity for novel theorising through a meso-level approach. As Müller (2016) similarly emphasises: ‘The downside of the dominance of large-scale regional studies is that these generally conclude that rural regions are resource deprived compared to their urban counterparts...Smaller spatial entities, such as rural contexts or urban districts and enclaves, may be differently but similarly strong in entrepreneurial capital, and thus may provide unique contexts to study entrepreneurship that is localized and contextualized.’ (p. 1147–1148). Figure 1 illustrates this macro-micro tension and the value of a meso-level of analysis which helps to reveal connections between the macro and the micro.

**Place as a gap-bridging concept**

As previously discussed, ‘context’ has become an important and growing explanatory lens. It is considered to have numerous theoretical facets in that it invites social, political-economic, industry, family and household, and spatial explanations of entrepreneurial behaviour (Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad 2014; Welter 2011). In particular, a large body of research has looked at understanding the effect of institutions on entrepreneurial behaviours such as debt requirements (Kimmitt, Scarlata, and Dimov 2016) or the entrepreneurial process (Baker, Gedajlovic, and Lubatkin 2005). The other dominant contextual lens is social context, which has been principally approached through a social network understanding of entrepreneurship and similarly adopted in studies of rural entrepreneurship, as previously emphasised (Jack and Anderson 2002; Jack et al. 2010). As a broad approach, therefore, it stretches beyond the dominant macro-level perspective of agglomeration theory and the ecosystems view previously highlighted.

Although a less dominant approach, entrepreneurship research has begun to embrace spatial context as an explanatory lens (Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad 2014). Kibler, Lang, and Muñoz (2015) highlight that place matters through emotional attachment to the spatial context of

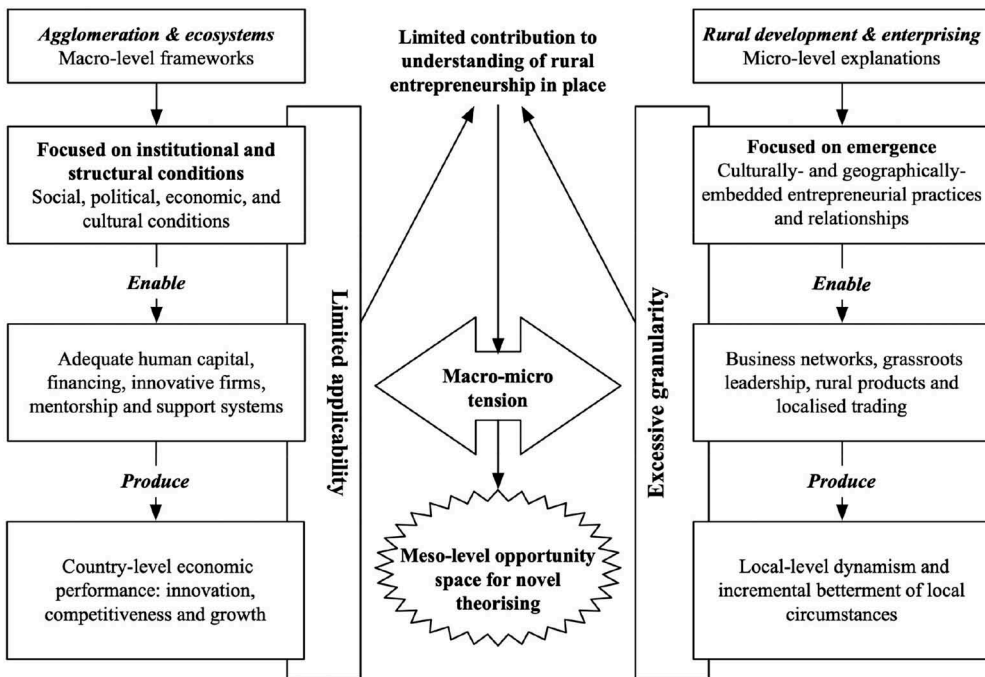


Figure 1. Macro-micro tensions.

sustainable ventures. Lang, Fink, and Kibler (2014) develop a place-based analysis using the classic tenets of institutional theory. McKeever, Jack, and Anderson (2015) emphasise a socio-spatial approach to how entrepreneurs look to redevelop challenging deprived places. Müller and Korsgaard (2018) argue that place can provide a unique set of resources for entrepreneurs but can be used strategically by those not attached to the context, as Kibler, Lang, and Muñoz (2015) similarly identify. Thus, the place provides a physical context for entrepreneurship by recognising some of the distance barriers it can place on trading, markets and other resources but they are also meaningful, emotional and the milieu for important social interactions.

From a social geography perspective (Cresswell 2013), these entrepreneurial places coexist beyond the physical environment, with social constructions elaborated from collective assets and memory, which are linked to both social norms and natural and built environments. Entrepreneurial spaces then involve geographical location, material elements and the meanings and values attached to them, which transform 'business' spaces into meaningful locations (Cresswell 2013). From this positioning, spaces become places which are seen as active ingredients in the organizational, community and entrepreneurial life (Lawrence and Dover 2015). They shape institutions and turn enduring elements of the social life into focal points, which end up having 'profound effects on the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individual and collective actors' (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, 216). In this paper, we argue that such a socio-spatial lens, from a social geography perspective with a focus on place, is a more fruitful conceptual apparatus than ecosystems as it can better facilitate an understanding of the milieu for entrepreneurship in rural areas.

In summary, our theoretical review highlights an important tension at the intersection of macro-level frameworks for understanding entrepreneurship and context, and micro-level understandings of rural entrepreneurship. Despite the value of these perspectives, they appear incomplete when considering this tension: we know surprisingly little about what an entrepreneurial place may look like in rural contexts and the main attributes supporting its emergence. This understanding of the milieu, we propose, helps to bridge the macro-micro tension previously highlighted, bringing in a meso-level explanation of rural entrepreneurship places that connects the macro and the micro. As such, we ask: *under what distinct conditions does entrepreneurship flourish in rural contexts?*

## Research methods

Our research question demands the elaboration of a comprehensive view of entrepreneurship in rural contexts. Given the limited diversity of observable cases and with the aim of developing a more generalizable framework, our research and conceptual development draws on abductive theorising. Combining inductive and deductive forms of theorising, abduction is the most conjectural of the three logics (i.e. induction, deduction and abduction) because it seeks a situational fit between observed facts and rules (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Thus, 'Abduction is the form of reasoning through which we perceive the phenomenon as related to other observations either in the sense that there is a cause and effect hidden from view, in the sense that the phenomenon is seen as similar to other phenomena already experienced and explained in other situations, or in the sense of creating new general descriptions.' (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 171).

The first and most extensive part of our research is inductive, since the identified gap and derived questions call for a deep examination of socially constructed places, so far hidden. As such, we need a methodological approach and techniques for data collection and analysis that allow us to capture historical events and the social, human and situational dimensions of the phenomenon of interest, as it occurs. An exploratory qualitative design was then the natural methodological approach to guide our study – including sample selection, data collection and analysis – as it would facilitate a complete description of representative cases and the detection of patterns. The second part of the analysis, deductive, draws on the systematic comparison of inductive insights with previous evidence with the aims of complementing the findings and subsequently providing the expected comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

### **Research setting, sampling strategy and data collection**

In inductive comparative studies, case selection is based on purposive sampling techniques. It entails the explicit use of conceptual criteria to define an area of homogeneity where cases become comparable (Rihoux and Ragin 2009). In selecting cases within that area of homogeneity, we also needed a great diversity of cases to be able to discover the broad spectrum of factors underlying the functioning and critical variables of places already sharing similar characteristics.

The study was conducted in Chile. The country has been recognised as one of the best start-up hubs in the world (Larsson 2016), which presumes a lively and supportive culture of entrepreneurship with opportunities for all, however, it is highly unequal (Gini 0.465) and diverse (socially, economically and geographically). From north to south, the country is divided into 16 regions, with distinct anatomical features. The Antofagasta region in the north hosts the driest desert and also one of the largest copper reserves in the world. Not surprisingly, it exhibits the lowest income poverty (5.4%) but the highest levels of poverty (17.2%) when housing, health, education, social security and social cohesion are factored in. The Aysén region, at the other end, was awarded the World's Leading Adventure Tourism Destination in 2016,<sup>1</sup> yet it presents one of the highest levels of multi-dimensional poverty (16.9%) and the lowest income poverty (6.5); both co-existing under the lowest unemployment rate (only 2.5%) in the country. Yet, Chile as a whole has grown over the past three decades as one of the most politically stable and prosperous countries in the region. Interestingly, 35% of the population still live in rural areas (Berdegué, Proctor, and Cazzuffi 2014) of this paradoxical context.

The unit of analysis chosen for the study is the commune, as it constitutes the smallest political and administrative government entity with clear social and geographical boundaries. The administrative organisation governing communes is called a municipality. A focus on communes allows us to capture the social, political, economic, and cultural elements underpinning entrepreneurial activities in the given place. Our aim was to identify rural municipalities with active entrepreneurial communities.

Our delineation of rurality is aligned with the notion accrued from the Planning Office ODEPA for the National Policy for Rural Development,<sup>2</sup> which defines a "rural territory" as those (censual districts) enabled by the dynamic interrelation between people, economic activities and natural resources, mainly characterized by a low population density (<150 hab./km<sup>2</sup>), with a maximum population of 50,000 inhabitants and whose basic unit of organization and reference is the commune. When applied to the smallest level of aggregation, i.e. censal district, this definition creates three types of communes: mostly rural, mostly urban and mixed. Since mixed communes can contain up to 49% of its population living in places with a population density of <150 hab./km<sup>2</sup>, we considered both mostly rural and mixed communes and constructed the sample of communes based on descriptive differences. Indeed, the 35% estimated by Berdegué, Proctor, and Cazzuffi (2014) is in line with the aforementioned two-group delineation. Our research echoes a shift of emphasis from what it used to be exclusively defined as related to agriculture and under-development, to embrace the idea that rural is "a space of opportunities that can contain small cities sparsely located in the natural environment, with strong interactions with the urban world and multiple possibilities of economic activity associated with its local assets." (ODEPA 2018)

Based on the two key criteria of homogeneity and maximum heterogeneity, we used public records, experts' views, and previous case studies to identify and construct a sample of 60 municipalities for initial analysis. Our selection was guided by focusing on rural communes which have developed or hosted entrepreneurship programmes (alone or in collaboration with other entities) and there is a critical mass of at least 200 active rural entrepreneurs. While this may present risks of endogeneity, the purposive nature of our sampling strategy required us to focus on those communes with a certain level of entrepreneurial activity.

For each municipality, we created case files comprising 11 dimensions, among others: socio-demographics (region and local levels), details of the entrepreneurship program, support institutions

and partnerships and role of civil society. After careful examination of the secondary data collected for the 60 municipalities, we selected 17 for primary data collection and in-depth analysis. Case selection was based on a combination of observable activity amongst the entrepreneurial population, which normally involves the presence of a diverse pool of 100 to 150 entrepreneurs, availability of key informants, data and representativeness. It is worth noting that exhibiting such concentration of incipient entrepreneurial activity in a rural area does not represent an agglomeration of economy activity, as the latter necessarily involves homogeneous economic activities, specialized industrial clustering, economies of scale, and cost-based network effects in or close to highly populated areas (Porter 1998).

The selection procedure and the number of cases (i.e. municipalities) are in line with current research practice, which defines a sample size of between 10 and 20 cases for comparative case in-depth analysis (George and Bennett 2005). Across all 17 municipalities, we selected a total of 117 participants, including local entrepreneurs, members of the civil society and representatives from the municipal councils, who have been involved in entrepreneurial or productive local development. Table 2 shows the final sample of municipalities, location, support programme and key informants, along the geopolitical map of Chile.

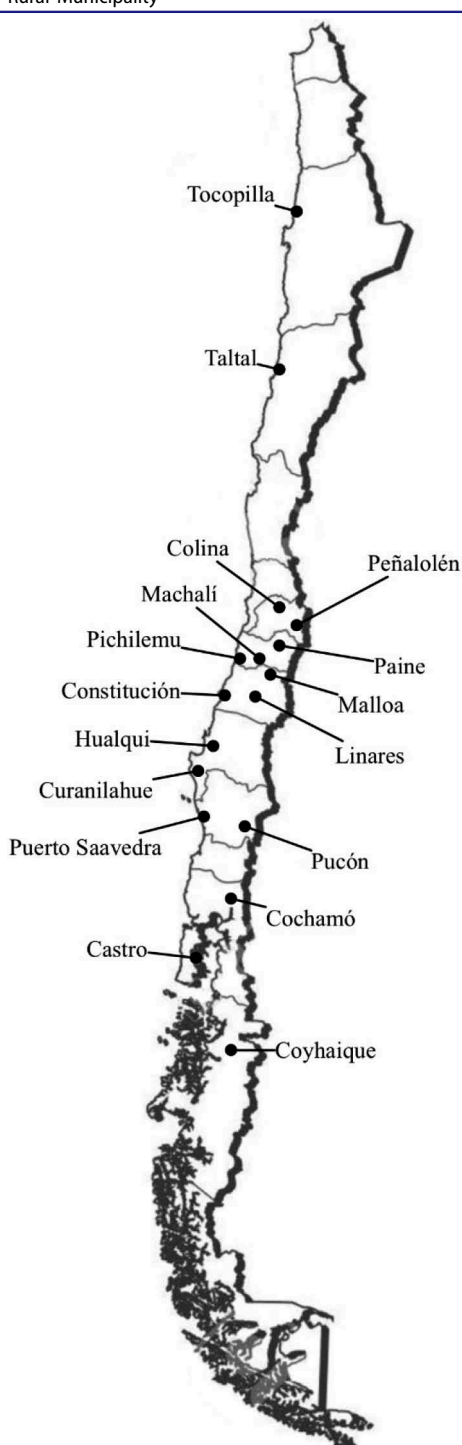
The main technique for data collection was semi-structured interviews. These were framed as guided in-depth conversations with the participants. Each interview was conducted based on pre-defined thematic areas; however, flexibility was maintained in order to obtain new data on certain areas which may have not been previously considered. Each participant was asked about their organizations or enterprise, development processes, as well as about their relationships with the other actors of the place. Interview guides in Spanish are available from the authors upon request. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed in Spanish. Translation into English for analysis was done by one of the authors of this study, who is a native Spanish speaker. While a two-way professional translation is recommended for some qualitative studies, we discarded this option in light of the risk of losing the richness of context-specific accounts and social and cultural aspects, which were deemed central to our examination of rural places. Interview data were complemented and contrasted with secondary data, including the case files and other secondary data (among others support programmes, case reports, impact reports, national statistics), collected during the process of refining our sample for primary data collection.

### **Abductive data analysis**

Our abductive data analysis is divided into two parts: with inductive and deductive contributions. In our first inductive data analysis, we conducted a within-case analysis (Eisenhardt 1989). This involves an in-depth examination of each of the cases (communes), where unique insights are drawn from detailed case-level narratives (part of the case files) comprising both interview and secondary data. It allows for gaining familiarity with each of the cases and identifying early patterns for each of the contexts, before embarking on the systematic examination of generalized patterns across cases (Eisenhardt 1989). Subsequently, we conducted a cross-case comparative analysis focusing on contrasts and similarities across the 17 communities. Our coding was guided by explicit theoretical consideration, as portrayed in recent rural (place-based) entrepreneurship research (Anderson and Obeng 2017; McKeever, Jack, and Anderson 2015; Müller and Korsgaard 2018) and social geography literature (Harvey 1997; Cresswell 2013; Gieryn 2000). We focused specifically on the social and spatial processes that configure rural enterprising and the emergence and functioning of rural places. As such, we observed rural entrepreneurship places as both constructed and experienced, combining 'material ecological artefacts and an intricate networks of social relations' (Harvey 1997, 316).

We identified several patterns across the interview data, comprising, social, cultural and material elements. Several unique concepts started to emerge, such 'neighbours as trading partners', 'financial independence, freedom and feeling proud about being an entrepreneur', 'emergent

**Table 2.** Sample: geographical distribution and informants.

Rural Municipality	Location and support programme	Informants
	<b>Tocopilla</b> , Antofagasta Region Coast <i>Fortalecimiento de Barrios Comerciales</i>	4 EN: Food and Leisure 1 CR: Productive Development 2 CS: Prodesal
	<b>Taltal</b> , Antofagasta Region Coast <i>Fondepro</i>	4 EN: Collection and marketing of seafood 1 CR: Productive Development 2 CS: Small farmers 'trade association and Small farmers' trade association
	<b>Colina</b> , Metropolitan Region North <i>Captura de valor mediante gestión de innovación y redes público privadas NODO Colina-Lampa</i>	4 EN: Catering and Food 1 CR: Entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurship Centre) 2 CS: FOSIS and Prodesal
	<b>Peñalolén</b> , Metropolitan Region West <i>Nodo Conectando Peñalolén</i>	4 EN: Sewing, recycling and internet sales 1 CR: Entrepreneurship 2 CS: Fundes Latin America and Junus Centre
	<b>Machalí</b> , O'Higgins Region North <i>Competencias Emprendedoras y Herramientas para el Éxito</i>	4 EN: food, mechanical service, handicrafts 1 CR: productive development office 2 CS: Board of neighbours, women programme
	<b>Paine</b> , Metropolitan Region South <i>Fortaleciendo habilidades, redes empresariales y asociaciones productivas de emprendedores</i>	4 EN: Sewing, catering, food 1 CR: Jefas de Hogar, DIDECO 2 CS: Neighbouring Board and Ecological Community
	<b>Pichilemu</b> , O'Higgins Region Coast <i>Pensar en Grande</i>	4 EN: Food, Sawmill, Salinera and Tourism 1 CR: Self-consumption 2 CS: Neighbouring boards
	<b>Malloa</b> , O'Higgins Region Centre <i>Certificación emprendedores de Malloa</i>	4 EN: Food, agriculture and handicrafts 1 CR: Community development 2 CS: A group of artisans and FOSIS
	<b>Constitución</b> , Maule Region Coast <i>Ruta de las Caletas</i>	4 EN: Food and Tourism 1 CR: OMIL and Economic Development 2 CS: Fondo Esperanza and Acerca Redes
	<b>Linares</b> , Maule Region Centre <i>Programa Jefas de Hogar y Mujeres: Asociatividad y Emprendimiento</i>	4 EN: Food and aesthetics 1 CR: OMIL and Productive Development 2 CS: Prodesal, INDAP and Tourism Department
	<b>Hualqui</b> , Biobio Region Coast <i>Hualqui Emprende 2015</i>	4 EN: Furniture, liquor, food and tourism 1 CR: Local Economic Development 2 CS: Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Chamber of Commerce and Tourism

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Rural Municipality	Location and support programme	Informants
	<b>Curanilahue</b> , Biobio Region Coast <i>Arauco Activa</i>	4 EN: Retail sales, food and agriculture 1 CR: Local Development Unit (UDEL) 2 CS: Artistic grouping of artisans and Horticultural Committee
	<b>Puerto Saavedra</b> , Araucanía Region Coast <i>Meetup Trawün Network</i>	4 EN: Food and Tourism 1 CR: Tourism 2 CS: Udel and CORFO
	<b>Pucón</b> , Araucanía Region Mountain <i>Una buena idea</i>	4 EN: Food, telecommunications and IT 1 CR: Entrepreneurship Support 2 CS: Rural Development and Tourism
	<b>Cochamó</b> , Los Lagos Region Northern Patagonia <i>Yo Emprendo Semilla-Fosis</i>	4 EN: Agriculture and Tourism 1 CR: Department of Tourism 2 CS: Tourism Guild and Prodesal
	<b>Castro</b> , Los Lagos Region, Chiloé <i>Programa de Emprendimiento Local: Turismo, Servicios y Palafitos Castro</i>	4 EN: Food, agriculture and retail marketing 1 CR: Productive development 2 CS: Small producer groups
	<b>Coyhaique</b> , Aysén Southern Patagonia <i>Forjadores del Espíritu Emprendedor 2015</i>	4 EN: Food, Tourism, Gardening 1 CR: Productive Development 2 CS: Centre for business development, community commercial organization

EN = Entrepreneurs, CR = Council Representative, CS = Civil Society

associativity attracts interest of other actors', and "landscape and identity are related, and both attract new customers". We also noticed distinct concepts associated with nature and landscape, such as: "nature as raw (intangible) material" or "feeling proud about local landscape and natural attributes of the place". As the coding of social, cultural and material dimensions progressed, we refined the analysis by narrowing our categorizations and loosely grouping exploratory insights into first-level categories, such as "Neighbouring and informal trading networks", "relevance of local raw materials, machinery and processes" and "territorially-rooted skills and knowledge"; and also "uniqueness of biophysical features" or "landscape as source of business ideas". Figure 2 details the inductive progression from first-order categories to second-level themes, which then produce a first aggregate view of the distinct social, spatial and material dimensions that configure places for rural enterprising.

We certainly observed constraints and commonplaces, as informed by the entrepreneurs, local government officials and community members. This included elements highlighted by mainstream entrepreneurship ecosystems literature (thus not unique to rural entrepreneurship), such as access to venture capital or international markets, or irrelevant from a social geography standpoint, e.g. strategic alliances or supply chain management, which only appear in limited occasions. In such cases, the information was intentionally discarded or set aside for triangulation purposes.

In a second deductive stage, the inferred categories (Figure 2) and existing literature (Table 1) are considered in tandem (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013), whereby emergent ideas and extant

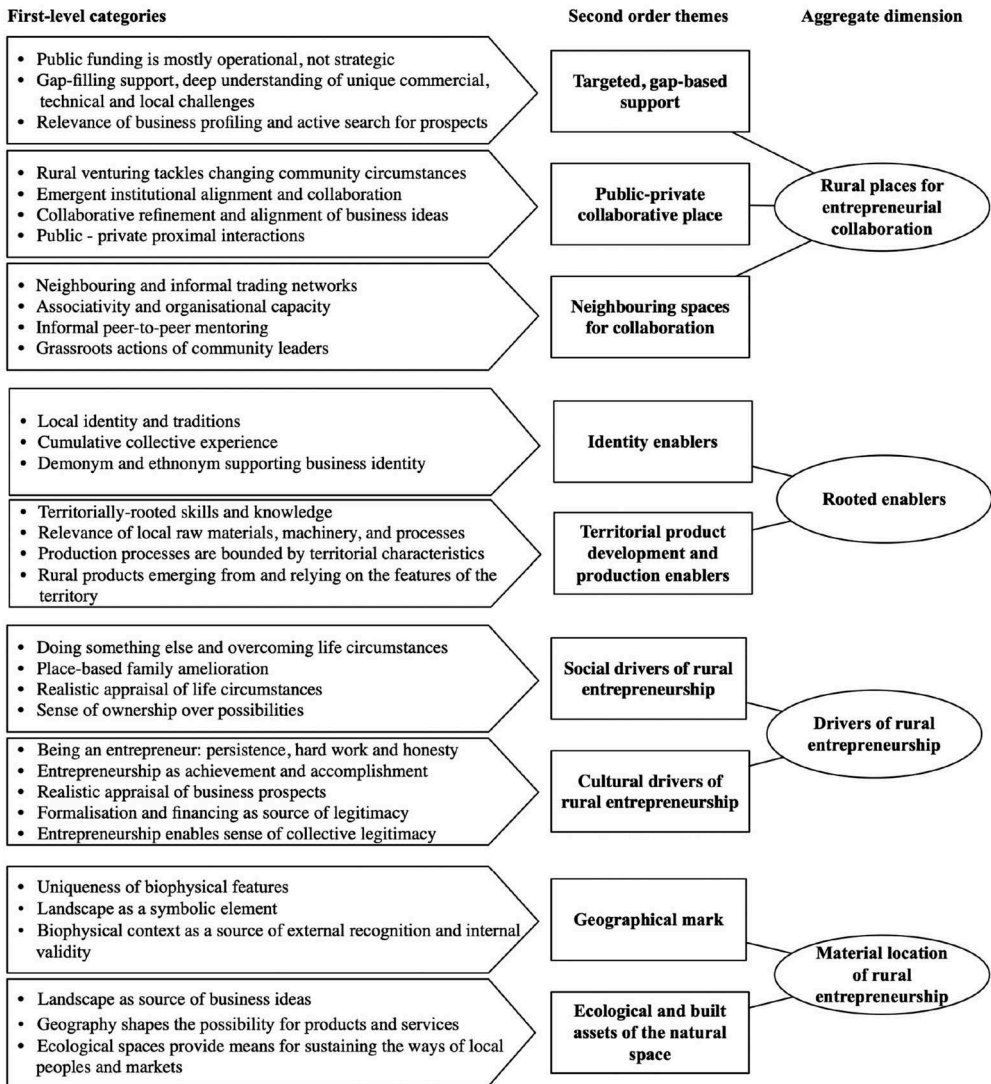


Figure 2. Inductive data structure.

concepts and frameworks are combined to uncover theoretical concepts that can be useful for both making sense of our data and facilitating conceptual development. This abductive approach (i.e. inductive than deductive) to theorising and conceptual development is particularly useful when emerging constructs and relationships are not yet well articulated in the literature (Poole et al. 2000). It enabled us to make sense and (re)contextualise the phenomena within a set of ideas (Hlady Rispal and Jouison Laffitte 2014).

As a creative process of producing new theoretical understanding, abductive development relies on finding natural affinities between the observed social realities and previous theories or solutions (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). In our effort to systematically combine insights with extant evidence, we deconstructed the four main dimensions and emergent attributes and searched for relevant matching theories and frameworks within our domains of reference, capable of complementing our inductive findings.

As emphasised in our delineation of shortcomings, our analytical process intentionally departs from current normative models (e.g. Stam 2015; Audretsch and Belitski 2016) towards a more place-sensitive

understanding and conceptualisation of the phenomenon. We draw on Spigel (2017) relational view to emphasise that entrepreneurial places should be understood more as a conceptual umbrella capable of accommodating different perspectives of entrepreneurship and place, rather than a coherent theory about the emergence of communities of 'disruptive' entrepreneurs. In consequence, for our conceptual development we observe our inductive inferences through the lens of *place* as elaborated by social geographers (Cresswell 2013). The place for rural entrepreneurship is then understood as an open arena of action and experience, involving a rich and complex interaction between human and physical characteristics of places and particular entrepreneurial dynamics.

In Cresswell (2013) view, there are multiple determinations that contribute to place, namely: locale, sense of place, and geographic location (Agnew 1987; Cresswell 2013). These constitute at the same time the process of becoming a place, because as Harvey (1997) points out 'places are constructed and experienced as material ecological artefacts and intricate networks of social relations'. The results from the systematic combining of inductively- and deductively derived insights are presented in Table 3. The table shows the conceptual development undertaken in the abductive analysis, providing a summary of the inductively derived analysis from our interviews which is complemented and elaborated through a deductive analysis of extant rural enterprise literature, which collectively set the basis for the development of our findings and framework.

## Research findings: rural entrepreneurship in place

In the following, we elaborate on the main findings of the abductive analysis. We provide an overview of the four inferred dimensions in Figure 2 and further elaborated in Table 3, supported by textual and visual evidence (Table 4).

### *The biophysical place of rural entrepreneurship: the role of the material location*

The recognition and use of the unique biophysical features of the place set up geographical marks, which when leveraged alongside the other social and cultural components of rural capital, permits attracting new customers (particularly in touristic rural areas) and also grants collective legitimacy. The perceived relevance of geographical marks emphasises the role and relevance of the material location of rural entrepreneurship, which partially explains the importance of attracting people (customers) to the community, rather than trying to access external markets with rural products.

In Chiloé, for example, the material components of the environment, both natural (e.g. Chiloé National Park), and built (e.g. traditional stilt houses), provide support for social and cultural activities to take place and also enable meaning and the preservation of traditions and values. The *Minga* in Chiloé, for instance, is an ancient Chilotan tradition that consists in the collaborative transportation of stilt houses through the islands and channels from one area of the Archipelago to another, using oxen and logs when in land and moored to a boat or buoys when at sea (see Table 5). The *Minga* is only possible given the unique combination of built and cultural resources, enabled by nature.

This *biophysical place of rural entrepreneurship* pertains to the physical setting of place and is comprised of *landscape imprinting*, *rural natural capital* and *rural built assets*. In the context of rural entrepreneurship, the material attributes of a place include those elements with a tangible presence in the region supporting and shaping new business creation. These are the imprinting effect of the landscape, and the centrality of nature and extant rural built assets as key enablers supporting new business creation. For its biophysical nature, Bosworth (2012) highlights that for many rural businesses, nature and built environment are at the heart of their activity. Therefore, the physical features of rural contexts represent important aspects of any rural place.

Places are a 'compilation of things and objects' but are also 'worked by people' (Gieryn 2000), which means that they are constructed but also impose a material effect which can constrain or enable action. It is here that the physical geography, topography, and ecology become central in understanding the role of the natural and/or built environment with the rural place (Guthey, Whiteman, and Elmes 2014). The





Table 3. Conceptual convergence.

Inductive contribution	Deductive contribution	Derived dimension
<p><b>Rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Institutional assistance</li> <li>● Institutions regionally defined</li> <li>● Rural governance</li> </ul>	<p>Localised institutional support</p>	<p><b>Rural entrepreneurial dynamics</b></p>
<p>Public-private collaborative place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaborative places for advancing rural enterprises</li> <li>● Place-sensitive trading</li> </ul>	
<p>Neighbouring places for collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Joint business practices and community goals</li> <li>● Mutuality and interdependence</li> <li>● Economic systems as social processes</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Rooted enablers</b></p> <p>Identity enablers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identity positioning</li> <li>● Meaning of place</li> <li>● Entrepreneurship and identity of place</li> <li>● Resource (re)configuration</li> <li>● Categorising of rural products</li> </ul>	<p><b>Entrepreneurial sense of rurality</b></p>
<p>Territorial production enablers</p>	<p>Cultural positioning</p> <p>Territorial embeddedness</p> <p>Place-sensitive products</p>	
<p><b>Drivers of rural entrepreneurship</b></p> <p>Social drivers of rural entrepreneurship</p> <p>Cultural drivers of rural entrepreneurship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rural fabric</li> <li>● Community as beneficiary</li> <li>● Cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship</li> <li>● Stories of rural entrepreneurship</li> </ul>	<p><b>Entrepreneurial rural locale</b></p>
<p><b>Material location of rural entrepreneurship</b></p> <p>Geographical mark</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nature at the core</li> <li>● Integration of material dimensions of place into practices and processes</li> <li>● Materiality of place</li> <li>● Countryside capital</li> <li>● Ecological embeddedness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Biophysical place of rural entrepreneurship</b></p>
<p>Natural assets</p>	<p>Landscape imprinting</p> <p>Rural natural capital</p> <p>Rural built assets</p>	



Table 4. Data supporting interpretations.

Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration
<i>Targeted, gap-based support</i> Public funding is mostly operational, not strategic	Generally, the projects are developed by the very same entrepreneurs. We only help, for example, with their applications to Sercotec. You know they have to apply online, we give them the guidelines and how to do it, we cannot do the project [Manager, tourist office dependent on the City of Linares]
Gap-filling support, deep understanding of unique commercial, technical and local challenges	As a municipality, there was an instance was to see if we could support both urban and rural people. Suddenly there were formalized businesses and many potential projects but there are many sources of external financing that people do not have knowledge of in rural areas. So, the idea is to inform the community the wide range of funding sources there. Mainly it's through programs Sercotec, INDAP, FOSIS, embassies, ministries. [Community Development Manager, Castro]
Relevance of business profiling and active search for prospects	...and also through the OTEC (training office) and everything that has to do with promotion (of entrepreneurship), we are gathering all the information that comes to us and as I said, creating the databases of people who are currently developing some sort interesting and attractive (business) activities [Municipality official, Hualqui]
<i>Public-private collaborative place</i> Rural venturing tackles changing community circumstances	Well, (this starts) many years ago, it must be about 18 years ago, when this was a dirt road, there was no light, there was no water, there was nothing...there was nothing to buy, nothing, absolutely nothing, then I am a very restless person...I started with a small shop... I began to offering eggs, vegetables, medicines, everything. That is how I started. Then I opened a bakery, then a bed and breakfast, all using a petrol generator. This is in the coast, so it became a really touristic place. Then the 2010 Tsunami came and I lost everything, so I had to start everything again [Entrepreneur, Constitución]
Emergent institutional alignment and coordination	We are working with the chamber of commerce and tourism, a lot of information exchange with the municipality and vice-versa, this is joint work. Also with the neighbours and sectoral associations representing the different rural areas, we have a working group called Cultivando Sueños (seeding dreams). We get together once a month to develop new ideas and actions [Municipality official, Hualqui]
Collaborative refinement and alignment of business ideas	In this 'ecosystem' it is extremely important for entrepreneurs who have an institution that is made for them, because if it were not for the Entrepreneurship Centre, I think people would continue with the same idea: we would be entrepreneurs without training. Perhaps with ambitions, but a little limited [Entrepreneur (local shop), Colina]
Private-public proximal interactions	Well to me what has most benefited me is the support it has given me and Paula. Mainly because of information about fairs and financial support for travel. They are always in contact with me, always they are telling me everything is being done at national level and that to me is great [Entrepreneur, Castro]
<i>Neighbouring places for collaboration</i> Neighbouring and informal trading networks	The first customers we had... we are now bigger, but the first, first ones were our neighbours here in the district of Saavedra [Seafood Entrepreneur, Puerto Saavedra]
Associativity and organizational capacity	My neighbours are my clients, (they) share my business with me [Cheese entrepreneur, Linares] Our organisation gathers around 22 fishermen, all ladies devoted to fishing, married to fishermen. When we first started, we began by building really small houses, shacks, we gathered the materials and built them ourselves. We stay like that for two years and then we realised that this initiative could become a project, and through the project we realised we could do more, new resources started to arrive, in one way or the other, people looking for ways to help us. [Hospitality Entrepreneur, Puerto Saavedra]
Informal peer-to-peer mentoring	The strength that we have is, as I said before, this coalition, we are pushing all together to the same side, this is the first time we are united [Seafood Entrepreneur, Talital]

(Continued)



Table 4. (Continued).

Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration
Grassroots actions of community leaders	<p>An entrepreneurship ecosystem here Colima? I think that is in the heart of the mayor. For years I talked to him personally about trying something. Then eventually I discovered that he had an idea .. the Entrepreneurship Centre was created and I think it is a platform for many entrepreneurs, I have seen here a parade of entrepreneurs from different areas [<i>Entrepreneur neighbourhood store, Colima</i>]</p>
Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: rooted enablers
<i>Identity enablers</i>	
Local identity and traditions	<p>I believe that one of the great advantages is that all the concepts of rurality are kept here despite the proximity we have with Concepción. Then people try to rescue their traditions, rurality, products from the countryside or from "creole" crafts, which in the end is an attractive element, considering that we belong to the Great Pencilopolitan and that we are the only rural commune that today is inserted in this plan [<i>Municipality officer, Hualqui</i>]</p>
Cumulative collective experience	<p>As here in Taltal there are ten unions (sharing history), so that idea was to create a business to be able to sell sea products, because Taltal is not only Taltal, so that's why we came up with an agreement to do the business together and be able to export seaweed and sell seafood (together) [<i>Seafood Entrepreneur, Taltal</i>]</p>
Demonym and ethnonym supporting product and business .. identity	<p>when the idea began in my head, I was thinking that I always wanted to give the hualquina identity. Because I am hualquina I fuss over this identity. I do cultural work here in Hualqui and that is what interests me [<i>Wheat Entrepreneur, Hualqui</i>]</p>
<i>Territorial product development and production enablers</i>	
Territorially-rooted skills and knowledge	<p>Well I live in the countryside, I live in a small farm, it has a lot of raw materials. A lot of fruit trees, so I came up with an idea... innovative jams, trying new flavours every day, because here in Linares, they are only very traditional jams... so I have from mosqueta (rosehips), because here it is everywhere but no one uses it. Well, and other fruits that one can use to create new (jam) flavours. Even now I'm trying with aloe vera to start making aloe vera jam, yes, because these are jams that nobody makes. And I have made (jams) from italian pumpkin, spanish pumpkin, banana, mosqueta, rhubarb, fruits that are not well-known [<i>Jam entrepreneur, Linares</i>]</p> <p>Relevance of local raw materials, machinery, and processes ... I get the wheat from here (Hualqui), following the idea of natural food, with a farmer from this very same area, so that (the wheat) is not so 'contaminated' [<i>Wheat Entrepreneur, Hualqui</i>]</p>
Production processes are bounded by territorial characteristics	<p>Rari's Crin production process [<i>Crin entrepreneur, Linares</i>]*                      I am a native of this town, I currently live in Constitución and I have everything here that I need to process the products ..I manufacture crunchy snacks of cochayuyo. There are more or less 200 products that are being made in flour, sea salt and other spices [<i>Gourmet Seafood Entrepreneur, Constitución</i>]</p>



Hualqui

(Continued)







Table 4. (Continued).

Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration
Rural products emerging from and relying on the features of the territory	There are various products based on seaweed, cochayuyo coffee and jams with flavours. There are also a number of products that are being made on the basis of algae.. We take the raw material, process it, transform it and deliver it so that it can be used in various preparations of dishes, pasta, sweet or salty dishes and/or soups. <i>[Gourmet Seafood Entrepreneur, Constitución]</i>
Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: drivers of rural entrepreneurship
<b>Social drivers of rural entrepreneurship</b>	
Doing something else and overcoming life circumstances	Well, I started 18 years ago, after giving birth to my third son and he has special needs... you can understand that money was not enough. He went through surgery, which was \$11 million pesos, so we were shattered. So, I started selling cheese, my husband was my first client (smiles). (It has been) slow process, 18 years of hard work... 8 years ago I made my first 1 million pesos. Now I have coolers, special containers... <i>[Cheese entrepreneur, Linares]</i>
Place-based family amelioration	These are personal achievements, because the family is united, because we all take part. If we had to go to two (local) fairs in the same weekend, my son goes to one and I take the other one, so that allows me to stay at home, I was working non-stop so I decided to try to do something (about it) and stay here (at home) and it has worked really well <i>[Entrepreneur, Hualqui]</i>
Realistic appraisal of life circumstances	Look, maybe if I were more ambitious, because there are many, many people who buy (wheat) coffee, I could have developed some kind of project to be able to do it more industrially, but (given the circumstances, <i>read quote above</i> ) so far, I am very pleased with what this has given me <i>[Entrepreneur, Hualqui]</i>
Sense of ownership over life circumstances	...one thing that always starts to happen, you have problems, or have fears to undertake the business. And he encouraged us, him and Don Jorge Reyes who worked at Funda, which is Foundation for Regional Development. We began to feel optimistic and we understood what we had to do, what not to do and why not to do it <i>[Entrepreneur tourist service, Coyhaique]</i>
<b>Cultural drivers of rural entrepreneurship</b>	
Being an entrepreneur: persistence, hard work and honesty	Well, usually in the country rural people have merits, it is multifaceted. They are hardworking people, they all have very strong feelings and emotions for the place. The issue is that we must find the most appropriate ways for them, so that they can do what they can. But their virtues are that they all have a strong feeling for their area. <i>(Individual responsible for healthy food program and self-provision of food, Pichilemu).</i>
Entrepreneurship as achievement and accomplishment	Well, you have to put some (effort), because you cannot wait they will give you everything, because otherwise, it does not worth it. It has to be difficult, that is how you end up appreciating things <i>[Tourism Entrepreneur, Coyhaique]</i>
Realistic appraisal of business prospects	...at first, I started to produce honey, to put it in drums of 200 kilos and to give it to the exporters who come here to Chiloé to buy honey. But soon after I realized that what I do is work and they are left with the profit <i>[Honey Entrepreneur, Castro]</i>
Formalisation and financing as source of legitimacy	People have a little fear of formalisation, that's why I told you that we are going to be directly involved in this next year because we believe that this is where people today need to dare and can start to act in a more independent way. Considering that they already have the experience and the guidelines that the whole municipality has given them so that they can advance individually and can grow much more than if they were not formalized <i>[Local Development Office, Hualqui]</i>
Entrepreneurship enables sense of collective legitimacy	Our main strength is that (as entrepreneurs) we are united, we work together pushing in the same direction... that is the main thing ... we are banded together <i>[Entrepreneur, Linares]</i>
Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: material location of rural entrepreneurship
<b>Geographical mark</b>	
Uniqueness of biophysical features	...the idea is for Maule to get known and valued by people (tourists), especially the coastal area and the trails, dunes, wetlands, lighthouses, coasts and also some mountain trails, all focused on people who do not like, or do not want to or cannot walk long distances, and for that we have vehicles that are appropriate for all types of terrain, vehicles that are entertaining, safe and fun <i>[Tourism entrepreneur, Constitución]</i>

(Continued)



Table 4. (Continued).

Themes and categories	Representative quotes/visual evidence: rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration
Landscape as a symbolic element	<p>I own a place called La Lobada, a really nice view, the sea, the river and the mountains. There is another part nearby called Cerro La Ballena, and there are Larch, Chilean myrtle and you also get to see the volcanos, the sea, the river and the mountains. I built a trekking trail between La Lobada and Cerro La Ballena, it takes like five hours, and then I started looking for tourists [Entrepreneur, Cochamo]</p>
Biophysical context as enabler and constraint	<p>Well, first of all I have the privilege of living in a countryside (Patagonia), I live here with my family and we decided to build a quincho (barbecue house), because the place is beautiful, I have access to the river and we made it in the back garden, that was like the beginning, because people go fishing in the river and I was waiting for them with roasts, casserole, coffee, tea, mate tea and the whole thing started to grow, so we decided to develop it further the quincho and then then camping site, down to the river [Tourism entrepreneur, Coyhaique]</p>
<p><i>Ecological and built assets of the natural space</i> Landscape as source of business ideas</p>	<p>...our commune has a strong potential, it is the landscape, this is where all the (business) ideas are being born, and the entrepreneurs grow [Tourism support, Municipality of Puerto Saavedra]</p>
Geography shapes the possibility for products and services	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">     </div>
Ecological spaces provide means for sustaining the ways of local peoples and markets	<p>The Minga in Chiloé Our ecological systems are damaged in Chiloé, we still have lots of native forest, but people make mistakes. Unlike the continent, in our island we don't have normal seasons, our only reservoirs of natural water are the swamps. Eucalyptus is a tree that, I do not know, consumes 100 to 150 liters of water per day. And people, to make quick profits, planted as many eucalyptus as possible, to sell it as firewood and now we are suffering the consequences of massive droughts...and we (Chiloé entrepreneurs) rely on nature [Honey entrepreneur, Chiloé]</p>

\* Naranjo, 2010

**Table 5.** REFLECT: framework details.

Determination	Dimension	Description
Rural entrepreneurial dynamics	Localised institutional support	Localised stage-wise programmes that provide support through training and direct funding or remove barriers to the creation of new businesses.
	Collaborative places for advancing rural enterprises	Social places for collaboration between private and public sector actors, aimed at supporting the development of rural businesses
	Place-sensitive trading	Local markets, opportunities, and trade infrastructure (local and external), which facilitate the dissemination and sale of local products and services.
Entrepreneurial sense of rurality	Cultural positioning	Cultural construction and collective understanding of the rural cultural place in relation to entrepreneurial behaviour
	Territorial embeddedness	Social and economic imprint of the home territory, which enable and constrain territorially-bounded entrepreneurial activities
	Place-sensitive products	Product development process influenced by cultural and territorial embeddedness, with minimal processing or value adding activity occurring outside of the local rural area
Entrepreneurial rural locale	Social locale of rural entrepreneurship	Set of informal rules, particular to the rural area, that facilitate or restrict the relationship and work between actors.
	Cultural locale of rural entrepreneurship	Shared beliefs and convictions about entrepreneurship in relation to individual and collective circumstances in a certain rural area
Biophysical place of rural entrepreneurship	Landscape imprinting	Distinct biophysical features of the rural area that imprint the social and commercial activities of the ecosystem
	Rural natural capital	Distinct biophysical resources of the rural area that facilitate the creation of new rural businesses
	Rural built assets	Distinct local assets, tangible and perceived, enough to facilitate the creation of new businesses

relevance of the territory in the shaping up of the spatial context goes far beyond the emotional (or even mystical) connection to roots and traditions. The biophysical place gives substance to the rural fabric, sustaining the ways of local peoples and markets.

### ***Entrepreneurial rural locale: drivers of rural entrepreneurship***

Through our analyses, we uncovered two types of drivers in rural entrepreneurship, comprising the social fabric and cultural locale of rural entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship in rural areas normally emerges out of necessity and/or as an extension of the current commercial activity or occupation; as a result, wanting to “do something else”, “overcome circumstances” or in reaction to (nonconformity with) current terms of trade imposed by larger buyers. We observe that these more pragmatic set of drivers are accompanied by a desire for independence and freedom, and a deep consideration of perseverance, hard work and honesty, which our interviewees link to personal and family amelioration. Entrepreneurship by itself gives them the chance to channel and materialize those values and “being an entrepreneur” becomes a symbol of achievement and accomplishment. This, in turn, increases the sense of individual and family legitimacy, vis-a-vis the community, the municipality (as an intermediary between the individual and external constituencies) and regional trading structures. Perceived external recognition seems to reach maturity with the formalization and financing of the rural business. The latter, by themselves, are symbols of accomplishment as they represent having overcome both business and personal barriers. Interestingly, the attitude towards entrepreneurship and decision-making is based on a rather concrete and realistic assessment of current and future needs, which differs from what is normally observed in more traditional start-ups where growth expectations and temporal scales are in many cases over-optimistic (Lowe and Ziedonis 2006).

In transitioning from self-employment to entrepreneurship, privately owned and local resources, though limited, play a central role as it enables local entrepreneurs to develop a sense of ownership over the possibilities ahead. Interestingly, while the lack of resources may pose restrictions to

traditional entrepreneurship, being able to use limited resources and ameliorate circumstances in rural areas is a sign of skilfulness and achievement, which enables legitimacy.

Thus, *entrepreneurial rural locale* pertains thus the set of *social* and *cultural* determinants of rural entrepreneurship, as related to the particular place the activity takes place (Guthey, Whiteman, and Elmes 2014). It involves the material setting for social relations, where people conduct their lives as individuals (Agnew 1987), the resources acquired through the rural social networks, as well as the cultural constructions (i.e. underlying beliefs and outlooks about entrepreneurship within a particular rural community) and collective understanding of the rural place in relation to entrepreneurial behaviour. This draws together ideas that formal business apparatus such as access to finance remains relevant (Baker, Gedajlovic, and Lubatkin 2005) but it must be complemented by ideas that underpin rural life and notions of 'rural fabric', which in Garrod, Wornell, and Youell (2006) view is the lifeblood of rural businesses, in particular, tourism. This mirrors similar findings from Meccheri and Pelloni (2006), who argue that the ideas behind human capital and its accumulation (e.g. University training) may have limited applicability in rural contexts and that institutions would be wise not to tie themselves to pre-conceived notions of what entrepreneurship support looks like.

### ***Entrepreneurial sense of rurality: rooted enablers***

We identified two types of enablers supporting the emergence of rural businesses: identity-related enablers and production enablers, both rooted in the territory. The mixture of local identity and place-based knowledge and skills plays a central role in the formation of rural businesses. It stems from a deep territorial identification and explicit recognition of the natives or the ethically dominant group of the place, thus involving a valorisation of the demonym and in some cases the ethnonym. Territorial embeddedness, demonym and ethnonym have proven central in the development of rural products and enterprises, and also in the way the place as a whole is being shaped by commercial activities. These activities originate not only from local identity and traditions but also from cumulative collective experience related to having developed businesses as a collective, based on shared cultural and natural resources.

The rural entrepreneurs interviewed actively search for and value local raw materials, machinery and production processes. This results from a combination of internal drivers and external pressures linked to the natural restrictions imposed by distance and access to external networks. This combination of factors favours the emergence and predominance of products with minimal processing or value adding activity occurring outside of the rural area. In Linares, for example, the Rari community has grown around *Crin Craftsmanship* (Horsehair Crafts) for more than 250 years using a unique weaving technique involving only local raw materials, machinery, and production processes. The (real) crin weaving technique (horsehair selection, cleaning, drying, dyeing, designing, and knitting) is only known by locals, who believe it all began when a local woman noticed how the roots of the trees were woven while swimming in the Rari river. Despite being a 1,300 people village in the Andean foothills, Rari has been recognised as a 'living human treasure' and a major cultural heritage in the country.

*Entrepreneurial sense of rurality* constitutes then the interpretation, meanings, and 'structure of feeling' associated with a place (Guthey, Whiteman, and Elmes 2014) which we identify as having three dimensions of *cultural positioning*, *territorial embeddedness* and *place-sensitive products*. In Agnew (1987) view, sense of the place involves the emotional and subjective attachment people have to place, as well as the particular historical, cultural, political, communitarian, and organisational aspects enabling the development of rural products and businesses. In rural areas, local identity, traditions, history, territorially rooted skills and knowledge are the main drivers of entrepreneurship. They provide guidelines for entrepreneurial activity and inspire action. Consequently, business ideas tend to result from previous collective experience mirroring the identity of the area as a whole, rather than of a particular communal organization. Drawing from Berglund, Gaddefors, and Lindgren (2015) our findings (and subsequent theorising) bring these ideas together by

emphasizing the role of *cultural positioning* in local development, where identities and traditions end up demystifying the flawed idea that development can be fostered by simply imitating successful and rich regions.

Alongside cultural positioning, our findings highlight the community as a social form embedded in the territory (*territorial embeddedness*), which is recognised as a guide and ultimate beneficiary of the enterprise; whose progress may or may not be aligned with the business idea. This is relevant because the entrepreneurial process can be modified in line with or in pursuit of community objectives, which in turn facilitates the emergence of new business opportunities, forms of development and place-sensitive products. This resonates with McKeever, Jack, and Anderson (2015), who, for example, found that entrepreneurs in two different communities of Ireland engaged in key exchange relationships with the local community to not only advance their ventures but also to support local community development. We argue that a deeper consideration of these elements would enable the design and development of more appropriate, place-sensitive strategies and support mechanisms for each rural context.

### ***Entrepreneurial dynamics: rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration***

Through our analysis, we identified three types of *rural places for entrepreneurial collaboration*: one enabling formal and informal private–public interactions, one that fosters collaboration by opening up neighbouring places and a third one focusing on providing targeted institutional support, based on the unique challenges faced by the entrepreneurs. In terms of private-public collaborative places, we distinguish four mechanisms: i. rural venturing as a way of tackling changing community circumstances; ii. emergent institutional alignment; iii. collaborative refinement of business ideas, and iv. proximate interactions.

This diversity of place-sensitive support mechanisms – *localised institutional support* – is recognized and valued by the actors of the place. In terms of business development and training, actors highlight the relevance of having mechanisms in place for the active search and selection of entrepreneurs within the municipalities. Maintaining a directory of (aspiring) entrepreneurs and their particular circumstances contributes to shaping and improving opportunities. In this sense, once central funds or subsidies become available, municipalities are in a better position to search and profile potential enterprises much more efficiently. As evidenced, funding in this context is contingent upon availability of funds and programmes. Consequently, the profiling of business ideas follows a similar logic; it is collaborative in nature and mostly aimed at aligning business ideas with extant rural capital, improving financial viability and meeting requirements for receiving subsidies or public funds. This proves not to be a problem in itself because business ideas evolve in a process of experimentation and learning, where the entrepreneur tests out alternatives in the face of changing and challenging circumstances, including changes in the sources of funding and to the original business idea. Despite its relevance, diversification and specialization of support mechanisms can also become counterproductive, as it creates unstructured and overlapped flows of information.

Coordination across formal institutions is then valued and emergent, yet still unstructured. It tends to reside and rely on the grassroots actions of rural community leaders. This is the only way, it is argued, for the information to reach audiences in an organized way. However, when these instances are exacerbated, interviewees feel that valuable resources are wasted in celebrating the (idea of) ‘culture of entrepreneurship’, rather than invested in the ventures themselves.

The efficiency of institutional support relies mostly on the frequency of individual interactions and the level of knowledge and involvement of public officials (responsible for promoting entrepreneurship and productive development) in the nascent businesses. They play a central role in sustaining the intention and confidence of entrepreneurs, in the profiling of business ideas and subsequent growth. In the same vein, actors emphasize the relevance of closeness, empathy and continuity of municipal employees (enabling public – private proximal interactions), as well as of



the level of awareness regarding local social and economic circumstances. Municipality-based programmes tend to be more focused on both relevant industries and specific geographic areas, opening up business opportunities and responding more effectively to business-related collective needs, including the promotion of both emergent industries and the region as a whole.

Through our analyses, we also identified two types of neighbouring *places for collaboration*: emerging trading networks and communal partnerships. Rural businesses are normally focused on serving the local area by establishing local value chains. Business networks emerge mainly around extant rural capital and main area of expertise, lacking communication and interaction with other businesses outside the industry of reference. Within it, emerging networks of neighbours play a central role as initial suppliers and buyers, providing aspiring rural entrepreneurs a rapid access to informal trading networks (e.g. local fairs), which counteracts the lack of diversity within business networks. These neighbouring networks are instrumental only to the extent they contribute to the dissemination of products and services, since neighbours act not only as initial suppliers and customers, but also as main promoters of the business and its products (i.e. neighbouring).

Beyond trading, we observe a second level of collaboration that involves associations and non-operational business networks, for example, informal chambers of commerce. Within rural areas, such associativity and organizational capacity are seen as a major strength, enabling legitimacy and even a sense of higher status, as it increases the visibility of the place and its businesses. Associativity and networking are primarily informal in both organizational form and processes. This is due not only to the lack of knowledge of business networks articulation, but also to the absence of specialized technical support, which reduces the chances of generating a critical mass of actors and associativity. In this context, the interviewees stress the relevance of professionalization and coordination within emerging partnerships, instances that can be articulated by third sector actors.

Despite the relevance of neighbouring, partnerships and communal living, communal networks and civil society organizations do not play an active role in the development of rural businesses. Their operational role is peripheral at best, providing social and physical places that facilitate early associativity in the process of business creation, mostly within established value chains. However, the community, as a social and cultural construction, becomes a key point of reference and the ultimate recipient of entrepreneurial efforts. In a limited number of cases, we observed informal peer-to-peer mentoring mechanisms in later stages of business development. Although these are not systematic and widespread activities, they have proven central in the formalization process of rural entrepreneurs, speeding up learning curves, which is required for rapid access to more formal trading networks. Large companies in the area also play a peripheral role in the development of new rural businesses, despite the presence of CSR practices and the perceived relevance of main industries such as mining, forestry, salmon in the Antofagasta, Bio Bio and Los Lagos regions, respectively. While entrepreneurs and other stakeholders emphasize the relevance of building more profound links with large companies, beyond CSR, we observe that rural entrepreneurial places emerge and flourish regardless.

As a final building block, *rural entrepreneurial dynamics* comprise localised institutional support, collaborative places and place-sensitive trading. Localised institutional support, in the context of the rural entrepreneurship, refers to the set of formal and informal rules which materialize locally, such as entrepreneurial programmes and a well-aligned institutional membrane, which may include support services and facilities, policy and governance, and markets. In our context of interest, institutions offer primary support to entrepreneurial activity.

How institutions support and complement pre-existing social and cultural attributes in a place-sensitive manner would seem critical for the development of the rural entrepreneurial place. As a result of the diversity and intermittent nature of public funding, we argue that coordinated, context-specific and stage-wise support is instrumental for the effective functioning of the rural entrepreneurship place. It requires laddered financial and non-financial support, in line with the distinct steps of rural endeavours characterised, for example, by long periods of informality. In

particular, funding support should accompany the rural enterprise in a process of continuous collaboration where the entrepreneur and the funder “move forward together in stages”. In the interviewees’ view, this can be articulated by the municipality or third sector organisations as the main links between the government and the communities. The collaborative work may enable multi-level inter-agency partnerships, which considers not only financing, but also mentoring and support.

Rural entrepreneurial dynamics also involve the development of collaborative places for advancing rural enterprising. Through instances of interpersonal connection between entrepreneurs and public officials, the municipalities become ‘part of their venture’, accelerating learning and increasing the likelihood of receiving support, as these interpersonal interactions facilitate the introduction and success of applications for support and funding (Meccheri and Pelloni 2006). This is central as the overemphasis in some local communities on closed communication and collaboration networks with business partners from within the value chain, rather than with other actors within the place, diminishes the possibility of taking advantage, more systemically, of the existing rural capital. At the same time, such narrow scope keeps in existence the constraining dichotomy between (national and international) external and local trading networks.

As with trading networks, partnerships require formalization and self-regulation despite their emergent nature, as it enables legitimacy and access to external support infrastructures. For the effective functioning of such partnerships, the rural place requires joint communication channels between public bodies and the users, alongside a transparent relationship between the municipality and other trade organizations. Having a large number of resources distributed by multiple agencies is positive to the extent it assists the various stages of the process. If the resources are focused simultaneously on, for example, acquisition of equipment, it reduces the possibility of actually strengthening local economies through entrepreneurship.

In rural areas, learning and the strengthening of social capital tend to occur through informal processes (e.g. peer mentoring) that influence the behaviour and decisions of rural entrepreneurs. Such processes are central to the development of entrepreneurial skills because they allow people to realise by themselves what opportunities exist, and realistically appraise the circumstances involved in the creation and operation of businesses in the area (Meccheri and Pelloni 2006).

## Discussion

In this paper, we asked: *under what distinct conditions does entrepreneurship flourish in rural contexts?* We argued that agglomeration-oriented approaches and particularly the entrepreneurial ecosystems lens, commonly applied in entrepreneurship research, are fundamentally problematic in the context of rural entrepreneurship because of the focus (and definitions) of high impact, high growth, innovative ventures. Rural entrepreneurship research seems to provide parts of the puzzle but does not have the necessary meso-level holistic perspective of an ecosystems approach to build a detailed picture. In this paper, we aimed to fill this lacuna by drawing inferences from interview data, linking to the wider social geography and rural entrepreneurship literature to develop a contextualised understanding of rural entrepreneurship places.

We have seen how the ecosystems perspective has sought to provide a more fine-grained understanding of the relationship between institutions and individual entrepreneurs at a macro-level (Acs, Autio, and Szerb 2014). It has been argued that such a systems-led approach helps unpack the relationship between institutional pillars (Scott 2013) and entrepreneurial ‘readiness’ (Schillo, Persaud, and Jin 2016), but in reality, they fail to consider entrepreneurs as parts of the place in the sense that they are still treated as passive outcome of the institutional environment they are embedded in (Stam 2015).

While relevant, such approaches underplay the role that socio-political, cultural, historical and material elements play within a particular spatial context, which is more prominent in rural areas. Our findings shed light on this issue by bringing human action and interactions to the fore in deep

connection to the dynamics (social and material), features and history of the place, which explain more in detail how rural entrepreneurs and other actors can be encouraged to assume the uncertainty of initiating and financing new businesses.

In this respect, a socio-spatial lens seemed more appropriate for understanding the underlying the distinct conditions for flourishing rural entrepreneurship, building on the growing emphasis on contextualised entrepreneurship in literature (Welter 2011). We argue that ecosystems literature provides a reductionist view of the many and complex circumstances driving entrepreneurship in rural contexts in a way that a (socio-spatial) context lens is able to ascertain. We believe our findings (and derived theorisation) tackle directly this unresolved issue in the entrepreneurship literature, contributing to the debate by reconciling, under one place-sensitive umbrella, previous efforts aimed at characterizing and explaining rural entrepreneurship from distinct units of analysis (e.g. Kalantaridis and Bika 2016; Berglund, Gaddefors, and Lindgren 2015; Meccheri and Pelloni 2006; Anderson and Obeng 2017; Anderson and Jack 2002).

### ***Towards an integrated framework***

Figure 3 and Table 5 articulate our findings in the form of a meso-level integrated framework comprising 4 determinations and 11 enabling dimensions characterising a multi-layered rural entrepreneurial place. We label our integrated framework REFLECT: *Rural Entrepreneurship Framework for Localised Economic and Communal Thriving*.

REFLECT allows for observing and analysing the structure and dynamics within such places and sets the basis for further developments including indicators and proxies for measurement and assessment. Given the embedded nature of the four determinations, our presentation of the framework follows a bottom-up logic, starting with the basal building block of biophysical space, followed by rural locale, sense of place and finally entrepreneurial rural dynamics.

### ***Contributions***

Our work makes three specific contributions to the literature. First, we derive and elaborate on an integrated framework – REFLECT – to analyse and further foster entrepreneurship in rural areas. Our framework (Figure 3) emphasises that contexts are a multi-level interactional place. Similar to the relational view of ecosystems (Spigel 2017) entrepreneurs interact with these layers, such as places for collaboration or the biophysical space, in a number of different ways. Whilst research does explain context as having multiple layers such as social, spatial, temporal and institutional (Welter 2011), we propose the notion that within a spatial context we can also see such layers that entrepreneurs engage with (Gaddefors and Anderson 2018). This builds on the call from Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad (2014) which emphasises the need for multi-level thinking in the theoretical development of context-based research. In doing so, we contribute to the growing literature on context as a lens for explaining entrepreneurship. However, it is not that our research is simply specific to a particular setting but that our findings help further our understanding of the role of (spatial) context in entrepreneurship.

Secondly, our findings and meso-level integrated framework, REFLECT, permit overcoming the conceptual limitations and lack of applicability of the ecosystem conceptualization to rural entrepreneurship. The ecosystems focus on macro-level systems and high impact, high growth, innovative ventures make it problematic as a framework for understanding rural entrepreneurship. In this paper, we provide a way of refining the notion of rural entrepreneurial places and the key dimensions associated with such contexts. This involves a place-specific recognition of rural life and their respective dimensions and multiple levels that support entrepreneurship and provide the meso-level holistic picture of spatial contexts in rural entrepreneurship. Relatedly, by doing so we advance our knowledge of rural entrepreneurship and the particular nature of the places that can potentially enable its development.

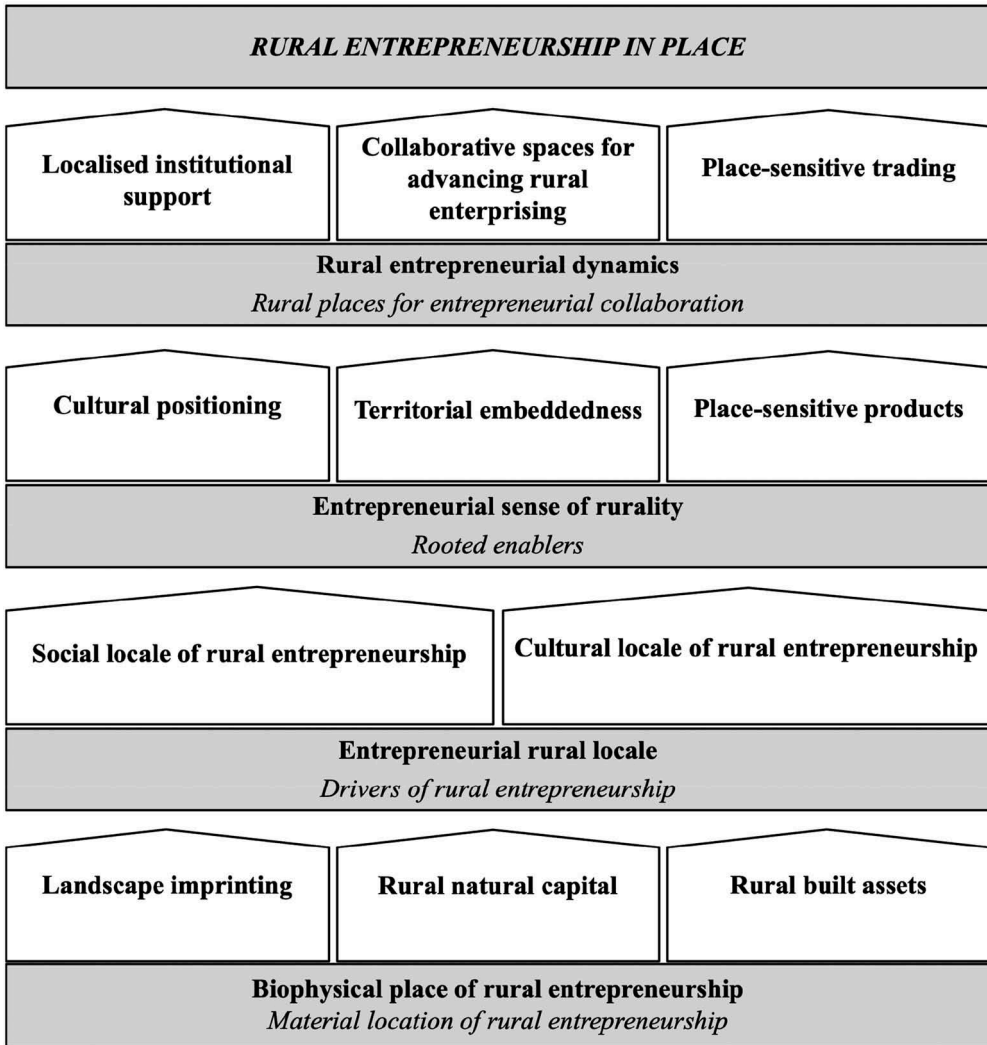


Figure 3. REFLECT: An integrated framework for rural entrepreneurship.

We believe that the articulation of natural space as a seminal building block for rural entrepreneurship contributes to Korsgaard, Ferguson, and Gaddefors's (2015) work on opportunity recognition in rural areas. The authors emphasize the role of “spatial embeddedness”, which is defined as the “intimate knowledge of and concern for the place tangled with strategically built non-local networks” (p.574). We argue that the role of “place” in rural spatial contexts goes far beyond local resources or local assets (Müller and Korsgaard 2018). It involves biophysical features of the rural area that imprint the social and commercial activities of the rural place. While our data does not provide sufficient evidence on the consequences of explicitly integrating the biophysical space into the functioning of an entrepreneurial place, we suspect that such an approach can be in return particularly beneficial for environment sustainability (Cohen 2005).

Thirdly, such an integrated framework is clearly of relevance to policy-makers, government workers, entrepreneurs, investors as well as researchers, in particular in terms of the development of programmes that can facilitate entrepreneurship in rural areas. Entrepreneurship researchers have long critiqued the idea of encouraging more entrepreneurs as representing good public

policy (Shane 2009). Such an approach would be similarly misguided here. The proposed *REFLECT* framework suggests that policy-makers should consider the physical features of the context as something which forms the uniqueness of a location and for opportunity recognition of potential and incumbent entrepreneurs. It also indicates a need for a set of flexible investment tools which value the complexities of the community focus (community and financial needs) across a diverse range of rural places. Indeed, our framework indicates that such venturing may remain local and bound by the uniqueness and support a community offers where products/services are tied to the dynamics of the place. Although beyond the scope of this paper, by developing a tool for the assessment of rural entrepreneurship places using our components, this can aid key decision-makers to think through whether these key elements are currently supported, recognised or are not part of the discussion.

The output of our work does not seek to idealise the idea of rural contexts, as flawless places rooted in human values, traditions and pristine nature. It portrays enabling aspects of the socio-spatial context since we aim to present, explain and model those unique features fostering rural entrepreneurship. As previously mentioned, in our analysis we also noticed constraints and antagonistic views. Some of them were discarded in the analysis drawing on theoretical consideration from social geography. Some others were remedied, particularly for those antagonistic views (e.g. non-supportive neighbours seen as counterproductive elements of the place) by integrating extant relevant literature into our theorising and particularly the normative part of our integrated, meso-level framework.

### ***Limitations and future research***

While the findings from our inductive work provide a fine-grained view of socio-spatial contexts in rural entrepreneurship, we are aware that observed social realities are always bounded by context-specific circumstances, which limits the development of a truly comprehensive conceptual framework we seek to elaborate. Although Chile is a relevant context for our study, we recognise that rural areas in other parts of the world may share only some of these attributes but also offer insights into new attributes. It is also important to note that due to the 'thinness' (Anderson, Osseichuk, and Illingworth 2010) of rural contexts, such features and attributes seem more apparent in a way that is less apparent in other spatial contexts. However, we believe that a systematic combining of evidence and previous research can lead to new conceptual developments which will allow us to see the complete collection of distinctive attributes and provide the holistic picture of what a place for rural entrepreneurship looks like.

In this context, the proposed integrated framework should be understood as a conceptual umbrella, rather than an all-encompassing normative model where all attributes are considered both necessary and sufficient for the effective functioning of the rural entrepreneurship place. Any further developments (e.g. assessment tool) cannot simply be a box-checking exercise leading to rankings or other relative order of rural areas in a given country or region. Any place-based perspective should naturally take a complexity view of its relationships and collaborations whereby small changes in one aspect of the system can have profound effects on its emergence (Byrne 2001). Our *REFLECT* framework seeks to open up opportunities for more in-depth, place-sensitive observation and analysis of entrepreneurial places in rural areas. Each of the dimensions is an analytical unit in itself, which can be observed independently as a distinct factor or in relation to the other dimensions, within or across dimensions. Taken together, the framework can facilitate the characterization and eventual development of typologies of socio-spatial contexts in rural entrepreneurship, which can then be compared and fostered alongside its complexities. Thus, our meso-level framework is an important first step forward. If we continue with extant models then it is likely that any support mechanisms will miss the rich features of the locale, its meaning and biophysical nature, which contextualise rural entrepreneurship in place.

## Notes

1. <https://www.worldtravelawards.com/award-worlds-leading-adventure-tourism-destination-2016>.
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## ORCID

Pablo Muñoz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8843-5943>

Jonathan Kimmitt  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1121-5181>

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