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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP
RESEARCH VOLUME 20

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: HARVESTING IDEAS AND SOWING NEW SEEDS

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

Editorial matter and selection © 2025 Gary Bosworth, Polly Chapman,
Robert Newbery, Artur Steiner, and Don J. Webber.
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83753-577-4 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83753-576-7 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83753-578-1 (Epub)

ISSN: 2040-7246 (Series)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>About the Editors</i>	vii
<i>About the Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Foreword</i>	xvii
Chapter 1 Rural Entrepreneurship: Harvesting Ideas and Sowing New Seeds <i>Gary Bosworth, Polly Chapman, Robert Newbery, Artur Steiner and Don J. Webber</i>	1
Chapter 2 What Can Participant Observations Tell Us About Rural Entrepreneurship? <i>Andreas Giazitzoglu and Gary Bosworth</i>	9
Chapter 3 Entrepreneurial Universities and Their Engagement with Rural Enterprise <i>Barbara Tocco, James A. Cunningham, Amelia Magistrali, Jeremy Phillipson and Matthew Gorton</i>	23
Chapter 4 Land and the Community <i>Mike Danson, Anne Smith and Geoff Whittam</i>	39
Chapter 5 Understanding and Supporting Farm Development Strategies <i>Peter Gittins and Ron Methorst</i>	55
Chapter 6 An Alternative Explanation of the Rural–Urban Productivity Gap <i>Don J. Webber and Pattanapong Tiwasing</i>	71
Chapter 7 Rural Entrepreneurship and Location: Does Rurality Matter for Small Firms? <i>David Deakins, Jo Bensemann, Abhishek Mukherjee and Jonathan M. Scott</i>	87

Chapter 8 Social Enterprise for Rural Health and Wellbeing <i>Danielle Hutcheon and Artur Steiner</i>	101
Chapter 9 Food and Rural Entrepreneurship <i>Eifiona Thomas Lane, Rebecca Jones and Robert Bowen</i>	115
Chapter 10 Rural Entrepreneurship and International Development <i>Robert Newbery and Paul Igwe</i>	129
Chapter 11 The Role of Rural Entrepreneurship in the Redevelopment of Rural Areas Previously Involved in Resource Extraction <i>Nikolaos Apostolopoulos, Ilias Makris, Sotiris Apostolopoulos and Panagiotis Liargovas</i>	145
Chapter 12 Digital Rural Entrepreneurship: Two Decades of Research into the Interaction Between Entrepreneurs and Policy <i>Koen Salemink, Polly Chapman and Leanne Townsend</i>	157
Chapter 13 Clustering Policy and Its Effects on Rural Entrepreneurship Over 20 Years <i>Ian Merrell and David Charles</i>	173
Chapter 14 Creating and Extracting Illicit Value from the Rural Environment: An Ethnographic Study of Two Organised Criminal Businesses <i>Orlando Goodall and Robert Smith</i>	187
Chapter 15 Rural Entrepreneurship and the Formalisation of Rural Tourism in Marginal Destinations: Challenges and Perspectives <i>Lavinia Wilson-Youlden and Helen Farrell</i>	203
Chapter 16 Does Gender Matter? <i>Sally Shortall and Orla Collins</i>	219
Chapter 17 Rural Regeneration Through Arts and Culture: Shifting Perspectives on Gaelic and Enterprise Contexts <i>Mike Danson, Kathryn A. Burnett and Douglas Chalmers</i>	233
<i>Index</i>	249

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FOREWORD

Since the early 1970s, I have had the pleasure of working to enhance attention and support for rural land uses, environments, enterprises and communities across the United Kingdom (UK). During my 50-year career, I have worked with UK organisations including the Countryside Agency (CA), the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC), the National Farmers' Union (NFU), the National Innovation Centre for Rural Economies and Scotland's Rural College, and international organisations such as the European Parliament, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN). Looking back, I recognise that regular access to academic evidence has underpinned my analysis, advice, advocacy, promotion and delivery of support programmes and policies. I am, therefore, writing this foreword with the expectation that this collection will offer those that continue my journey a commendable source of evidence.

The character, classifications and perceptions of 'rural' communities and economies are diverse. So are the 'entrepreneurs' who create or harness rural resources and opportunities. Over time, rural places and economies have witnessed many transformations. Accordingly, research, advocacy and support for rural enterprises benefit from a collective and diverse set of skills, outlooks and sources. The editors of this book have called upon such qualities from a broad group of centres within and beyond Britain.

Britain has a rich history and corpus of official inquiries, reports and regulations in which landowners and allied occupations are highly visible, for example, in England's Domesday Inquests, the medieval Welsh 'Law Book of Hywel Dda', and the First Statistical Account of Scotland 1790–1799. Such land-based enterprises – though they now form only 15% of England's rural businesses – continue to evolve, presenting new material, examples and questions, as evidenced in several chapters in this book. In contrast to the ever-present focus on land-based enterprises, the contributions of other rural industries gradually lost visibility, and learned enquiry, as Britain was converted into notably urban societies. Thankfully, early in the 20th century, interest in the breadth, opportunities and challenges of other rural enterprises and communities was led by the establishment of the Rural Development Commission (RDC). The foundations that the RDC built for sound systematic research into rural places and businesses, and strong relationships with social and economic research centres, were adopted after its closure by successor English, Welsh and Scottish agencies.

My teams at the CA and CRC continued to grow this focus, building relations with practitioners, universities and colleges, many of whom are represented by authors in this book. They provided us with a sound, broad and complementary evidence base, to inform, initiate or support programmes and policies at national

and regional levels. This collection includes and develops further a few of the many themes of such shared working, for example, the roles and challenges faced by women rural entrepreneurs and the value of rural's economic contribution. It is also refreshing to read here of newer features of rural enterprise or entrepreneurs, such as the nature of rural-organised criminality and the place of arts and culture in driving rural entrepreneurship and wellbeing.

These chapters offer new paths for today's academics and provide ideas and routes for future scholars, and decision-makers, to explore. I encourage the circulation of this book to encourage and stimulate would-be rural entrepreneurs of the future, at home and abroad. It has been my enjoyable experience to seek out, encourage, support and harness research, ideas and their forms of presentation, such as this book and the conferences that underpin it. Thus, I wish all similar enjoyable and beneficial reading.

I will add this book to my home library.

Roger M. Turner
Retired Rural Policy Advisor

CHAPTER 1

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: HARVESTING IDEAS AND SOWING NEW SEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

At a time when entrepreneurship research increasingly emphasises the importance of ‘context’ (Welter et al., 2019), this edited book offers a chance to reflect on a growing body of rural scholarship that has long understood the need to ‘investigate the wider economic, social and institutional context within which the entrepreneurial process takes place ... [to support] ... the effective design, delivery and implementation of competent entrepreneurial polices’ (Stathopoulou et al., 2004). Each chapter examines what we have learnt about an aspect of rural entrepreneurship and what still needs to be understood.

The purpose of this edited book is to celebrate how far we have come in understanding different dimensions of rural entrepreneurship, reflect on our earlier transgressions, break down our assumptions to spawn new research directions, and highlight foreseeable challenges in the contemporary climate emergency and post-Covid-19 world. The fluidity of demographic, socioeconomic, workplace, lifestyle, and physical geographic dimensions make rural entrepreneurship an

Rural Entrepreneurship: Harvesting Ideas and Sowing New Seeds
Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research, Volume 20, 1–8
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and Don J. Webber

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited
ISSN: 2040-7246/doi:10.1108/S2040-724620250000020001

engaging and exciting real-world subject that has meaning and ramifications for swathes of the population either directly or indirectly.

The book also reflects the evolving global membership of delegates, past and present, of the Rural Entrepreneurship Conference (REC), which has facilitated the exchange of ideas between stakeholders and academics alike for two decades and continues to explore new challenges and opportunities for rural economies and communities. The timing is particularly significant as the REC coordinators are widening the associated network with a track at the biennial European Society for Rural Sociology Conference and increasing activities staged as part of their affiliation with the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Our aspiration is for the book to set a marker in the timeline of the evolution of an increasingly international network of rural entrepreneurship researchers.

Research into rural entrepreneurship takes place in the disciplines of sociology, business studies, human geography, and development studies. The book provides an overview of the distinctive themes and theories that have guided the progress of research in the field with critical reflection on these themes as the global economy confronts a series of new human- and nature-facing challenges that are affecting rural areas. From this foundation, our chapters explore the contemporary challenges in light of past experiences and then introduce new questions and analytical approaches that can guide research and policy to inform a post-Covid-19, post-Brexit economy where rapid advances in artificial intelligence and digital technologies are reshaping the nature of opportunities in and for rural economies. Bringing together established and newer researchers to examine the critical issues facing rural economies and entrepreneurs, the unique value of the book is that it facilitates critical reflection of past theories to inform the interpretation of contemporary research. In bringing together these contributors, we are also helping to nurture the development of rural entrepreneurship networks that are growing out from a recognised circle of influence.

STRUCTURE

Rural entrepreneurship research has evolved considerably in depth, breadth, and conceptual rigour in recent decades. Through 16 edited chapters, this volume charts the emergence of a number of themes within the corpus of rural entrepreneurship scholarship as a means of reflecting on the dynamism of rural economies and the enhanced recognition of rural entrepreneurship within policy and academic research. It constructively critiques current understandings of the dynamic rural economic landscape and acknowledges the need for agility and adaptability as rural entrepreneurship itself evolves at various speeds and in ways that challenge existing policies. Interpretation of the pace and direction of change depends in part upon the analytical lens that we take as well as the context in which we are researching. The rich variety of approaches and understandings of rural entrepreneurship stimulate thought-provoking, inspiring, and sometimes controversial calls for readers to strive for a better rural future.

In the next chapter, Giazitzoglu and Bosworth explore research ‘about the rural’ produced by scholars adopting a participant observation approach. The majority of the work reviewed is produced by scholars in disciplines like geography, community studies, and sociology. However, the work reviewed is relevant as it provides insights into the way entrepreneurship is lived, negotiated, and defined in rural communities. Participant observations allow the emergence of deep insights into the context of rural entrepreneurship, and Giazitzoglu and Bosworth argue that such insights have been neglected and overlooked in extant scholarship. The insights contribute to the literature by giving fresh, alternative perspectives on rural entrepreneurship that other work looking at rural entrepreneurship – with different epistemological, ontological, and methodological underpinnings – may not present. The chapter reviews work in a way that contributes to the understandings of how everyday entrepreneurship is lived and negotiated in rural contexts and at different points in history. Giazitzoglu and Bosworth’s focus is on the British rural specifically and they show how scholarship produced by participant observers brings into focus how social class, the rural (as a structure), and entrepreneurship intersect, and in doing so these authors call for more research underpinned by observations to emerge in the future.

The role of universities in rural innovation ecosystems is examined in Chapter 3, where Tocco, Cunningham, Magistrali, Phillipson, and Gorton consider the engagement of universities with rural enterprises through the lens of the entrepreneurial and engaged university. UK universities’ mission focus, structures, and activities have considerably expanded in recent decades to address the contemporary and emergent economic, social, and cultural needs of business and society, embracing ‘third mission’ activities through various mechanisms of formal and informal knowledge exchange and technology transfer. Yet, university engagement and collaboration with rural-based businesses and societal actors can be undeveloped due to practical challenges in identifying and connecting to sparse and remote locations and prevailing approaches to engagement, which may not reflect rural businesses’ circumstances, challenges, and opportunities. Against this backdrop, the chapter introduces the illustrative example of the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) which aims to strengthen the connection between universities and rural enterprises in England. The early experiences of NICRE highlight four main issues relating to realising the mission of entrepreneurial and engaged universities in rural areas, associated with university structures, models of interaction, metrics, and funding.

In Chapter 4, Danson, Smith, and Whittam explore the interactions of land and the community. Long considered as lagging, remote and backward, communities of the Hebrides and North West Scotland have suffered from monopoly, often absentee, landownership with the resulting mismanagement of land use and degraded environments. Over the last three decades, many estates have been subject to community buyouts under land reform legislation with the aim of addressing depopulation, low incomes, poor housing, and low levels of rural entrepreneurship. Analysis derived from several studies is applied to consider the impacts of these developments and reveals overwhelmingly positive outcomes of community buyouts. Evidence illustrates a repopulation, affordable housing,

job and income generation and retention, revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture, and significant enterprise creation, all in the context of biodiversity improvements. This chapter analyses the documented experiences of five community landowners that, over the past two decades, and once the issue of monopoly ownership has been overcome, have collectively enacted rural entrepreneurship and pioneered ways of creating sustainable communities.

Gittins and Methorst review the understanding of farm development strategies in Chapter 5 by revisiting the field of farm entrepreneurship over the past 20 years and examining the evolution and current state of research in this area. They conceptualise the entrepreneurial farming unit, focussing on farmers and farm businesses and their engagement in entrepreneurial and strategic activities to address increasing challenges in the sector, society, and environment. Gittins and Methorst's review identifies a trend of growing academic interest in certain themes, such as farm diversification strategies, while other critical areas remain less explored. As they reflect on the past, their attention also shifts to the future including the prospects of the agricultural sector. Their argument includes the changing role of farmers in delivering essential public goods and rural services, and they challenge traditional food producer identities, regulatory pressures, the impact of digitalisation, and pressures imposed on farming businesses in response to environmental goals. Gittins and Methorst also place particular emphasis on the rise of digitalisation and the increasing pressures to meet sustainability goals that lead to a renewed embedding of the farm in the social and ecological context while presenting both opportunities and constraints for farmers.

While opportunities and constraints for farmers often are associated with the ability to effectively produce a range of agricultural outputs and their value in the market, Webber and Tiwasing's focus in Chapter 6 is squarely on whether government policies to measure and increase productivity are misguided. These authors argued that productivity is typically measured in terms of gross domestic product or gross value added (GVA) and is then often used to underpin government decisions on resource allocations. Webber and Tiwasing explore whether GVA per worker is a measure of productivity that has been understood to reflect the efficiency of production and they offer a different interpretation of GVA productivity figures using two dimensions that call into question whether urban areas are more productive than rural areas. This chapter summarises the old and this new way of understanding GVA productivity figures and stresses that the sweeping generalisation that rural businesses are less productive than their urban counterparts is profoundly misguided. After advocating a move away from the old to adopt the new two-dimensional way of understanding GVA productivity figures Webber and Tiwasing stress the need for deeper understanding and a variety of policies to support businesses and entrepreneurs to become more efficient irrespective of their rural or urban location.

In Chapter 7, Deakins, Bensemman, Mukherjee, and Scott focus on the importance of location for innovation and growth strategies as well as access to resources and business networks. Combining a resource-based view with social network theory and a dynamic capabilities perspective, they seek to shift the language of disadvantage towards a focus on location-specific factors that can shape

entrepreneurial behaviours and outcomes. Drawing on evidence from research in New Zealand during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, they are able to identify specific features of rural locations that enhance entrepreneurial resilience, both at the firm level and particularly at the individual level too. Rural locations are not simply an economic variable in terms of scale or transaction costs, they are more complex and multifaceted in the ways that they influence entrepreneurship.

Hutcheon and Steiner stress in Chapter 8 that over the last few decades rural areas in the UK have been affected by the withdrawal of many public services. While some of those directly relate to healthcare service provision, other services have indirect impacts on social determinants of health and the wellbeing of communities. The latter includes ‘social infrastructure’ that encompasses community centres, cafés, libraries, and churches. In the absence of essential services, Hutcheon and Steiner explore if and how social entrepreneurship could assist rural communities in addressing their needs. This chapter presents information from four studies, highlighting the role of rural social enterprises in supporting the health and wellbeing of rural residents. Informed by existing evidence, Hutcheon and Steiner discuss what is known so far about rural social enterprises for health and wellbeing, debate the potential role of rural social enterprises in delivering healthcare services in the future, and make recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

Lane, Jones, and Bowen discuss rural entrepreneurship actions in relation to the food and drink industry in Chapter 9. The food and drink industry plays an important role in the rural economy in many countries and, as the global population increases, there is a need to consider how food production processes can meet the increasing need for food consumption. Their pertinent chapter coincides with a challenging period of global pressures on food supply chains, such as Covid-19 and international conflicts, which means that entrepreneurial activity is important in supporting and sustaining food supply chains. Lane, Jones, and Bowen contribute to knowledge on food and rural entrepreneurship by investigating opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurship in the food industry, exploring a range of case studies of actors along the food and drink value chain, and exploring examples of best practices in entrepreneurship and sustainability. Their findings point to the need for more specific policies in supporting the food industry to facilitate entrepreneurial activity and sustainable food supply chains.

Newbery and Igwe argue in Chapter 10 that rural entrepreneurship is an inclusive phenomenon that should encompass international contexts. These authors explore rural entrepreneurship across different international development geographies and use the World Bank Income Classification as a lens to analyse 20 years of rural entrepreneurship research. The chapter presents an exploration of a range of themes including sector transition and diversification; poverty alleviation, empowerment, and wellbeing; and social networks, migration, and embeddedness. Newbery and Igwe make recommendations for future research on non-farm entrepreneurship in low-income countries, the applicability of neo-endogenous development in lower- and upper-middle countries such as China and India, and the alleviation of overlooked pockets of poverty within high-income countries.

Chapter 11 examines the role of rural entrepreneurship in areas affected by resource extraction industries, and in particular the mining industry. Here, Apostolopoulos, Makris, Apostolopoulos, and Liargovas link past events in this field to the examination of current changes occurring within a just transition and the identification of new challenges. Mineral exploration is shown to have a long history in challenging rural economy and society and in this regard the chapter explores the crucial theme of redevelopment of rural areas involved in mining extraction through the lens of entrepreneurship by presenting a novel journey through the years from the perspectives of successive crises, various transformations, relevant policies, structural changes, and institutional framework issues. Undoubtedly, these are the main factors that influence the notion of rural entrepreneurship and its contributions to socioeconomic development.

In Chapter 12, Salemin, Chapman, and Townsend argue that there have been four waves of digital entrepreneurship over the last 20 years, and that these waves each have distinct features in terms of drivers at a local level, research, policy response, and community activity. The differing roles of entrepreneurs in these waves are discussed, including by whom and to what end. The chapter concludes with a look to the future, imagining what a fifth wave might look like, and suggesting what the future focus of research might be. Salemin, Chapman, and Townsend illustrate these waves with examples from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, draw on initiatives led by enterprising councils and other public sector bodies, and discuss entrepreneur and community-led initiatives. The chapter concludes that a fifth wave might usefully focus on understanding the need for place-based policy actions and further understanding the wider impact and benefits (or otherwise) of digital hubs. Academic research on digitalisation and rural entrepreneurship can help to translate originally urban innovations to create a rural fit and perhaps contribute to actual rural innovation.

In Chapter 13, Merrell and Charles examine business clustering, which are traditionally associated with knowledge spill-overs, shortened supply chains, local skills development, and increased productivity. With a lack of agglomeration, rural areas were often excluded from clustering policy but Merrell and Charles argue that there are five distinct ways in which rural businesses engage in clusters. These span from distinctly rural clusters to the participation of rural businesses in more urban-focussed regional clusters, with different requirements for policy to support the rural economy in each case. The chapter concludes by examining the emergence of micro-clusters in rural areas that offer a new dimension to understanding the evolution of rural entrepreneurship as a more collaborative, knowledge-based, and digitally dependent set of activities.

Chapter 14, by Goodall and Smith, presents a strong case that organised rural crime and organised rural criminality are not taken seriously in practice or in the academic literature. They emphasise that the criminological literature positions organised crime as being an urban-based phenomenon despite a growing grey enterprise literature suggesting that much rural crime is both organised and entrepreneurial in nature. The very mention of organised crime conjures up imagery and mafia and organised crime groups. This study utilises Dick Hobbs' notion of enterprise-orientated crime and extends it to include organised crime business. Utilising Alistair Anderson's definition of entrepreneurship as the creation

and extraction of value from an environment, Goodall and Smith adopt a phenomenological, ethnographic approach to tell the stories of two active organised crime businesses operating in the rural environment. The stories highlight the entrepreneurial nature of organised crime committed by rural businessmen and the predatory crimes they routinely engage in. We bring their deer poaching and food fraud to life as stories of ongoing criminal enterprise, and these highlight the acquisitive, entrepreneurial nature of contemporary organised rural criminality.

Wilson-Youlden and Farrell offer a historical review of rural tourism development in Chapter 15, focussing on England, to contextualise its evolution as an entrepreneurial domain. The exploration extends to the responses of tourism businesses in the changing rural tourism landscape, addressing formalisation, gentrification, and the rise of experience-led tourism. Using the northeast of England as a case study, the chapter delves into the challenges and opportunities in marginal destinations. In envisioning the future, the chapter then explores emerging trends and potential pathways for rural entrepreneurs to navigate evolving consumer demands. Wilson-Youlden and Farrell conclude on the dynamic evolution of rural tourism, emphasising the industry's transformation from picturesque landscapes to an authentic, experience-driven sector. The chapter also highlights the challenges and triumphs faced by entrepreneurs in non-traditional destinations, highlighting the blend of innovation, collaboration, and technological integration. The narrative underscores the ongoing journey of rural tourism as a story marked by resilience, creativity, and a commitment to delivering enriching experiences.

In Chapter 16, Shortall and Collins contribute to scholarship on rural entrepreneurship by focussing on women, including both women in farm businesses and women in rural businesses. In agriculture they find that traditional cultural norms restrict women's ability to be entrepreneurs, and this is because of difficulties accessing land, finance, and training. Where women do manage to obtain land, their enterprises are smaller, but they are much more innovative and cutting edge. When they look at rural women entrepreneurs, they discover different motivations depending on social class and skill set. Working-class women wished to supplement their family income, and while the literature reports that women are often constrained by a fear of failure, Shortall and Collins found no evidence of this. For professional women, the motivation to establish their own business was a fear of discrimination once they became mothers.

In the final chapter, Danson, Burnett, and Chalmers engage specifically with Scots Gaelic language and cultural enterprise and focus their attention on two issues. First, they comment on enterprise policy concerning Scotland's highlands and islands region, and the ongoing concerns to both sustain and regenerate communities across the area. A current classification of Scotland's highlands and islands enterprise region (HIE) includes the Outer Hebrides, the Inner Hebrides of Skye, Mull, Islay, and Jura (for example), and many other islands with Gaelic heritage. It notably also includes Shetland and Orkney, both island regions distinctively typified by their own unique 'northern' Scots, and Scandinavian-influenced language and culture. Second, Danson, Burnett, and Chalmers introduce Scots Gaelic as an example of how a minority language is currently articulated as a rural-regenerative enterprise asset.

CONCLUSION

Collectively the chapters span government policy through to individual entrepreneurial decision-making, and international through to local perspectives. As you read the chapters, we encourage you to think about the synergies and the dissonance between different sectors and different drivers and trajectories of change across rural economies. Most importantly, we hope that the book reveals the wealth of knowledge and learning that has emerged from the field of rural entrepreneurship practice and research with the potential to have an impact far beyond the rural domain itself.

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