

Rural proofing entrepreneurship in two fields of research

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332

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how rural entrepreneurship is discussed by analyzing articles in the leading journals of the two main research fields, entrepreneurship studies, and rural studies, through the concept of rural proofing.

Design/methodology/approach – The systematic literature review centers on the two main fields where rural entrepreneurship is studied and covers papers in nine leading journals in entrepreneurship studies and two leading journals in rural studies, between the years 1989 and 2020. In total, 97 papers were reviewed and we utilize and operationalize the rural proofing concept based on Fahmy *et al.*'s (2004) 3 characteristics of rural: remoteness, accessibility, and rural locale and sense of place. The authors take stock of the dimensions of rural proofing addressed within each of the research fields to find similarities and differences; that is, if articles are rural proofed (or not) when discussing rural entrepreneurship.

Findings – The classification of articles across the three dimensions of rural proofing shows that the field of rural entrepreneurship is being addressed mainly in the dimensions of remoteness and accessibility, while few authors in rural studies journals give priority to the rural locale and sense of place dimension. The results of the authors' review reveal that out of a total of 97 articles on rural entrepreneurship, 56 articles address at least one dimension of rural proofing and 41 articles do not address any dimension. Among the 41 articles not rural proofed, rurality is not problematized when discussing rural entrepreneurship. Instead, the authors focus on specific topics such as social capital, community entrepreneurship/networks, entrepreneurs'/farmers' identity, illegality in rural areas, and institutional framework. The number of non-rural-proofed articles in entrepreneurship journals is almost double that in rural studies journals. This means that authors in entrepreneurship journals do not problematize rurality to the same extent as authors in rural studies journals when addressing rural entrepreneurship.

Research limitations/implications – The authors emphasize the need for increased cross-fertilization between the fields of entrepreneurship and rural studies as an avenue to develop the entrepreneurship field in the direction towards rural proofing. A close collaboration with academia and policymakers is essential to promote interdisciplinary research in order to make a distinctive contribution to rural development. Scholars in either of the two fields will benefit from our review and identification of similarities and differences in the research. The review is one step towards promoting a closer dialog between the two fields.

Originality/value – Previous reviews have focused mainly on what rural entrepreneurship entails (e.g. what topics are discussed) rather than how rural entrepreneurship is discussed. This paper centers on the differences and similarities of the two main fields and provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of how rural entrepreneurship is discussed by utilizing the rural proofing concept.

Keywords Rural entrepreneurship, Rural proofing, Remoteness, Accessibility, Rural locale and sense of place, Literature review

Paper type Literature review



1. Introduction

Although the topic of rural entrepreneurship is interdisciplinary (Pato and Teixeira, 2016) and insights are provided from fields other than entrepreneurship, the lack of entrepreneurship knowledge appropriate to the rural context has been highlighted (McElwee, 2008; Munoz and Kimmmit, 2019).

There is also a lack of recognition of the multiplicity of rural areas (Zografos, 2007). Calls for more studies on rural contexts in the field of entrepreneurship (Stathopoulou *et al.*, 2004; Steyaert and Katz, 2004) are increasingly being answered (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015). Greater understanding is urgently needed since the role of rural areas and the rural/urban divide is changing rapidly at this time of global crisis (Hunt *et al.*, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Contemporary research and policy are debating both the main purpose of supporting rural entrepreneurship (sustainability, community building, economic development) (EU, 2016; OECD, 2018; Wieliczko *et al.*, 2021) and how to do so through, for example, expanded ecosystems (Clausen, 2020; Spigel and Harrison, 2018), government programs (Atterton, 2008; Siemens, 2015; Terluin, 2003) or other subsidies (OECD, 2018; Zografos, 2007).

According to one comprehensive bibliometric survey (Pato and Teixeira, 2016), rural entrepreneurship is discussed mainly in entrepreneurship studies and rural studies but also in sociology, anthropology, geography, business management, and tourism. In the entrepreneurship field, rural entrepreneurship has become a broad umbrella for a variety of research, ranging from micro-level studies on entrepreneurial psychological traits via embeddedness in local areas to a macro-level focus on growth, institutional framework, and governance (Pato and Teixeira, 2016, p. 18). Müller (2016) highlights the heterogeneity of the rural areas that influence entrepreneurship (e.g. distance to non-local markets, limited access to various forms of capital) and, vice-versa, how entrepreneurship influences regional development and proposes examining rurality beyond the national context.

Hence, we know from previous literature reviews the topics that have been discussed (e.g. entrepreneurs' demographic traits, entrepreneurs' psychological traits, embeddedness, rurality, growth and development, policy measures, institutional frameworks and governance) (Pato and Teixeira, 2016). However, for a deeper understanding of rural entrepreneurship research appropriate for the rural context, we need to move beyond broad surveys. Therefore, we follow the example of Secundo *et al.* (2020) and zoom in on the two main research fields covering rural entrepreneurship according to Pato and Teixeira (2016), namely, entrepreneurship and rural studies.

When analyzing the literature, we ask if authors problematize rural when studying rural entrepreneurship and, if so, how they “think rural”. Hence, we analyze if authors consider characteristics of rurality or simply apply a tacit urban norm (Atterton, 2008) when discussing rural entrepreneurship. The aim of this paper is to analyze *how* rural entrepreneurship is discussed in the leading entrepreneurship studies and rural studies journals. For this purpose, we borrow the concept of “rural proofing”, which is used in policy research and practice to identify how to address rural issues (ENRD, 2017, p. 29; Sherry and Shortall, 2019).

In contemporary research, the various definitions of rurality and the fluid concept of entrepreneurship add to the complexities of conceptualizing rural entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019; Pato and Teixeira, 2016). Our analysis of previous studies is important in order to further theoretical developments, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship. To our knowledge, there has not to date been a systematic review with the purpose of analyzing this dimension, despite several calls to expand the knowledge of entrepreneurship in all contexts (Baker and Welter, 2018).

A contextualized perspective on entrepreneurship prompts us to examine varieties of entrepreneurship that “often remain invisible to us” (Welter *et al.*, 2019, p. 321). This includes

identifying and developing theories to understand differences where we expect uniformity (Welter *et al.*, 2019) and taking into account a multiplicity of contexts when researching entrepreneurship (Roos, 2017). Therefore, advancement of relevant theoretical and practical knowledge of entrepreneurship needs rural proofing as there is a multiplicity of rural areas (Zografos, 2007), which is an ongoing challenge for research and policy.

We analyze how authors “think rural” when addressing rural entrepreneurship by operationalizing the concept of rural proofing, as borrowed from the policy studies. The operationalization is based on the three characteristics of rural used by Fahmy *et al.* (2004), namely (1) the remoteness and (2) accessibility of rural areas, and (3) the degree of rural locale and sense of place. The characteristic of “remoteness” implies that rural areas are defined according to functionality and distance to metropolitan regions and are disadvantaged compared to urban areas in terms of depopulation, access to basic community services, and distance to markets. The characteristic of “accessibility” implies that rural areas are defined according to physical location, a sparse population, and limited natural resources, dependent on primary resource extraction or rural businesses. They have links to a nearby urban area, but they are not part of its labor market and thus have limited access. The characteristic of “rural locale and sense of place” implies that rural areas are considered as outskirts, from all types of open countryside (DEFRA, 2021) to a close “degree of urban settlement” (Fahmy *et al.*, 2004, p. 9), and presents a sense of belonging attached to rural space. The characteristics are theoretically grounded in Getz *et al.* (2004) and supported by policy (OECD, 2006, 2018). We take stock of three dimensions of rural proofing to assess whether the authors in entrepreneurship studies and rural studies consider these characteristics of rurality when they discuss rural entrepreneurship. We also identify and discuss methodologies used and contexts studied in the two fields of research.

We contribute to both entrepreneurship studies and rural studies by analyzing in which dimensions the literature on rural entrepreneurship is to date rurally proofed in the sense that researchers “think rural” rather than according to an urban norm (Atterton, 2008, p. 2). Our conclusion is that a large portion of the entrepreneurship studies on the topic is in fact not rural proof, in the sense that rurality is not problematized. The dimension of rural locale and sense of place is very seldom discussed. Our findings have important implications for researchers, reviewers, and editors, as well as for policymakers. Our study also makes methodological contributions by offering an operationalization of rural proofing applicable to journal articles.

The paper consists of five parts. After the introduction in Section 1, Section 2 contains previous reviews on rural entrepreneurship and definitions as well as a conceptual review of rural proofing, arriving at two research questions which guide our review. The method is described in Section 3, while Section 4 presents and discusses the results of our review. Section 5 concludes with an overview of challenges for further research reflecting on rural proofing dimensions discussed in both fields, and outlines policy implications and limitations.

2. Definitions and previous reviews

2.1 Defining rural

The broad concept of rural/rurality refers to open spaces extending from the outskirts of towns and including forests and mountains (Woods, 2011); however, there is still some debate regarding its features (Pato and Teixeira, 2016, p. 5; Siemens, 2007, 2015). In categorizing the different definitions of rural, three ways of conceptualizing rural have been suggested: a social definition, a definition based on lack of population, and a geographical definition (Halfacree, 1993; Siemens, 2007).

A social conceptualization focuses on individuals' interpretations of rural locality and what this "space" represents to them, and the way they respond to it (Halfacree, 1993; Siemens, 2007). Examples include authors who refer to an abstract space that displays "characteristics of being rural" not necessarily linked to a specific physical territory (Woods, 2011, p. 8).

A conceptualization related to a lack of population focuses on the disadvantages of rural areas when compared to urban areas, such as depopulation and distance to markets. These approaches seldom distinguish variances between rural settings. Examples include researchers who characterize rurality as low population density, small markets, limited levels of higher education, yet as a suitable entrepreneurial milieu with distinct physical, social and economic traits (Freshwater, 2015; Herslund, 2012; Stathopolou *et al.*, 2004; Vesala and Vesala, 2010).

A geographical view underlines different characteristics of rural settings and tends to focus on physical location, a sparse population, and the view of natural resources as economic assets. The rural context is perceived as a particular landscape with distinct social and natural resources, often chosen for lifestyle reasons (Getz *et al.*, 2004; Woods, 2011) and suitable for entrepreneurship, although the distance to urban areas influences the opportunities (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). This definition has also been introduced into the rural policy (OECD, 2018), with commuting time between rural and urban areas being included. These policies advocate that the degree of physical distance between rural and urban locations and the degree of linkages should be considered when identifying types of rural settings (OECD, 2018) conducive to entrepreneurship (Bosworth *et al.*, 2011; McElwee, 2008; Zografos, 2007).

2.1.1 Rural proofing concept and our operationalization. The concept of rural proofing was introduced to build a rural lens into policymaking and implementation (Atterton, 2008; Sherry and Shortall, 2019; Tillväxtnalys, 2016; Nordberg, 2021). The aim was to ensure the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental well-being of rural communities, such as access to basic services and a favorable climate for entrepreneurship (ENRD, 2018). Rural proofing should now be an integrated approach in economic development and is highly encouraged by the OECD (Wieliczko *et al.*, 2021). A small number of academic studies have been published regarding rural proofing, scrutinizing the process in England and Northern Ireland (Atterton, 2008; Shortall and Alston, 2016; Sherry and Shortall, 2019). For example, Atterton (2008) implies that policymakers do not consult rural communities on their needs and thus fail to be attentive to diverse spaces in rural areas. Consequently, rural proofing methodologies become incomplete, leading to a flawed rural proofing process and theoretical assumptions of rural inability "to reflect on the historical and inevitable future changes in rural areas", compared to urban areas (Sherry and Shortall, 2019, p. 343). In sum, rural diversity needs to be taken into account by policymakers, as rural policy issues vary in different rural settings (Sherry and Shortall, 2019).

Rural proofing involves a formal requirement to follow a checklist on "how rural issues have been considered and addressed" (ENRD, 2017, p. 30). The rural proofing in this paper concerns the assessment of the entrepreneurial literature using the rural lens. Simply put, this involves assessing whether authors in the reviewed articles approached rural entrepreneurship by "thinking rural", that is, by taking into account the diverse characteristics of rurality. We operationalize the rural proofing based on the Fahmy *et al.* (2004) consideration of degrees of rurality, based on concepts of remote and accessible rural areas, and the degree of urban settlement (Fahmy *et al.*, 2004, p. 9). The degree of urban settlement regarding rural areas refers to "all types of open countryside" (DEFRA, 2021, p. 45) that exhibit a sense of (rural) place (Halfacree, 1993; Siemens, 2007). The characteristics of remoteness, accessibility, and proximity to an urban settlement in distinguishing rural area links to cities are also indicated by the OECD (2018). The urban and rural areas are

interconnected through demographics, the labor market, and public services (OECD, 2018, p. 12); thus, distance from the urban impacts rural areas. Therefore, we operationalize the rural proofing concept utilizing the three main characteristics of rural used by Fahmy *et al.* (2004) based on spatiality as the distance between urban and rural (also used by OECD, 2006, 2018). We examine whether authors in the reviewed articles problematize rurality (and if so, how they talk about it) in relation to the three characteristics of (1) remoteness, (2) accessibility and (3) rural locale and sense of place.

The first characteristic of rural is remoteness. In remote rural areas, there is “less provision of basic community services (e.g. healthcare, education, financial services), and difficulties in accessing information” (Fahmy *et al.*, 2004, p. 5). The characteristic of remoteness implies that rural areas are defined according to functionality and distance to metropolitan regions. The focus in these rural areas is on the disadvantages when compared to urban areas in terms of depopulation, access to basic community services, and distance to markets. Rural communities in these remote areas rely on a small number of service providers for the delivery of basic community services (Fahmy *et al.*, 2004). The challenges in obtaining basic community services such as healthcare, education, financial services, cultural and leisure activities make these remote rural communities vulnerable, and poor infrastructure makes them isolated (Getz *et al.*, 2004, p. 15).

The second characteristic of rural is accessibility which includes sparsely populated rural locations (e.g. Atterton, 2008, p. 4) with limited natural resources, often chosen for lifestyle reasons (Getz *et al.*, 2004). These rural areas are defined according to a physical location, a sparse population, and limited natural resources. They are dependent on primary resource extraction or rural businesses; there is a small manufacturing sector; they have links to a nearby urban area, but they are not part of its labor market and thus have limited access (Getz *et al.*, 2004, p. 2).

The third characteristic is rural locale and sense of place. The characteristic of being rural and “not necessarily linked to a specific physical territory” is also highlighted by Woods (2011, p. 8) where rural presents a sense of belonging attached to rural space. The rural areas are considered outskirts, from all types of the open countryside (DEFRA, 2021) to a close “degree of urban settlement” (Fahmy *et al.*, 2004, p. 9). In our paper, this characteristic of rural is termed “rural locale and sense of place” (Halfacree, 1993; Siemens, 2007).

2.2 Defining rural entrepreneurship

The discussion about the difficulties of defining entrepreneurship spills over to the debatable definitions of rural entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019). In his seminal study in the US, Wortman (1990) defined rural entrepreneurship as venture creation introducing new products and services utilizing “a new technology in a rural environment” (Wortman, 1990, p. 330). Similarly, McElwee and Atherton (2021) employ a simple view of rural entrepreneurship as entrepreneurship which happens to occur in rural environments. Rural entrepreneurship often involves being engaged in a particular rural milieu and making use of the natural, social, cultural, and financial resources “of a place which the venture needs to support its development” (see, for example, Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015, p. 7). In this vein, rural entrepreneurship, being spatially bound, reconnects space with the place and thus involves the creation of new value by creatively recombining resources from a particular setting (Anderson, 2000; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015).

We note from the above definitions regarding rural entrepreneurship that each rural setting is diverse and thus context matters (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019). The theoretical implication is that “being rural produces a different kind of entrepreneurship, a unique entrepreneurial genre” (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019, p. 160). Considering rural entrepreneurship as a contextualized social, cultural, spatial, and institutional

phenomenon, these “boundaries” affect our conceptualization of rural enterprise (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019, p. 160). For the purpose of this paper, we define rural entrepreneurship as a process impacted by its immediate spatial context and central to rural development (Müller, 2016; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015) in which all market actors can engage (Foss and Klein, 2012) in a re-combination of resources to create value (Müller, 2016; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015) that is bound to rural.

2.2.1 Previous literature reviews. In the last two decades, there have been several literature reviews on rural entrepreneurship. One bibliometric survey analyzed 181 articles (from 1989 until 2014) published in a broad range of journals and disciplines indexed in Scopus (Pato and Teixeira, 2016). The authors found that studies of rural entrepreneurship have focused on inter-related topics within various disciplines, “from demographic to health-related issues” and highlight the most important contributors and the major outlets [1] where rural entrepreneurship studies are published (Pato and Teixeira, 2016, p. 7). In the same year, Müller (2016) highlighted the lack of a contextualized approach, which limits understanding of the unique meso-level characteristics and supporting mechanisms of smaller rural entities.

There are also literature reviews on rural entrepreneurship with a narrower focus. For example, Burnett and Danson (2017) focused on island enterprises and entrepreneurs in remote areas, thus reflecting on the role and activities of agencies and strategies at different levels relevant in such remote communities in the western and the developing world (Burnett and Danson, 2017). Stathopoulou *et al.* (2004) point out the complexities of rurality as a specific entrepreneurial setting with distinct physical, social and economic characteristics. Thus, distinguishing between ideal types of rural entrepreneurship within the multiplicity of rural areas (Zografos, 2007) is an ongoing challenge for research literature and policy. Hence, to date the reviews have focused mainly on *what* rural entrepreneurship entails (e.g. what topics are discussed) rather than *how* rural entrepreneurship is discussed. Previous reviews of rural entrepreneurship literature have resulted in a research agenda proposing more theoretical work on entrepreneurial processes in rural areas (Stathopoulou *et al.*, 2004) as well as a developed categorization of definitions (Siemens, 2007, 2015).

3. Method

To fulfill our purpose, we adopt the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. To overcome bias due to researchers’ personal preferences in choosing the literature (Fink, 1998; Bryman, 2016) we use the adapted version of the evidence-based management knowledge (Trandfield *et al.*, 2003). Our review process is guided by the second stage of the SLR framework (Phelps *et al.*, 2007; Tunberg, 2014) which provides guidelines concerning the identification of research, selection of studies, quality assessment of the studies, extraction of results of each study and (data synthesis) synthesizes the results (Bryman, 2016; Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Trandfield *et al.*, 2003). The first phase, identification of research, entails a comprehensive, unbiased search (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Trandfield *et al.*, 2003) and may incorporate either a set of selected journals (Trettin and Welter, 2011) or one (Crossan and Apaydin, 2010) or a few databases (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2019; Lee, 2009). We began the review of the literature by identifying research articles on rural entrepreneurship published in core entrepreneurship and rural studies journals. The rankings by entrepreneurship journals are rarely published (Carragher and Paridon, 2008; Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2018; Katz and Boal, 2003). We, therefore, used the criterion of the “core journal”, which is amply applied within the literature of a field (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2018; Neeley, 1981). Similar to Secundo *et al.* (2020) we zoomed in on the two main fields of research into rural entrepreneurship, namely entrepreneurship studies and rural studies (Pato and Teixeira, 2016). We selected those journals that are considered important by scholars and clearly reflect the essence of the fields (Post *et al.*, 2020; Secundo *et al.*, 2020) of rural and entrepreneurship.

After carefully reading the papers from each of the research fields, we categorized the papers by outlining the author, title, journal, methodologies, the context of the study (indicating scales of micro, meso, and macro level), research question(s), research finding(s) and frame of reference, as well as findings in the reviewed articles, presented in Table A1 (in Appendix 1).

Secondly, we examined *how* authors discussed and made sense of rural entrepreneurship in both fields, i.e. entrepreneurship journals and rural studies journals. Thus, we utilized the checklist on rural proofing (see Table A2 in Appendix 2) where we took stock of the characteristics of rural addressed within each of the research fields, to find similarities and differences (Breslin and Gatrell, 2020); that is, if articles are rural proofed (or not) when discussing rural entrepreneurship.

3.1 The sample

We began with a broad search for research articles in two major databases, SCOPUS and Web of Science (Bryman, 2016). We drew on a combination of a search in Scopus using operators AND for Rural Entrepreneurship topic ($n-15$) [2] within the title, abstract, and authors' keywords (Rural Entrepreneurship OR Rural OR Entrepreneurship) in English, published between 1988 and 2020. We also searched for articles on the Web of Science to find an exact match for the title and topic "rural entrepreneurship" [3].

The initial search in SCOPUS yielded 265 documents and we then searched for peer-reviewed articles (Secundo *et al.*, 2020) (Doctype "ar" $n = 210$) in the following journals: *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development (ERD)*, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (IJEI)*, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research (IJEER)*, *European Planning Studies (EP)*, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business (IJESB)* and the *Journal of Rural Studies (JRS)* and *Sociologia Ruralis (SR)*, which rendered 39 articles. We then used a similar search in the Web of Science (WoS), which resulted in 364 initial documents and, after the search was limited to articles in English and respective journals, yielded 31 articles, of which the majority had already been generated in SCOPUS. Most of the documents indexed in WoS are also incorporated in the SCOPUS (Waltman, 2016).

We examined all 39 articles by reading the title, abstract, and, if necessary, the whole text (Baumann *et al.*, 2019). Initially, we read each article to ensure that it addressed rural entrepreneurship adequately to be included in the review. We excluded only one paper that did not directly address rural entrepreneurship (on violent conflicts on entrepreneurial decisions in rural areas). This yielded 38 articles. We then screened the reference lists of these articles to extend the scope of the search and identified an additional 59 relevant articles, including articles from the *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice Journal*, the *Journal of Small Business and Management*, the *International Small Business Journal*, and the *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship* that met the criteria. Thus, our database rendered 97 articles, presented in Table 1. In total, 58 articles have been selected from leading entrepreneurship journals and 39 articles from the *Journal of Rural Studies* and *Sociologia Ruralis*.

3.2 The review process

After carefully reading all 97 articles we used a formal protocol to record features (Bryman, 2016) such as the publication year of the articles; author(s); the title of the article(s); journal(s); research question(s); research finding(s); methodology and location. We classified articles (Baumann *et al.*, 2019) into the following categories according to the methodologies used, the context of the study, the research questions, the general frame of reference, and the findings discussed in the reviewed articles. In the cases where we had divergent classifications,

Leading entrepreneurship journals	Number of articles	Leading rural studies journals	Number of articles
<i>Entrepreneurship and regional development (ERD)</i>	17	<i>Journal of rural studies (JRS)</i>	31
<i>International Journal of entrepreneurial behavior and research (IJEER)</i>	13	<i>Sociologia ruralis (SR)</i>	8
<i>International journal of entrepreneurship and innovation (IJEI)</i>	5		
<i>International journal of entrepreneurship and small business (IJESB)</i>	9		
<i>European planning studies (EP)</i>	5		
<i>Entrepreneurship theory and practice (ETP)</i>	4		
<i>International Small business journal (ISBJ)</i>	1		
<i>Journal of small business management (JSBM)</i>	2		
<i>Journal of small business and entrepreneurship (JSBE)</i>	2		
Total	58		39

Note(s): The selection process of reviewed papers includes the following steps: (1) Broad paper search in database (criteria: peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals, published between January 1988 and December 2020, in English); (2) selection of articles from core entrepreneurship study journals and rural study journals; (3) exclusion of thematically substantively irrelevant articles by reading titles and abstracts, and the whole paper when necessary; (4) exclusion of articles which failed to address rural entrepreneurship and (5) identifying further relevant articles by screening reference lists of articles remaining after step 4

Table 1.
Outline of articles from
entrepreneurship
journals and rural
studies journals

we discussed the articles in question, after which we agreed on categories. The initial categorization of the papers is presented in Table A1 (Appendix 1).

In the second stage, since we were reviewing rural entrepreneurship studies, rurality was the basic category for our classification. Since there are very diverse understandings of rurality among authors in the reviewed papers, we derived a classification framework. In this framework, we incorporated the concept of rural proofing described in Subsection 2.1, which enabled us to place all identified papers. We used an iterative process to compile the final classification, and also drew on other stock-taking papers, for example, Trettin and Welter (2011), in which the authors examined spatially orientated entrepreneurship studies across 18 international journals. Our intention is to provide a comprehensive description of the rural entrepreneurship phenomenon by reviewing research findings in leading entrepreneurship and rural studies journals. In this way, we want to make it easier for the reader to follow the categorization of rural proofing dimensions and see if articles are rural proofed when discussing rural entrepreneurship (see Table A2 in Appendix 2).

3.3 Categorizing in accordance with the operationalization of rural proofing

In reviewing the articles, we take stock of the three characteristics of rural (remoteness, accessibility, and rural locale and sense of place) elaborated in the introduction, discussion, and conclusion of each article. If the articles address one of these three characteristics, we consider it to be rural proofed; if the rural is not problematized in the articles but is simply a context in which entrepreneurship takes place, then it is not rural proofed. In Table A2 (see Appendix 2) the articles that address one, two or three of these characteristics are highlighted in the respective characteristics (column), while those articles that do not address any characteristic of rural are empty (column).

Based on our classification of the in-depth review of articles that address (or do not) characteristics of rural presented in Table A2 (see Appendix 2), we developed a matrix.

The matrix includes the number of characteristics of rural addressed in the articles, which we elaborate more in detail in the result section below (Section 4.2). The analysis revealed similarities and differences in *how* authors approached rural proofing.

4. Findings

4.1 Methodologies and contexts of studies

The analysis reveals that the number of articles pertaining to rural entrepreneurship has increased considerably in the last four years (2016–2020) as illustrated in Table A1 (Appendix 1). Overall, 57 of the 97 articles were published in entrepreneurship journals and 40 in rural studies journals. A summary table with an overview of the methodologies and the context of the study (countries) is presented in Table A3 (Appendix 3). The majority of articles, 49 out of 97, were empirical qualitative (29 in entrepreneurship journals and 20 in rural studies journals). There are 23 empirical quantitative articles (14 in entrepreneurship journals and nine in rural studies journals) and seven with mixed methods (three in entrepreneurship journals and four in rural studies journals). There are six literature review articles (five in entrepreneurship journals and one in rural studies journals). Regarding conceptual articles, the total number is 12 (six in entrepreneurship journals and six in rural studies journals). After the year 2003, the qualitative method replaced quantitative studies as the dominant method.

With regard to countries in which rural entrepreneurship is elaborated, our results are similar to Pato and Teixeira's (2016) bibliometric survey which covers articles from the year 1989 until 2013. The majority of articles (70) address the rural entrepreneurship phenomena in developed countries such as the UK, USA, New Zealand and EU countries including Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Norway; a few articles (19) pertain to countries in development, including China (two articles); and eight articles are written in the global context. However, it is noted that since 2016 the phenomenon of rural entrepreneurship has attracted non-EU countries such as Israel, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Thailand, Tanzania and Vietnam. This might be partly because of the adoption of the macro-economic policies (e.g. utilizing neo-endogenous rural development approaches) which have been recommended by the OECD (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2013a, b; Pato and Teixeira, 2016).

4.2 The characteristics of rural

In this section, we present the results of our classification of articles with regard to our operationalization of rural proofing, utilizing the three dimensions of rural: (1) remoteness, (2) accessibility, and (3) rural locale and sense of place. The results are presented in below Table 2 *The matrix of three dimensions of rural proofing addressed in the articles.*

A total of 56 articles out of 97 include one, two or three characteristics of rural, while the remaining 41 articles do not specifically elaborate on rural characteristics. There are 23 articles that address one of the three characteristics of rural (12 in entrepreneurship journals and 11 in rural studies journals), and 23 articles that address two of the three characteristics (15 in entrepreneurship journals and eight in rural studies journals) and are well-balanced, belonging to both fields, entrepreneurship studies and rural studies. However, of 10 articles that address all three characteristics of rural in relation to rural entrepreneurship, seven pertain to the rural studies journals and three are from entrepreneurship journals. Below, we discuss the results in Table 2 row by row.

4.2.1 Three out of three characteristics of rural addressed. The three characteristics of rural, remoteness, accessibility and rural locale and sense of place are incorporated in a total of 10 articles. As stated above, most of the articles (7) are published in the rural studies journals highlighting the socio-spatial dimension (e.g. distance to access basic services) and

Nr. Articles	Rural locale and sense of place			Authors and journals	
	Remoteness	Accessibility	Rural place	Entrepreneurship	Rural journals
Three out of three characteristics addressed (10 articles)	10	Yes	Yes	Munoz and Kimmitt (2019) (<i>ERD</i>); Muller (2016) (<i>EP</i>); North and Smallbone (2006) (<i>EP</i>)	Steiner and Teasdale (2019) (<i>JRS</i>); Li <i>et al.</i> (2019) (<i>JRS</i>); Zografos (2007) (<i>JRS</i>); Bosworth (2012) (<i>JRS</i>); Steiner and Atterton (2015) (<i>JRS</i>); Pato and Teixeira (2016) (<i>SP</i>); Bosworth and Turner (2018) (<i>JRS</i>)
Two out of three characteristics of rural addressed (23 articles in total)	12	Yes	No	Stathopoulou <i>et al.</i> (2004) (<i>IJEBR</i>); Fuller-Love <i>et al.</i> (2006) (<i>IJEBR</i>); Vaillant and Lafuente (2007) (<i>ERD</i>); Ring <i>et al.</i> (2010) (<i>ETP</i>); Cumming and Johan (2010) (<i>ETP</i>); Polo-Pena <i>et al.</i> (2012) (<i>ERD</i>); Korsgaard <i>et al.</i> (2015) (<i>ERD</i>); Siemens (2015) (<i>SBE</i>); Deakins <i>et al.</i> (2016) (<i>IJEBR</i>); Istiqomah and Adawiyah (2018) (<i>IJESB</i>)	Clausen (2020) (<i>JRS</i>); Kvist (2020) (<i>JRS</i>)
	7	Yes	No	Meccheri and Pelloni (2006) (<i>ERD</i>); Korsgaard <i>et al.</i> (2015) (<i>IJEBR</i>); Müller and Korsgaard (2018) (<i>ERD</i>)	Bryant (1989) (<i>JRS</i>); Terlum (2003) (<i>JRS</i>); Markantoni and Van Hoven (2012) (<i>JRS</i>); Sofer and Saada (2016) (<i>SR</i>)
	4	No	Yes	Lang <i>et al.</i> (2014) (<i>ISB</i>); Kalantardis and Bika (2006) (<i>ERD</i>)	Herslund (2012) (<i>SR</i>); Somerville <i>et al.</i> (2015) (<i>JRS</i>)
One out of three characteristics addressed (23 articles in total)	11	Yes	No	Pato and Teixeira (2020) (<i>EP</i>); Bosworth <i>et al.</i> (2011) (<i>IJESB</i>); Baumgartner <i>et al.</i> (2013b) (<i>ERD</i>); Kasabov (2016) (<i>ERD</i>); Burnett and Danson (2017) (<i>IJE</i>); Movahedi Yaghoubi-Farani (2012) (<i>IJESB</i>)	Deller <i>et al.</i> (2019) (<i>JRS</i>); Galvao <i>et al.</i> (2020) (<i>JRS</i>); De-Guzman <i>et al.</i> (2020) (<i>JRS</i>); Young (2006) (<i>JRS</i>); Lang (2019) (<i>JRS</i>)
	4	No	Yes	Brunjes and Revilla Diez (2013) (<i>ERD</i>); Koyana and Mason (2017) (<i>IJEBR</i>); Von Friedrichs and Wahlberg (2016) (<i>IJESB</i>)	Bock (2004) (<i>JRS</i>)

(continued)

Table 2.
The matrix of three
dimensions of rural
proofing addressed in
the articles

Table 2.

Nr. Articles	Rural locale and sense of place		Accessibility		Rural journals	
	Remoteness	Accessability	Yes	No	Entrepreneurship	Rural journals
8	No	No	Yes	No	Gaddefors and Anderson (2019) (<i>IJEI</i>); Anderson and Gaddefors (2016) (<i>IJESB</i>)	Chege and Wang (2020) (<i>JRS</i>); Anthopoulos (2010) (<i>JRS</i>); Kalantaridis (2010) (<i>JRS</i>); Bosworth and Willett (2011) (<i>SR</i>); Wright and Annes (2014) (<i>SR</i>); Anthopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2017) (<i>JRS</i>)
41	No	No	No	No	Aarstad <i>et al.</i> (2010) (<i>ETP</i>); Adnan <i>et al.</i> (2016) (<i>IJESB</i>); Akinbami and Aransiola (2016) (<i>JSBE</i>); Baumgartner <i>et al.</i> (2013a, b) (<i>EP</i>); Berglund <i>et al.</i> (2016) (<i>ERD</i>); Besser and Miller (2010) (<i>IJESB</i>); Carter (1998) (<i>ERD</i>); Couzy and Dockes (2008) (<i>IJESB</i>); Eijdenberg <i>et al.</i> (2019) (<i>IJEER</i>); Fitz-Koch <i>et al.</i> (2018) (<i>ETP</i>); Gaddefors and Anderson (2017) (<i>IJEER</i>); Gorbuntsova <i>et al.</i> (2018) (<i>IJEI</i>); Johansson and Nilsson (1989) (<i>ERD</i>); Julien (2019) (<i>ERD</i>); Khanduja and Kaushik (2008) (<i>IJESB</i>); Marques <i>et al.</i> (2019) (<i>IJEER</i>); McElwee <i>et al.</i> (2018) (<i>ERD</i>); McKague <i>et al.</i> (2017) (<i>IJEI</i>); Muhammad <i>et al.</i> (2017) (<i>IJEER</i>); Nordbo (2014) (<i>EP</i>); Sä <i>et al.</i> , (2019) (<i>IJEER</i>); Smith (2004) (<i>IJEER</i>); Smith and McElwee (2015) (<i>IJEER</i>); Stone and Stubbs (2007) (<i>ERD</i>); Tretin and Welter (2011) (<i>ERD</i>); Wang <i>et al.</i> (2019) (<i>IJEER</i>); Welter and Smallbone (2011) (<i>SBM</i>); Yu <i>et al.</i> (2013) (<i>SBM</i>)	Abbott and Fuller-Love N. (2020) (<i>JRS</i>); Apostolopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2019) (<i>JRS</i>); Atai <i>et al.</i> (2020) (<i>JRS</i>); Dubois (2016) (<i>JRS</i>); Freshwater (2015) (<i>JRS</i>); Greenberg <i>et al.</i> (2018) (<i>JRS</i>); Hermans <i>et al.</i> (2012) (<i>SR</i>); Grande (2011) (<i>JRS</i>); Niska <i>et al.</i> (2012) (<i>SR</i>); Simmons and Kalantaridis (1996) (<i>JRS</i>); Vesala and Vesala (2010) (<i>JRS</i>); Webster (2017) (<i>JRS</i>); Young (2010) (<i>SR</i>)

multiplicity of rural areas that present challenges to rural entrepreneurship and policymaking. For example, [Steiner and Teasdale \(2019\)](#) develop a conceptual framework by unfolding the potential contribution of social enterprises to rural development. They note that rurality is often associated with distant locations and sparsely populated areas faced with the challenge of accessing goods and services, which impacts entrepreneurial activities ([Steiner and Teasdale, 2019](#)). Physical barriers and distance from basic services such as access to schools, health care, and support centers (e.g. banks) represent obstacles to business development ([Bosworth, 2012](#)). A strong collaboration between the policymakers and rural entrepreneurs is thus necessary, as “one size fits all” policies ([Steiner and Teasdale, 2019](#), p. 152) do not work in rural environments since there are multiple rural(s) ([Zografos, 2007](#)). Moreover, “rural” is more than a spatial dimension; it also encompasses social features ([Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019](#)) such as the entrepreneurial behavior of rural business owners ([Steiner and Atterton, 2015](#)), particularly when embedded within a community. [Steiner and Atterton \(2015\)](#) highlight the importance of rural community where social capital and trust in collaboration with local networks helps enhance the resilience of rural businesses which face difficulties of distance from markets and limited local demand. Hence, policymakers need to consider the holistic contributions of rural businesses in terms of sustaining local services and providing employment as well as sustaining social capital and a sense of attachment to the local community ([Steiner and Atterton, 2015](#)) when developing policies.

The three (3) articles pertaining to entrepreneurship journals emphasize the role of rural entrepreneurship and policy support in rural development. For example, [North and Smallbone \(2006\)](#) suggest that there is a need for a clear vision of the role of entrepreneurship in rural areas so that policies are developed and implemented by tuning into rural local specificities. [Munoz and Kimmit \(2019\)](#) highlight the importance of a contextualized understanding of rural entrepreneurship places. They provide a meso-level holistic view of spatial contexts also to informing policies at the communal level in rural areas. Using the place-based perspective ([Cresswell, 2013](#)), they develop a Rural Entrepreneurship Framework for Localized Economic and Communal Thriving framework (REFLECT). In the REFLECT framework, they indicate that material location, a rural space as place-specific recognition of rural life and particular nature of the places, may enable rural entrepreneurship and its development. Similarly, [Müller \(2016\)](#) suggests that rural areas are heterogeneous, and thus, the notion of rurality must also be examined beyond the national context. Policies are often replicated from developed nations or regions without being tuned to their specific local place and entrepreneurial culture. Therefore, in order to develop effective policies to stimulate entrepreneurship in rural areas, policymakers have to “understand the conditions, capabilities and structures of spatial contexts”, including entrepreneurial activity ([Müller, 2016](#), p. 115). In particular, since regional, including rural, conditions and structures (e.g. distance to non-local markets, limited access to social and financial capital) influence entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship (e.g. in a rural setting a unique entrepreneurial activity may emerge as a regional resource) impacts the regional development ([Müller, 2016](#)).

Articles in rural studies journals generally examine the interplay between rural policy and rural (social) enterprises that influence rural development ([Bosworth and Turner, 2018](#); [Bosworth, 2012](#); [Steiner and Atterton, 2015](#); [Steiner and Teasdale, 2019](#)) as well as the achievement of sustainable rural communities ([Li et al., 2019](#)) taking into account diverse rural settings ([Zografos, 2007](#)). The three articles in entrepreneurship journals refer to rural place-specific contexts that enable rural entrepreneurship ([Munoz and Kimmit, 2019](#)), which impacts regional development ([Müller, 2016](#)) and informs policymakers ([North and Smallbone, 2006](#)).

4.2.2 Two out of three characteristics of rural addressed. As shown in [Table 2](#) above, a total of 23 articles address two of the three characteristics of rural, of which 15 articles pertain to

entrepreneurship journals and eight articles pertain to rural studies journals. Out of 23 articles, the first characteristic of remoteness and the second characteristic of accessibility are jointly addressed in ten articles in entrepreneurship journals and two articles in rural studies, making a total of 12 articles. In addition, the characteristics of remoteness and rural locale and sense of place are jointly addressed in three articles in entrepreneurship journals and four articles in rural studies, a total of seven articles. Both accessibility and rural locale and sense of place are addressed in two articles in entrepreneurship journals and two articles in rural studies, a total of four articles. The results in this classification show that articles published in entrepreneurship journals emphasize the characteristic of remoteness and the characteristic of accessibility, rather than rural locale and sense of place. Remoteness and the rural locale and sense of place are almost equally addressed, and accessibility and the rural locale and sense of place are the same in entrepreneurship journals and rural studies journals (each two articles).

In the entrepreneurship field, the results from addressing two of three characteristics of rurality show that the characteristics of remoteness and accessibility are dominant in entrepreneurship journals. For example, [Stathopoulou et al. \(2004\)](#) highlight the challenges posed by the remoteness of rural locations, such as the large distance(s) from major (urban) markets and access to institutions that have implications for obtaining viable information and effective policy implementation. [Fuller-Love et al. \(2006\)](#) provide rural businesses with scenarios for easier access to information technology regarding niche markets and scenarios to inform policy on local specific needs so that policymakers develop tailor-made policies. These rural areas are sparsely populated and have a limited choice in terms of human resources ([Polo-Peña et al., 2012](#); [Ring et al., 2010](#); [Siemens, 2015](#)), as the skilled and educated workforce move to cities ([Cumming and Johan, 2010](#)). Thus, running ventures in remote areas requires business entrepreneurs with distinct characteristics ([Deakins et al., 2016](#)) who must build their local networks and utilize non-local networks ([Lang et al., 2014](#); [Kalantaridis and Bika, 2006](#); [Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006](#)) and “become placially embedded” ([Korsgaard et al., 2015](#), p. 592). Inappropriate socio-cultural traits of their informal institutional framework, in addition to physical disadvantage, make these remote areas “non-conducive for effective entrepreneurial activity” ([Vaillant and Lafuente, 2007](#), p. 314). These results show that in both fields a high degree of importance is given to the idyllic trait of rural. The rural idyll refers to an idealization of the countryside that paints an idyllic picture of rural traditions – characterized by a sense of belonging, rootedness, stability, and national distinctiveness – with its peasant agriculture ([Waters, 2010](#)). It is often used to “simplify our understanding of power relations within rural society and of the contestation of the reality and representation of rural culture” ([Little, 1999](#), p. 440).

In the rural studies field, [Herslund \(2012\)](#) for example, stresses the importance of a rural idyll for the localization of businesses, whether the creation of new ventures or the expansion of existing ones. Support for rural businesses and entrepreneurs needs to be grounded in the political, social, and economic arenas as an enabling environment, since rurality presents various challenges, particularly for women ([Markantoni and Van Hoven, 2012](#); [Sofer and Saada, 2016](#)), at both macro and local level and thus influences the need to conduct entrepreneurial activity in different ways ([Bryant, 1989](#)). [Kvist \(2020\)](#), highlights that during the implementation of the regional policy on encouraging people to live and work in the remote rural Swedish north, the promotion of the white male entrepreneur was emphasized, recreating gender norms due to the failure of policymakers to problematize the underlying gender discourses. Thus, developing inclusive policies pertaining to a specific rural setting would increase their resilience in overcoming challenges coming from a local and international context ([Terluin, 2003](#)). That is, in terms of mitigating the failure of formal institutions in the implementation of policies in rural areas ([Somerville et al., 2015](#)) by taking into account the specificities of a rural milieu.

4.2.3 *One out of three characteristics of rural addressed.* In the categorization of one out of three characteristics of rural addressed, 11 articles pertain to entrepreneurship journals and 12 articles pertain to rural studies journals. The most frequently addressed characteristic is remoteness (six articles in entrepreneurship journals and five articles in rural studies, a total of 11 articles). Moreover, the characteristic of accessibility is addressed in three articles in entrepreneurship journals and one article in rural studies, a total of four articles. The characteristic of rural locale and sense of place is addressed in two articles in entrepreneurship journals and six articles in rural studies, a total of eight articles. Hence, results in this category show that the characteristics of remoteness and accessibility are dominant in entrepreneurship journals and the characteristic of rural locale and sense of place is emphasized more in the rural studies journals.

In entrepreneurship journals, for example, [Baumgartner et al. \(2013a, b\)](#) address the challenges of EU peripheral regions with a local identity that obtain various dynamics for development which require unique entrepreneurial initiatives. [Bosworth et al. \(2011\)](#) note that EU policy overlooks the potential dynamics in rural economies, such as niche markets, natural and environmental resources, and the quality of rural life. [Burnett and Danson \(2017\)](#) highlight the utilization of rural proofing by the Scottish Government, where the diversity and distinctiveness of rural(s) need to be recognized in order to build successful institutional frameworks and policies tailored to remote rural communities. This includes the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation to ensure appropriate development in the right rural settings. In addition, [Kasabov \(2016\)](#) points out that when promoting rural entrepreneurship in remote, less densely populated areas in Thailand, generic (EU) policy approaches are inappropriate due to a lack of sensitivity to local circumstances, leading to incoherence between internal and external policy. [Movahedi and Yaghoubi-Farani \(2012\)](#) describe the barriers for women rural entrepreneurs in Iran in terms of remoteness such as distance to the city, suppliers, markets, and infrastructure difficulties. Although in some developing countries the rural development policies promote women's entrepreneurship in rural areas ([Koyana and Mason, 2017](#)), there is still a lack of government policies offering women support to access financial services ([Movahedi and Yaghoubi-Farani, 2012](#)). [Pato and Castro Teixeira \(2020\)](#) imply that the criteria, territorial unit, as well as definition of rural settings, vary between countries, and thus, urban/rural boundaries are becoming blurred. For example, [Von Friedrichs and Wahlberg \(2016\)](#) show that in Sweden, small communities in sparsely populated areas outside bigger cities are slowly shrinking, which leads to challenges in accessing basic services and the closure of schools and health facilities.

When only one of the characteristics of rural is addressed, it is, in rural studies, most often rural locale and sense of place. The idyllic discourse of rurality is often highlighted, including in the policy, and thus used by governments, particularly in terms of counter-urbanizations. For example, [Bosworth and Willett \(2011\)](#) portray the government's intention to re-vitalize deprived rural areas in Cornwall and Northumberland by encouraging in-migrants to create or run rural enterprises. They point out that particular attention should be paid (by government officials, and policymakers) to the different expectations and motivations of individuals that move into these rural communities, as the social and economic imperatives should be treated inseparably. Moreover, [Chege and Wang \(2020\)](#) stress that rural entrepreneurs embedded in the rural setting must analyze their environment in order to optimize the performance of their enterprises to better cope with the changes and dynamism of the (new) rural environment. Indeed, [Kalantaridis \(2010\)](#) describes the role of in-migrants in the socio-economic change in the countryside and rural-urban interdependencies in North East England, implying that areas on the outskirts of metropolitan areas and those with a distinctly rural character benefit from the arrival of newcomers (in-migrants), while remote areas continue to decline. [Anthopoulou et al. \(2017\)](#) describe how rural idyll discourse is promoted by governments in times of crisis in Greece with regard to rural resilience,

projecting rural as a center for innovation and employment opportunities. Yet the idyllic discourse is insufficient since socio-economic and cultural prerequisites of resilience are not appropriate for processes of transformation and reconstruction to take place and build a sustainable community (Anthopoulou, 2010). Moreover, Anthopoulou (2010) highlights that the rural idyll reinforces the traditional women's gender role. Wright and Annes (2014) describe how farm women diversify farms into agritourism by using the idyllic perceptions of the countryside such as wellness and the tranquility of nature embedded within the collective consciousness of tourists. The authors imply that, since the meanings of rurality are mainly socio-psychological constructs, these farm women in France use it to make themselves visible, entrepreneurial and to obtain a degree of authority. Bock (2004), however, addresses accessibility in terms of Dutch farm women who lack access to resources such as investment capital and cultural challenges for starting their own ventures. These women use various strategies and navigate between family, farm enterprise and community in the rural setting to overcome gender challenges.

Although there are exceptions when articles in entrepreneurship journals discuss the characteristic of rural locale and sense of place (for example, Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019) this characteristic was distinctively present in the rural studies journals, compared to the remoteness and accessibility that are dominant in the entrepreneurship journals. This implies that authors in the entrepreneurship journals problematize rural in terms of tangible variables, such as distance to markets/metropolitan areas, depopulation, and limited access to resources (e.g. financial resources, banks) including public services. In the rural studies journals, authors to a higher extent emphasize the intangible variables, such as support and trust within community networks, and social capital in conjunction with the unique resources of rural locale that present a sense of place and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

4.2.4 None of the rural characteristics addressed. In the last category in Table 2, there are 41 articles that do not address any of the three dimensions of rural proofing. Out of 41 articles, 28 pertain to entrepreneurship journals and 13 articles pertain to rural studies journals. In this category, the authors mainly focus on specific topics such as social capital (e.g. Aarstad *et al.*, 2010; Abbott and Fuller-Love, 2020; Ataei *et al.*, 2020; Marques *et al.*, 2019) community entrepreneurship/networks (e.g. Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989; Young, 2010), local-translocal embeddedness (e.g. Dubois, 2016; Greenberg *et al.*, 2018; Webster, 2017), agriculture and farm diversification (e.g. Carter, 1998; Grande, 2011), entrepreneurs'/farmers' identity (Fitz-Koch *et al.*, 2018; Vesala and Vesala, 2010), illegality in rural areas (Smith, 2004; Smith and McElwee, 2013, 2015), institutional and policy framework (e.g. Eijdenberg *et al.*, 2019; Julien, 2019; Sá *et al.*, 2019; Simmons and Kalantaridis, 1996; Yu *et al.*, 2013), resilience (e.g. Apostolopoulos *et al.*, 2019; Freshwater, 2015), women's entrepreneurship (Adnan *et al.*, 2016; Akinbami and Aransiola, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2019). These authors focus on specific entrepreneurship phenomena in rural settings, i.e. embeddedness, space, and resilience, and do not address characteristics of rurality. They thus do not consider rurality to be problematic when theorizing rural entrepreneurship.

5. Discussion

In this paper we set out to explore *how* rural entrepreneurship is discussed in the leading journals of the two main research fields of entrepreneurship studies and rural studies.

Our literature review reveals that in the past four years rural entrepreneurship has attracted increased interest in both fields. We operationalized the concept of rural proofing by identifying three characteristics of rural and took stock of published articles to assess whether the authors in the entrepreneurship studies and rural studies consider these characteristics when they discuss rural entrepreneurship.

First, we find that out of 97 articles, 41 articles on rural entrepreneurship are not rural proofed, meaning rurality is not problematized when theorizing rural entrepreneurship. There are twice as many “non-rural proof” articles in the entrepreneurship journals than in the rural studies journals. This means that authors writing in entrepreneurship journals generally do not “think rural” to the same extent when addressing rural entrepreneurship. By neglecting the characteristics of rurality, entrepreneurship researchers risk applying a tacit urban norm to rural entrepreneurship phenomena. This confirms the previous findings regarding the lack of entrepreneurship knowledge appropriate to the rural contexts (e.g. [Atterton, 2008](#); [McElwee, 2008](#); [Munoz and Kimmmit, 2019](#); [Zografos, 2007](#)).

Secondly, our review shows that when articles do address rurality, both fields lean towards focusing mainly on the characteristics of remoteness and accessibility. Although a small number of authors in rural studies journals give priority to the characteristic of rural locale and sense of place, authors in both fields mainly address the characteristics of remoteness and accessibility when discussing rural entrepreneurship. Hence, there is a need for increased attention to these characteristics in the study of rural entrepreneurship, particularly in entrepreneurship journals. Increased cross-fertilization between the fields of entrepreneurship and rural studies is one avenue to develop the entrepreneurship field in the direction towards rural proofing.

Thirdly, our review showed that both fields of research are relatively similar regarding methodologies used and context studies and that there has been a shift towards more qualitative methods in the last two decades. Authors in rural studies use slightly more mixed methods than authors in entrepreneurship journals and are equally interested in conceptual papers. Over time (since 2016) there has also been an increase in studies from non-EU countries that follow up on macro-economic policies recommended by the OECD.

Our conclusions provide important lessons for researchers, but also for reviewers and editors, in particular in the entrepreneurship field. If rural entrepreneurship is to be taken seriously in the field, the dimension of rural space and place also needs to be addressed in a larger portion of our published paper. The operationalization of rural proofing in the context of scholarly work developed in this paper, could potentially also be used as a tool in review processes.

6. Conclusions

This paper has focused on how rurality is discussed and identified gaps in the rural proofing, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship. In the discussion section, we noted that there is a lack of studies into gender entrepreneurship in the entrepreneurship field (e.g. [Koyana and Mason, 2017](#); [Movahedi and Yaghoubi-Farani, 2012](#)), compared to the field of rural studies (e.g. [Anthopoulou, 2010](#); [Anthopoulou et al., 2017](#); [Bock, 2004](#); [Kvist, 2020](#); [Sofer and Saada, 2016](#); [Wright and Annes, 2014](#)). The same applies to the topic of resilience. Hence, these would also be relevant issues to explore in further – of course, rural proofed – research endeavors.

We, therefore, suggest that scholars investigating entrepreneurship phenomena in rural settings take into account the specificities of the rural context concerning the phenomenon under study. Each rural area is unique in terms of proximity to an urban area, demographic (i.e. depopulation), and placial features (e.g. [Korsgaard et al., 2015](#)) which influence the phenomena under study. Hence, we recommend that researchers do more rural proof research and take into account all three dimensions of rural proofing discussed in this paper, namely (1) remoteness, (2) accessibility, (3) rural locale and sense of place. The first dimension could be assured by considering the socio-spatial dimension (e.g. distance to access basic services, markets, schools, healthcare, suppliers, customers, and transaction costs such as transportation, and use of natural resources) and multiplicity of rural areas (e.g. [Bosworth et al., 2011](#); [Deller et al., 2019](#); [Kasabov, 2016](#); [Steiner and Teasdale, 2019](#); [Zografos, 2007](#)), by

which we mean considering rural place-specific contexts conducive to rural entrepreneurship (e.g. [Munoz and Kimmitt, 2019](#)). Regarding the second dimension, researchers should ensure they assess the level of infrastructure in a rural area, the access to information and communication technologies, the operation of rural businesses networks, and access to the use of local resources (e.g. [Bock, 2004](#); [Lang et al., 2014](#); [Kalantaridis and Bika, 2006](#); [Koyana and Mason, 2017](#); [Von Friedrichs and Wahlberg, 2016](#)). In the third dimension, “rural locale and sense of place” (e.g. [Anthopoulou, 2010](#); [Chege and Wang, 2020](#); [Herslund, 2012](#); [Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019](#); [Kalantaridis, 2010](#)) researchers should account for intangible variables such as rural community support and trust, norms, tradition and mentality within a specific rural place (e.g. [Müller, 2016](#)), which influence entrepreneurship and ultimately rural development.

In terms of policy implications, we identified throughout our review several issues that were addressed by several authors, implying that close cooperation between academic research and institutional policy is necessary. We concur with [Steiner and Teasdale \(2019\)](#) on the need to explore the impact of different policies on rural enterprise development and assess the effectiveness of the policies in the rural context, such as regional growth policy and collective awareness on supporting gender unbiased in rural areas. That is rural proofing the policies by taking into account the specificities of a rural milieu, including gender and ethnicity, as well as tradition and mentality within the rural community. Indeed, this confirms the policymakers’ acknowledgment that a close collaboration with academia is essential, and research should be more interdisciplinary in order to make a more distinctive contribution to rural development. Consequently, it would enable policymakers to formulate policies that support projects to strengthen the rural environment as well as the cooperation of local and non-local actors in order to benefit from both networks, which is vital for rural development. In addition, this would address the requirements of the policymakers in the European Commission concerning more in-depth research on the composition of rural communities, which has changed due to newcomers to rural areas who invest in rural settings and offer different types of skills (particularly scarce in the agricultural sector), as well as acquaintances in non-local networks ([EC, 2015](#)).

Our study is not without its limitations, in particular as we focus on two fields, namely entrepreneurship studies, and rural studies, to examine the rural proofing of entrepreneurship. Further research could extend our study by including journals from other disciplines, such as economic geography, tourism studies, and family business, that examine varieties of entrepreneurship where “hidden” rural articles may reside (e.g. [Welter et al., 2019](#)) due to urban bias. Rural proofing articles within economic geography may enrich further insights into rural entrepreneurship within rural proximity dimensions. In tourism studies, rural proofing tourism literature might explain the reconstruction of rural tradition and its utilization within tourism (e.g. farm bed and breakfasts). Rural proofing articles on the family business can shed light on entrepreneurial family businesses in rural areas that are generally considered small, not entrepreneurial, and less visible. These areas present an intriguing agenda for future research when utilizing the rural proofing concept.

Notes

1. Major outlets of rural entrepreneurship published articles identified by [Pato and Teixeira \(2016\)](#): *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* (16 articles), *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses* and *Journal of Rural Studies* (10 articles each).
2. ($n-15$) in the Scopus database indicated the number of words to check within a specified category (for example, in our case checking the content of rural entrepreneurship 15 words within the title).
3. Web of Science search, [(Rural Entrepreneurship (Title) and Rural Entrepreneurship* rural (Topic)], total 364 documents, articles $n = 236$, in English $n = 212$ articles, in respective journals = 31.

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Appendix

The Appendix files for this article can be found online.

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