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# Context matters; entrepreneurial energy in the revival of place.

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## **Context matters; entrepreneurial energy in the revival of place**

### **Abstract**

The objective of this longitudinal ethnography of a rural small town in Northern Sweden, following the presence and identifying the processes associated with an incoming entrepreneur, was to better understand entrepreneurship in a rural context. The significant shaping of entrepreneurship by context is increasingly recognised, with entrepreneurship in depleted communities an important part of this research movement. Moreover, entrepreneurship within a community focus offers fresh insights. We position our paper at the conjunction of these literatures. We have studied this community for 10 years; regularly interviewing the entrepreneur and residents; attending meetings and making observations. We found that the entrepreneurial creation of garden provoked a raft of change, such that entrepreneurship reverberated throughout the town. Catering and accommodation facilities for the new tourists sprang up; arts and craft businesses emerged to join in the creative buzz and sense of vibrancy permeated the people. This movement, development and action can be attributed to the gardener and his garden.

To explain these effects, we developed the concept of entrepreneurial energy. Entrepreneurial energy is a vitality; produced in and by entrepreneurship. It works, in part, as a role model, holding up examples of what can be done. But much more, the presence of entrepreneurial energy serves to invigorate others. It becomes amplified in new ways of doing, new ways of being, yet calcified in the entrepreneurial actions of others. We saw how it unleashed the latent, promoted the possible, to entrepreneurially revive the town. Entrepreneurship has long been seen as an engine of development, but studies are often economic and very coarse grained. We offer a fine grained analysis that furthers explanations of entrepreneurship by elaborating on a novel dimension. Moreover, rather than treating entrepreneurship as an individual act, the social of interaction and context are brought into play. The proposed concept of entrepreneurship as energy offers a novel, but complementary element to understanding the entrepreneurial process in context.

**Keywords;** rural; uneven development; entrepreneurial energy; depleted community; process

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## Introduction

This chapter is as much about reflecting on how we understand and appreciate context as it is about our empirical analysis of entrepreneurship. Our case study demonstrates what for us is a remarkable phenomenon, the economic and social revival of a depleted community through entrepreneurship. We know of course that entrepreneurship promotes growth. We even know that the reason has much to do with introducing new products or services or in doing things differently - innovation. In this archetypal view of entrepreneurship, it is well understood as a process or a behaviour practiced by individuals. Entrepreneurs do things that create change, usually beneficial change that is experienced by others. Thus entrepreneurs “do” entrepreneurship. But typically context, place, is seen as the recipient of these benefits; entrepreneurship produces and places receive entrepreneurship’s outcomes. Entrepreneurship is done to places, although the context of place can modify what is done. In our longitudinal study, rather than place being merely a recipient of change, we found that place was intrinsically involved as part of the process. Thus place is our unit of analysis of entrepreneurship. We are interested in discovering, how entrepreneurship as a thing (*sui generis*; a thing in itself) rather than an entrepreneur, engages with and affects place.

Our case is distinctive, a declining Swedish rural town that rediscovered its identity as a good place to be. The first author first became aware of Skoghem, our case, when he heard about plans to build a garden in a remote area. Interested in rural enterprising he visited to see what was going on and became so fascinated that this became a longitudinal study of entrepreneurial change in context. Although novel, it is not unique because McKeever et al (2014) and McKeever et al (2015) saw something very similar in Northern Ireland. Anderson, Warren and Bensemann (2018) identified the entrepreneurial revitalisation of a rural town in New Zealand. Indeed, the very idea of a depleted community owes much to Johnstone and Lionais (2004) seminal paper on entrepreneurial renewal. Although Thomson (2010) talked about how some entrepreneurs seem to enable other entrepreneurs in regenerating places, the major focus of these studies has been the direct impact of entrepreneurship on places. Our unit for analysis is broader, the dynamics of entrepreneurship and place. Put differently, we are especially interested in how entrepreneurship is a socialised phenomenon, and how it engages and involves others. Accordingly, what is different about our case analysis is the apparently contagious role of entrepreneurship in the transformation of place. From the zeal and enthusiasm of one rather surprising entrepreneurial source, a gardener, entrepreneurship spread through the town. First one entrepreneurial act and then another, each new action seemed to spur yet another until the once depleted place was abuzz with entrepreneurship. We envisage this notion of enterprise engendering enterprise not as some sort of cloning or replication; but as almost akin to a fast breeding reactor and chain reactions. The process of creating one new business catalysed others; enterprise radiated outwards from the primary event, stimulating and sparking up others. We can readily see this as

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entrepreneurial propagation, but struggle to explain why it was happening. It was almost as if the town had been reenergised by entrepreneurship.

We have structured our chapter in a way that, we hope, will give the reader a sense of how the ideas we present resulted from our engagement with the small town. To lay the ground for our thinking, we problematise how change and entrepreneurship has been approached and illuminate some of the consequences of imposing established structure to explanations of how the concepts relate. Further, in order to develop our theoretical point of departure we review theories about the intersection between context and entrepreneurship. After this theoretical groundwork, we open up our case, by first presenting and reflecting on how we did it, followed by our story about the revival of a small, rural town in Sweden. We then have what we need for an empirically and theoretically grounded discussion about context and entrepreneurship. Finally a concluding section brings the chapter to an end.

### **Explaining change and entrepreneurship**

The accepted view of entrepreneurs as change makers accounts for some of what we observed, although creating a garden is hardly a typical entrepreneurial event. But what was intriguing and poorly explained by our current theories was the entrepreneurial amplification effect that we observed. Entrepreneurship is a change process and we expect places to adapt to change, to absorb change and be somewhat different after change. Accordingly, entrepreneurship in practice is context bound (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2017; 2016; Roos, 2017; Welter, 2011) or simply that context matters (McKeever et al, 2014; Boettke and Coyne, 2009). But what we observed was not merely modifications to place as one entrepreneurial effort was subsumed into the town. What we saw seemed a radical change brought about as the town appeared to engage with entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship appeared as the change agent, not just the entrepreneur.

We know that the economic fortunes of places wax and wane. History shows us that once great places fall, succumbing to processes of change to which they do not adapt. Indeed, even great civilisations whether Roman, Greek or Egyptian seem to become victims of their own success. Landes (1969) for example, describes the mighty dynasties of China decaying as they failed to adapt to change. It seems that the very elements that make places great carry the seeds that bring about their decline. Historically, Sydney Checkland (1976) uses the analogy of the Upas tree to explain the deterioration of the Industrial Scottish central region. The legendary Upas tree grows so large and spreads so far that it overshadows everything else. Checkland argued that the heavy industries were so entrenched, physically, economically, and socially that no other, far less new, businesses could survive in their shadow. But as the fortunes of heavy industry began to rust, and the clamour of the shipyards turned silent, there were no emerging seedling businesses to recolonise this crumbling terrain. Socially, individuals had only experienced working for others; economically, customers and capital had fled to the promised lands of new places such as Taiwan; and all of the hard won expertise and craft stood idle on street corners. We see similar patterns repeated within the countryside

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in the rural north of Europe. Food production continue its route towards industrialization; farmers learn to apply lean production and customers get used to world market prices. Simultaneously these happenings leave the knowledge about how to grow food in the hands of a rapidly decreasing group of farmers. What has for hundreds of years been the hub in rural economy in Scandinavia is moving to warmer countries. The past had shaped the future and entrepreneurial change had lacked the nutrients to allow it to take root.

Political economy offers an alternative explanatory theoretical account of why some places prosper and others falter. Just as Schumpeter's (1934) creative destruction delineates how new winning products destroy the old, the concept of uneven development describes how in spatial and geographic terms, established places lose out to new places. The dynamics of the capitalist process determines that what was once the competitive advantage of place loses out as the very investments that brought development create the conditions that chase investment to new places (Huggins and Thomson, 2014). A clear example of this process operating in Tunisia is described by Harbi and Anderson (2012). In this Tunisian case, the impelling nature of competition meant that the availability of cheap skilled labour sucked out knitwear production from European factories to relocate in Tunisia. The irony is that Tunisia now suffers from this same problem from which it had benefitted. Increased wages, arising from better economic conditions, have chased knitwear manufacturing to use even cheaper wages in places like Cambodia. At a national, but rural level, we have previously argued that rural places can attract entrepreneurs simply because they seem more 'natural'; they have not benefitted in the past from industrial investments. The twist in this "tale" is that the lack of development; the naturalness, the otherness of the rural, is precisely what attracts people to value the countryside (Anderson, 2000). It is interesting how both a historical and economic analysis emphasise inertia within change; that it is the lack of action that causes decline. If places stand still as the world moves on, these places decline.

Interesting too how these theories seem to present an inevitability set in a cycle of time. This chimes well with economic long wave theory, a Kondratieff (1979) picture of economies growing but inescapably followed by shrinking. Kondratieff was executed by the Soviets for insisting that economies will shrink even in a communist planned economy; but he was right and the Soviets were wrong. Although these theories account for how places decline over time, they tell us little about how such cycles of contraction can be interrupted. We argue that places are not fixed in time but are shaped by time. Moreover, places are not passive vassals to some tyranny of time; places are about people, and people act. Entrepreneurs in particular have agency power that can challenge the inevitability of existing structures (Anderson and Warren, 2011, Berglund et al. 2016) and challenge rural adversity (Anderson et al, 2010). Aligning entrepreneurship with these theories of uneven development and historical inevitability, as we see it, entrepreneurship happens in places (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). The process is certainly influenced by the past, but perhaps as shaping, even offering, opportunity. However opportunity, like entrepreneurship itself is always future orientated. As

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we have argued, entrepreneurship appeals because of the entrepreneurial promise - that tomorrow will be better than today.

Nonetheless, this accounting of uneven development is rooted in Marxist thinking (Massey, 1991) and thus emphasises capital accumulation. However a critique of Marxist theory is that it overdetermines capital and underdetermines people. For us, capital has no power in itself, but gains power in its application; this is what people do, specifically what entrepreneurs do. People certainly respond to financial imperatives, but do so in ways that they choose. Entrepreneurs are never the miserable *homo economicus* that Schumpeter (1934) so disparaged. Instead they are sentient, conscious beings who may choose to follow their dreams, even if the financial consequences might sour into nightmares. The notion of uneven development provides us with an overview, an explanatory backdrop for the changing fortunes of places. It considers *why* entrepreneurs can cause change. However, its explanatory reach falls short of explaining *how* people in one place can so demonstrably and constructively engage with the entrepreneurial forces of change.

As well as prioritising capital accumulation, Marxism emphasises structures. Certainly, the history of places is calcified in structures. The past forms structures, institutions that are the political, economic, and cultural artefacts creating contexts which shape entrepreneurship. In Checkland's (1976) example, the institutions of the labour movement and local capital structures impeded change. In Chinese dynasties bureaucracy expanded to stifle change. Places become the carriers of particular traditions and embodiments of practices. In that sense they are structural (Warren, 2004). However, the explanatory credibility of structure has given way to a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between structure and agency. Structure affects agency, but agents can affect structure. This concept of structuration is described rather aptly for our enquiry as the time-space constitution of social life (Giddens, 1984). Structuration has been usefully applied in explaining the role of entrepreneurship, especially in accounting for institutional changes. Dodd and Anderson (2007) claimed that conceptions of entrepreneurship suffer from methodological individualism; attributing too much explanatory power to entrepreneurial agents. Structuration theorising creates an explanatory middle ground between this lonely and isolated individual and a tyranny of structure in the overly socialised construct. Structuration sets out the dynamics of the relationship.

In the broad picture, structure represents how places are; and present what entrepreneurs will encounter. Structures may be powerful, even dominant; but they are neither permanent nor immutable. Agential power can confront and modify structures (Anderson et al, 2012). We specifically have in mind Northian informal institutions (North, 1990); those cultural institutions that promote or deter types of activity (Anderson and Smith, 2007). Thus we can conceive how our research place presented a structure with which our gardening entrepreneur engaged. Moreover, his engagement modified the structure. In turn new agents, new entrepreneurs encountered and engaged with the new structure. In part these

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iterations, this continuity and change, offer a partial account of the extraordinary events we saw. Essentially, the structure became much more supportive of enterprise. Put differently, entrepreneurs as agents created more agents. Yet this forces us to ask, agents for what? Our answer is circular, but tentatively powerful - agents for entrepreneurship itself!

Moreover, just as in the socialisation process, the presence of an entrepreneurial mother shapes the cognitions of her daughter to imagine entrepreneurial possibilities. The local presence of an entrepreneurial role model may have a similar effect. Thus we are beginning to locate our explanatory exploration of entrepreneurship as something and somewhere between the social to the individual. This causes us to wonder if we might tentatively combine the conceptions of place, the processes of uneven development and institutions. Can we describe, even summarise this as a path dependency of lost ambition? Has a depreciation of cultural and economic assets in uneven development caused place to lose its purpose? Has some despondency of place atrophied and withered individual aspiration? If so, has this new vital entrepreneurial presence in our case engendered enterprise?

Returning to this liminal space between the individual and the social space that we call place, can we treat place as a reservoir of entrepreneurial possibilities? In such a view our depleted Swedish town has lost its drive and ambition, but potential, albeit latent and dormant remains. Of course places don't act, only people do. Yet places hold people together; people belong to places. Places imbue a sense of identity. To say, "I am from Glasgow" conjures up meanings. Perhaps some brash swagger of toughness, but muted with a friendliness to strangers. Certainly as social constructions, places have characteristics that spill over into the people who live there. Extending this argument, might places have qualities as well as characteristics? Certainly the literature tells us that places like Silicone Valley are entrepreneurial places. This infers some kind of entrepreneurial condition. Not only does entrepreneurship happen here, but new entrepreneurs are attracted. Explanations of why this occurred, usually propose an agglomerations of knowledge. Silicon Valley is all about high tech, so that the starting point was an accumulation of high tech knowledge in the universities; thus a reservoir of high tech possibilities? Has our rural town, Skoghem, been revived to become a locus of possibilities? However we examine it, it seems that context does indeed matter for entrepreneurship and that entrepreneurship matters for context.

### **Context and entrepreneurship - From background to descriptor; from typology to enabler**

We are troubled by how context is sometimes ignored in the pursuit of some general entrepreneurial theory (Welter, 2011) because context carries explanatory power. Many studies simply ignore context (Zahra and Wright, 2011) whilst for others, context is little more than an assembly of broad features (Harbi and Anderson, 2010). In this approach, it is the features, rather than the context which carry explanation (Baumol, 1990). Indeed context is kept as implicit rather than explicit. Yet, Autio et al (2014) propose that ignoring context represents a major gap in research. Looking back over the literature we detect a growing awareness of context. We see a hierarchy in the extent to which context, especially place, has

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been used in explaining entrepreneurship. In this hierarchy, context is first broadly presented as a container for entrepreneurship.

Early studies were concerned to place entrepreneurship in specific contexts. Bath (1971) and his account of the entrepreneur in northern Norway is an excellent example of the entrepreneurial importance of place. Dana (1995) shares this anthropological perspective and draws our attention to how place modifies the general processes of entrepreneurship. Anderson and Obeng (2017) use a sociological framework to explain how the qualities of a poor Ghanaian fishing village limit enterprise. This version of context tends towards exotic places, perhaps because the influence of context is more apparent. Moving up the hierarchy, we find context used as a descriptor of entrepreneurship. Thus we see, for example, rural enterprise (McElwee, 2008) where context - rural - implies a typology of entrepreneurship. Korsgaard et al (2015) explore the typological conceptualisation of rural entrepreneurship in depth, identifying two dimensions of entrepreneurship as, in the rural and, entrepreneurship as rural. They conclude that the prefix rural is more than mere description. This categorisation by place infers, perhaps even assumes, that different types of context mean different types of entrepreneurship. McElwee et al (2006) draw out the assumptions of what it means to be rural for farmers who try to diversify. Similarly the power of rural meanings is discussed in Smith and McElwee (2014) as they explore the implications of "rural" for illegal enterprises. This view implies a strong explanatory relationship between place and enterprise. Recently, an even stronger view of entrepreneurial engagement with place has been presented (McKeever et al, 2015, Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). Here context is not merely a condition which entrepreneurs use or to which they adapt; context becomes the means of entrepreneurship. In such accounts, place is principal in explaining the entrepreneurial process. It is this strong emphasis on context as a means to entrepreneurship to which we want to contribute.

We have taken a long conceptual meander through the theoretical undergrowth and we have not yet found a path that leads us to a complete explanation of what we found in Sweden. What we have found is that context matters. It may be no more than a container of entrepreneurship; it can be an arena where entrepreneurship is enacted. In some cases context is the very stuff from which entrepreneurship is wrought. But something more and different seems to be happening in our case. Entrepreneurship not only happens but it also seems to flow, so our research question is how can we explain this?

### **Methodological considerations**

The chapter continues with a short account of how we conducted our ethnography. Our broad research objective was open - here is an interesting rural situation - what can we learn from it? We started out with few fixed ideas about theories, and even less idea about what data would be important. As we explain, the project developed over time, developed in that we found a sense of direction in asking what was the effect of this garden in the case and the entrepreneur's presence? But in social science, unlike physics, effects are rarely direct. Hence

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we sought out examples of “influence”. We used a phenomenological approach, in that we enquired about the experiences of our respondents. This allowed us to appreciate what was important for them; what meanings they understood and how they responded to these understandings. We were able to relate these to our observations to build up a picture of what was going on. Phenomenological theory provided a loose framework to guide and shape the enquiry, but was much less useful for explaining. Our analysis was difficult, trial and error; the constant comparative method (Jack et al, 2015; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). It evolved into an iteration between patterns in the data and looking for a conceptual fit with theories that we knew from the literature and discussed above.

Accordingly, after the detailed account of our method, we offer examples of the respondents’ experiences in their own words. This followed by our attempt to analyse these data, to try to understand and explain what was going on. Our analytical approach resulted in what turned out to be a largely reflexive account, rather than a crisp “this caused that” and is explained by theory x, type of analysis. We recognise now that this was a consequence of the longitudinal nature of our study. First we had collected enormous amounts of data, so much that it was difficult to sort, never mind analyse. Moreover, as well as collecting data at points in time, we had collected data from many sources. Thus our data were very complex as well as extensive. With hindsight, a narrower theoretical structuring would have been much easier to do. Our findings would have been robust in the terms of the analytical framework, but restricted to the explanatory reach of the prescribed theory. However we think, and hope, that the openness of our approach permits us, gives us some freedom, to theoretically explore some new conceptual territory.

Broadly, we wished to develop understandings of entrepreneuring in its rural context. This task could be undertaken in different ways but it was important to follow, on a detailed level, how processes unfolded and how people interacted in order to apprehend what was going on in a particular place on a regular basis. Our choice was to collect ethnographic data (Czarniawska, 2008) over a ten year period, employing loosely structured interviews and participant observations (Alvesson, 2003, Watson, 2008). The two techniques allowed us to follow and develop ideas based on upcoming empirical results. The purposeful sampling (Neergaard, 2007) deployed made possible theoretical insights to continuously foster the research process (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Our long-term ethnographic work opened up this unusual view of the entrepreneurial process. We saw how the core of the process moved between different actors (Steyaert and Katz, 2007) and how it draw (Korsgaard, Ferguson and Gaddefors, 2016) from, but also changed different aspects of context (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016). Therefore, we found firm level analysis to be inadequate for describing and explaining our case of rural entrepreneuring. Entrepreneurship was not just an event, but a process in time and space, an engagement with place and interactions with people showing how social, spatial and economic processes were interwoven (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016).

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Combining data collection and theoretical reflection, allowing data to guide the research process, is what Glaser & Strauss (1967) introduced as the development of empirically grounded theory. Slightly later, Glaser (1978) developed his thinking on how theory could be seen as a part of empirically driven theorising. To us, this explains the step from empirical description to theoretical explanation (Anderson, 2015). Thus, our choice of theory shapes the results, as ethnographic data in itself lacks direction and meaning (Silverman, 2006; Alvesson, 2002). This does not mean that empirical material is largely used to verify theory, a task more apt for quantitative methods (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The productive use of theory in our work is to provide direction and space for new ideas and then to relate our contribution to existing entrepreneurship theories. An important criterion for evaluating this type of research is how reflexive it is; drawing attention to the processes of knowledge production and the involvement of the knowledge producers (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Thus, we may reflect on other influences on our description of the case. First, in shaping our story there were obvious incidents, like for example the development of a firm. However, there are also less obvious incidents, such as the coming and going of people and ideas that did not have a direct, or easily detected, effect on the outcome of entrepreneurial processes. Second, as discussed above, we departed from an inductive approach, as we would not allow a theoretical analytical frame to do all the work when it came to deciding what should be included or left out of the empirical story. Thirdly, and rarely acknowledged, we needed to adjust our presentation to the readers of this book and the purpose of the book. A fourth influence was something that could be seen as an intrinsic ambition to find something new, in other words we were not looking to verify previous research, but rather to found our own contribution. Fifth, the story we wrote was influenced by a critical argument against dominating discourses in theory and practice; we wanted to question taken for granted ideas and contribute to a reflexive tradition in social science. Finally, in planning and writing the chapter, the conversation between us as authors covered all areas of the chapter and resulting in a comprehensive coproduced piece of work. To conclude, by reflecting on six influencing factors we wanted to produce an empirical section that was the opposite of “the innocent, naïve display of what actually happened out there”.

We were regular visitors to Skoghem, but never lived there. Typically, over the decade of data collecting, we visited three times a year. We had some formal planned interviews with key players, or those we thought to be key informants, but also spent time walking around, looking and chatting; often identifying additional respondents. The first author became well known in Skoghem as their academic and regularly delivered reports and presentations about what he was finding. We believe this helped our access in that respondents were less puzzled by the sometimes odd questions we asked.

### **Our story about the revival of a small, rural town in Sweden**

How can we articulate a ten year case study? We chose to present a number of contextual citations as illustrations of our theme. The hub of our story is a very different and prize-winning garden, situated in a small remote town, Skoghem, in the southern part of northern

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Sweden. They welcome visitors to take a walk in the garden, visit the hotel or the restaurant. They organise conferences, weddings, exhibitions, concerts and courses on gardening related topics. Perhaps this does not sound exceptional, nor a very good business idea, but most of what has happened in Skoghem over the last fifteen years has been linked to the garden. Thus, we present a story that communicates some of what has happened over the years. We decided to build our narrative around five elements (see table 1). The idea is not to identify critical incidents or to illustrate patterns or causalities between identified factors, nor is it to tell a linear story, as the process was disorderly, unwinding and ambiguous. It is merely a way to tell our story about what we saw in Skoghem, relative to entrepreneurial energy.

(I) In the beginning there was a gardener named Dave. Dave, together with friends, was running a successful garden in the capital of Sweden, including a very well-attended restaurant and gift shop. One day, he received a phone call from the remote municipality where his grandparents had lived and he had spent some of his childhoods summer holidays. He was asked was if he had any ideas about what they might do with the ironmaster's estate? The former residence of the manager of the ironworks was practically abandoned and falling apart or at least losing its former glory. The group seeking his advice consisted of municipality officials and locals that oversaw the old houses but also, and perhaps foremost, cared for the small town. Being small and remote, Skoghem was facing the familiar difficulties associated with the downside of urbanisation and the internationalisation of traditional industries. Nevertheless, the gardener decided to leave the capital and move to Skoghem. He saw a challenge in trying to live a good life in rural Sweden and to build a new garden, and new organisation.

- (I) A surprising entrepreneurial source, a gardener*
- (II) One entrepreneurial act and then another*
- (III) Stimulating and engaging/energizing/inspiring others*
- (IV) The once depleted place was buzzing with entrepreneurship*
- (V) The town rediscovered its identity as a good place to be*

Table 1 Five empirical elements explaining how the town had been energised by entrepreneurship

(II) In 2000, Dave connected to a team of friends and locals and Green was set in motion. Initially they invited locals to a meeting where about twenty groups were formed, with each group having a particular responsibility. This initiative made Green an open and almost official project, in contrast to a more traditional venture with plans known only by the management team. The groups worked on local, practical problems that needed local solutions, e.g. cleaning up the grounds, making plantations, etc. Beside the development of Green itself, we saw how artisan businesses were established close to the entrance of the garden. *"A number of women have moved into our small town, arts and crafts people moving in, and they form an association planning to sell their products together. They will open this summer in connection to Green. This is amongst the first signs of external growth that we see as a result*

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*of Green. They are not associated with project funding of any kind and they will rent local property. It is planned to be a marketplace for arts and crafts”* (Local municipality official). This illustrates how Green invigorated others, how one thing lead to another.

(III) Green quickly attracted 20-30 000 visitors each summer, which was astonishing considering that the number of tourists coming to the region previously was very low. One result of the increased tourism, was the growth of tourist-related local businesses, like catering and accommodation facilities. *“Green is behind a lot of the changes here in Skoghem, it turns out when you start poking into it and this is not the end of it. I don’t think Skoghem Guesthouse or Skoghem Adventures would have started if it hadn’t been for Green. It has great significance by just being here”* (Local farmer). Skoghem Adventures was built around local natural resources such as rivers and mountains. An elk park also opened for visitors, providing lodging for overnight guests (people, not elks), as well as courses for hunting dogs and their owners. Activities not specifically related to tourism took place as well. *“Lots of things are going on, there’s an association called Skoghem Art and Landscape. Well, this is a kind of offspring from Green you might say, but not directly. The initiative came from the students, they have been very active running events, lectures, exhibitions, happenings, events of various kinds. And there’s this local guy named Fred, he has been important in this”* (Project leader at the municipality). Thus, we witnessed how the initiative of local people started and ran local projects without engaging directly with Green. One example was a single-day workshop run in the garden about "Power and food." While Green was an inspiration for the event, it was not practically involved in organising the event. The meeting was a manifestation of critical thinking around food and food production. One theme, *“Don’t underestimate dirt”*, referred to composts and the biological cycle, while another was about the linkages between rural settings and cities and how problems can emanate from this clash. We can see how Green was active in initiating a conversation about rural place, food and life. To raise an issue like this in a small remote town does not happen often and it is difficult to explain. In our view it takes local engagement and new ways of thinking and doing.

(IV) Around 2005, businesses in Skoghem were growing. The municipality even received an award 2004 for being Sweden’s most enterprising municipality. *“In the beginning, I saw Green as a group of enthusiasts who loved flowers, volunteers working there because they thought it was fun. The vibrations started spreading; from the beginning it was an almost silent sound, then it started to throb and suddenly it was here. Now I see it as the big pulsing heart of life in Skoghem. It’s great! We need them and they are contagious. They have so much knowledge, we must use them and they are so close to us”* (Teacher from the local school). In addition to Green and the related tourism industry, there were also other businesses that came to life as a result of Green’s inception. Municipality officials proudly presented a cluster of food firms producing local foods, e.g. salad, cheese, bread and pancakes, for export to other regions in Sweden. Another example was a number of care-taking and assisted living businesses. Green was not a formal part in any of these businesses, but still a role model for taking initiative. *“Recently, when we met in our local business network I asked Dave to talk about doing business here in Skoghem, we asked him for his view on development, he is kind of a front man for taking local initiatives”* (Local politician). Thus, we can see how Green contributed to a change in local attitudes and a change in practices.

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(V) Over the ten year period during which we continuously visited Skoghem, we have seen many ideas come to life--some still operate and prosper but others have faded away. In 2010, Green developed a horticultural study programme run in cooperation with the regional university. We thought this partnership would be sustainable, but in 2015 the programme was terminated due to funding problems at the university. On the other hand, one of the assisted living businesses now has about 400 employees and continues to grow. This development was not easily predicted. In other words, it is difficult to pick the winners in advance in a remote place like Skoghem. Perhaps what is more important to recognize is the vitality of people who are ready to engage with place when needed, who continuously take the initiative, without the guarantee of success. Over the past decade as we have come to understand Skoghem, the entrepreneurial identity of the town has been strengthened. We attribute some of this capacity to Green and some to a latent, local capacity for change.

### **Discussion**

We have spent more time in problematising and describing than explaining. However, as we had emphasised earlier, the unfolding of events and actions was itself complex and consequently resistant to a simple accounting. Our detailed problematising was useful in offering different dimensions to look at, and different explanations to consider. Theories offered us conceptual cues, but our problematising indicated how they might be juxtaposed, contrasted or combined to improve explanatory reach. For example, we saw that uneven development is normal, that places will inevitably decline if they are not renewed. We were dissatisfied with the argument that an influx of financial capital was sufficient. Instead, we proposed recognising this as a profoundly human process and considered if human and social capital had explanatory power. Whilst we found a partial explanation, we were led to argue for something broader - entrepreneurial capital.

Dave's stock of entrepreneurial capital flowed into Skoghem as a kind of entrepreneurial investment. Building the garden was certainly important in creating an asset from his entrepreneurial capital; but Dave's engagement with Skoghem was greater than the garden. Indeed, we argue that the garden's role was also symbolic as tangible evidence that things could be done in Skoghem. Thus the garden served as a (role) model of entrepreneurship. However this means that the entrepreneurial "capital" analogy doesn't work very well to explain ensuing events. Capital can be spent or invested in the expectation of a return. In this case there was no formal return. Instead we saw how it sparked up new ideas and new businesses. The garden's presence and influence was more akin to an entrepreneurial pump primer that cracked open new channels into which this entrepreneurship flowed.

We think it is important to observe the series of entrepreneurial events; the burgeoning of the number of new businesses. We saw these as sequential and following from Dave's garden. It was almost as if Dave's garden was a great entrepreneurial rock plummeting into a still pool; waves of entrepreneurial action radiated out from this event. Capital, even entrepreneurial capital cannot produce that kind of effect. But if we relax our biases and apply our intellectual imagination, we can see this as a massive disturbance, a disruption of the status quo. We might also picture it as entrepreneurial energy. In this case, entrepreneurship was not simply events; nor can we reduce it to individual processes. It worked to catalyse entrepreneurship

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in others. How else might we explain the consequences of the garden, save as entrepreneurially energising others?

## **Conclusion**

In this article we saw economic and social revival in a depleted community evolve through entrepreneurship. Our aim was to reflect on how we understand and appreciate context as an integrated part of entrepreneurial processes. Departing from our case we wanted to understand entrepreneurship in a rural context associated with an incoming entrepreneur. We found that the entrepreneur provoked some remarkable changes; changes in attitudes; changes in practices and several new businesses. To explain these effects we developed the concept of entrepreneurial energy. Entrepreneurial energy is a vitality; produced in and by entrepreneurship. It works, in part, as a role model, holding up examples of what can be done. But much more, the presence of entrepreneurial energy serves to invigorate others. It becomes amplified in new ways of doing, new ways of being, yet calcified in the entrepreneurial actions of others. We saw how it unleashed the latent and promoted the possible to entrepreneurially revive the town.

Entrepreneurship has long been seen as an engine of development but studies are often economic and very coarse grained. We offer a fine grained analysis that helps to explain entrepreneurship by elaborating on a novel dimension. Moreover, rather than treating entrepreneurship as a single and individual act, the social of interaction and context are brought into play. The proposed concept of entrepreneurship as energy offers a novel, but complementary element to understanding the entrepreneurial process in context.

In our search for how entrepreneurship take place in place our theoretical experiment gave place a more prominent position in our explanation than is usually the case. This was an empirical result of our study. We discussed in our theoretical section how a growing awareness of context may help us to understand rural entrepreneuring. We presented a hierarchy in the extent to which context, especially place, has been used in explaining entrepreneurship; context as a container for entrepreneurship, context used as a descriptor of entrepreneurship and context as the means of entrepreneurship. Our idea was to contribute to context as the means.

There may be implications from these findings for policy makers. If it is possible to recreate the primary entrepreneurship that radiated from the garden, it may be possible to induce the secondary entrepreneurship which made such a large difference to place. The obvious limitation of our study is that because it is a single case, we do not know the importance of role of personality and persuasion and embeddedness in this process. The main implication is however in how we conceptualise entrepreneurship, especially in context.

It is, as Gartner told us, difficult to separate the dancer from the dance. Entrepreneurs perform the entrepreneurial dance, so we tend to only see entrepreneurship in the dancer. What we have done is to listen to some entrepreneurial music and sense the entrepreneurial rhythm. We managed to hear entrepreneurship as something more than the dancer herself. In the same way as we cannot avoid tapping along to a melody, or thinking the words to a tune

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before they are sung; entrepreneurship is potentially contagious. It can be transmitted and spread amongst others. This implies that entrepreneurship is indeed a thing in itself. Entrepreneurship fired up more enterprise, it energised a community and changed the context. Seen in this way we recognise entrepreneurship as a magnificent dynamic in processes of change. To explain this magnificent dynamic in context, we propose the idea of thinking about entrepreneurship as a kind of energy. Entrepreneurship as something that makes things happen.

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