

Exploring trajectories of entrepreneurial counterurbanisers

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Abstract

This paper reveals a range of factors that stimulate entrepreneurship among rural in-migrants and then attempts to align them with perceptions of rural destinations and wider motivations for moving home. Analysis explores the extent to which in-migrants’ entrepreneurial behaviour is shaped by their perceptions of a rural place and its attractiveness as a migration destination. Previous research has examined the economic contribution of counterurbanisation yielding many positive conclusions associated with entrepreneurial in-migrants in terms of job creation (Stockdale, 2006; Bosworth, 2010), human and social capital (Atterton, 2007; Bosworth, 2009) and business creation (Mitchell & Madden, 2014), including social entrepreneurship (Bosworth & Glasgow, 2012). However, to date scant attention has been paid to the dynamic processes linking rural migration and entrepreneurial emergence.

Re-analysing narrative interviews from a collection of past projects, a critical incident approach is used to identify the timings, the spatiality and the social context of decision making. In particular, this approach can capture the geography of key network connections and the importance of human and social capital originating from both within and outside of the rural regions. This approach allows us to test the hypothesis that as in-migrants become increasingly embedded in a locality, their businesses are more likely to draw on local resources and emerge somewhat differently to those maintaining stronger connections beyond their locality and to other urban centres. Our findings will also inform new primary research designed to interrogate the “latent entrepreneurship” phase that many rural in-migrants pass through prior to establishing a rural business.

Exploring trajectories of entrepreneurial counterurbanisers

Introduction

The importance of inter-regional migration flows for local economic development is attracting continuing attention among regional and rural development researchers. This is strengthened by new conceptions of the fundamental drivers of regional competitiveness away from inherent factor endowments towards more dynamic forces of innovation and knowledge creation (Kitson *et al.*, 2004), which depend upon the education, skills and wider networks of people engaged in local and regional economies. Despite this, research into rural migration and counterurbanisation has tended to overlook the potential contributions of more economically dynamic migrants, instead focusing on inflows of older adults and rural ageing (Philip & MacLeod, 2018) combined with a “brain drain” of younger people away from more remote rural regions (Stockdale *et al.*, 2018). Where the rural economy has been the focus, previous research has identified a number of positive conclusions associated with new venture creation (Stockdale, 2006; Kalantaridis & Bika, 2006; Bosworth, 2010; Mitchell & Madden, 2014) as well as wider contributions to economic networks, social capital and neo-endogenous development trajectories (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012; Bosworth & Glasgow, 2012; Atterton *et al.*, 2011).

Encapsulating the themes above, Bosworth (2010: 977) defined *commercial counterurbanisation* as “the growth of rural economies stimulated by inward migration”. It was noted that “this may take the form of business creation by rural in-migrants, their employment in other rural firms, or their promotion of other businesses through local trade, knowledge exchange, and cooperative working”. For the purposes of this paper, we use the term “in-migrants” to represent the (potential) agents of rural economic change and explore the pathways through which some in-migrants become economically embedded and/or entrepreneurial within the broader process of commercial counterurbanisation. Whilst recognising that rural in-migrants include lateral movers as well as counterurbanisers (Stockdale, 2016; Mitchell & Madden, 2014), the research is aligned to the broader counterurbanisation literature, focusing on pro-rural migration choices and studying business owners who have moved down the settlement hierarchy, in keeping with traditional definitions of counterurbanisation (e.g. Fielding, 1982).

The default position has been to compare entrepreneurial in-migrants with local business owners to understand how incomers bring new dynamics and connections as well as the ability to identify different business opportunities and markets. However, if commercial counterurbanisation is to be promoted as a desirable force for rural economic development, it is also important to compare entrepreneurial in-migrants with other groups of rural in-migrants whose economic impact is lower.

Rather than a binary categorisation, we follow Halfacree and Rivera's (2012) approach to understanding residential counterurbanisation as a process through which migrants are viewed as contextual subjects following new biographical pathways that may become more or less embedded in their new locality over time. Their migration journey has a wide range of influences which change over time and provides them with multiple sources of potential entrepreneurial ideas and opportunities.

In order to investigate motivating factors across a continuum of commercial counterurbanisers, we analyse interviews with business owners who operate from a rural location to understand how they came to trade from that location. This includes business owners who moved with an existing business or a clearly defined start-up idea as well as those for whom rural entrepreneurship was a later development. Therefore, the research questions relate to factors that attract existing business owners or managers to trade from a more rural location and factors that attract entrepreneurial individuals to move to more rural locations. In the latter case, the research must also identify differences between in-migrants planning to start a business as part of the migration decision and those "latent rural entrepreneurs" for whom the business idea comes some time later. The identification of different residential and business motivations, and their interconnections, within the broad trend of "commercial counterurbanisation" can then help policy-makers to recognise the most effective mechanisms for attracting new businesses and entrepreneurial individuals to rural areas.

The changing rural economy

The motivations for counterurbanisation are well documented, with a range of social, lifestyle, environmental and cultural push and pull factors cited over several decades of research across Europe (Halfacree & Rivera, 2012; Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Champion, 1989), North America (Mitchell, 2004; Champion & Brown, 2012), Australia (Walmsley *et al.*, 1998; Holmes, 2006) and more recently in South Africa (Geyer & Geyer, 2017). Given that neighbourhoods with higher levels of wellbeing, based on a range of indicators, tend to fuel counterurbanisation trends, it is fair to conclude that pull factors are strongest. In England and Wales in particular, the continuing appeal of the "Rural Idyll" (Mingay, 2017; Shucksmith, 2016) has seen continuous counterurbanisation since the 1930s (Champion, 2003).

The dominant rhetoric of early retirement and family-oriented lifestyle choices, combined with the attraction of escaping the "rat-race" to more peaceful, safe and environmentally attractive homes,

does not align itself naturally to thoughts of entrepreneurship, but that belies the truth that a significant proportion of small businesses are established in rural areas. Data compiled by UK Government over 2016 and 2017 indicates that there are 547,000 businesses registered in rural areas, representing 24% of all registered businesses in England and employing 3.5 million people – 13% of all people employed by registered businesses in England. Also, the number of rural business start-ups per head of population has risen steadily over the last five years. Land-based industries are no longer dominant in rural areas, as the ‘professional, scientific & technical services’ sector now matches land-based industries, with both accounting for 15.1% of all registered businesses in England (Philipson et al., 2017)¹.

These economic shifts in rural areas to some extent reflect opportunities enabled by digital technologies (Roberts *et al.*, 2017; Townsend *et al.*, 2015). Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer new ways to do business, expand networks and build capacity, particularly for small businesses (Galloway and Mochrie 2005; Hansson et al. 2007). They offer “an enhanced feeling of access to, and communication with, the world beyond their local settings” (Hansson *et al.*, 2007: 48). This means that, despite a common notion of a “penalty of distance” in the rural literature (Townsend *et al.*, 2017; Dicks *et al.*, 2010), technology produces a “death of distance”, enabling rural firms to participate in urban markets, and larger numbers of individuals to work from home including from rural and remote rural locations (Weber & Freshwater 2016). These shifts mean that rural in-migrants have wider choices – commuting to urban workplaces becomes less onerous when working from home is an option, and entrepreneurial individuals are not restricted to typical rural sectors such as tourism or land use but can instead develop businesses in numerous other sectors enabled by ICTs. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the changing nature of rural work and business itself reflects a changing demographic of in-migrants to rural areas. This shifting nature of rural in-migrants presents diverse human and social capital in the form of new skillsets, networks and working practices. Given that rural areas are increasingly interconnected with urban areas in social and economic terms (Lichter & Brown, 2011), research is needed to understand when and how these individuals realise their entrepreneurial potential, and the extent to which these activities are either embedded in the rural locale or focused on urban markets, or perhaps a combination of both.

¹ Data available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682985/Businesses_February_2018_Digest.pdf (Report last accessed 8th March 2018)

Migration processes and motivations

“Migration decision-making, no matter how rationally it seems to be calculated, has a history, a geography and a sociocultural dimension” (Halfacree and Rivera, 2012: 94-95). In other words, we are not looking at rational economic decision-making but the implications for individuals’ economic lives and for the economic performance of regions gaining or losing population through migration processes are of course hugely significant. Halfacree and Rivera (2012: 96) continue to explain that pro-rural migration, “tends to be a very ‘big deal’ for those involved. Even if not it does not usually express the cold, contemplative logic of the behavioural model, it is very rarely done on a whim”. Thus, the scope to better understand the relationship between migration decision-making and potential entrepreneurial emergence is clear.

This has been addressed in international migration literature with links made between entrepreneurial trait theories and risk-taking as well as a positive motivation towards business start-up (Jones et al., 2014). International migrants also have more extensive networks to capitalise on and, in the urban context, are often able to combine this with strong ethnic or kinship networks in their new destinations. This has parallels to the idea of neo-endogenous rural development (Ray, 2006) where counterurbanisers can draw on combinations of local and extra-local networks (Bosworth, 2010). However, when studying internal migration patterns, the socio-cultural differences may be less apparent so recognising distinctive entrepreneurial capabilities or networks is often more challenging.

In more rural areas the networks and social capital accessible to in-migrants may be quite different when compared to migrants in more urban areas or to indigenous communities. It has also been shown that counterurbanisers can be more selective about the local networks in which they participate based on personal fulfilment rather than community obligation (Gielsing et al., 2018). A distinctive common feature of many counterurbanisers is that they are consumers of rural places through their housing choice. As we have seen, these choices tend to be heavily influenced by social and environmental factors (Halfacree and Rivera, 2012), which provide a different perspective on rural places as sites for business development. Bosworth and Willett (2011) noted that this could be problematic for economic development policy where dominant representations of idyllic, peaceful and recreational rural areas sit uncomfortably alongside policies to attract investments in innovation and technology. However, for commercial counterurbanisers, the fact that they have been attracted to features of their rural locations also means that they are very well placed to recognise opportunities to capitalise on non-economic rural assets and to brand their product or service to reach wider and potential higher-value markets.

From a neo-endogenous rural development perspective, in-migrants can bridge local and extra-local networks, and translating this into entrepreneurship theory, they are especially well placed to perform a “go-between” function (Dana, 2011) and leverage the value of rural assets. Within the entrepreneurship literature, a host of advantages have been attributed to “networks” including the motivation of entrepreneurship and innovation among network members, time and money saved in information gathering, access to training and support for nascent small business (Copus & Skura 2006; Davidsson & Honig 2003; Camagni 1991; Bennett & Errington 1995). Networks also provide a firm “with its ‘distinctive capabilities’ that help it to create and add value” (Malecki 1997, p173) and other authors have implied that there are cumulative and long-term benefits (Totterman & Sten, 2005; Uzzi, 1996). Despite networks being limited by the relative sparseness of rural economies, commercial counterurbanites can strengthen as well as benefit from participating in these networks.

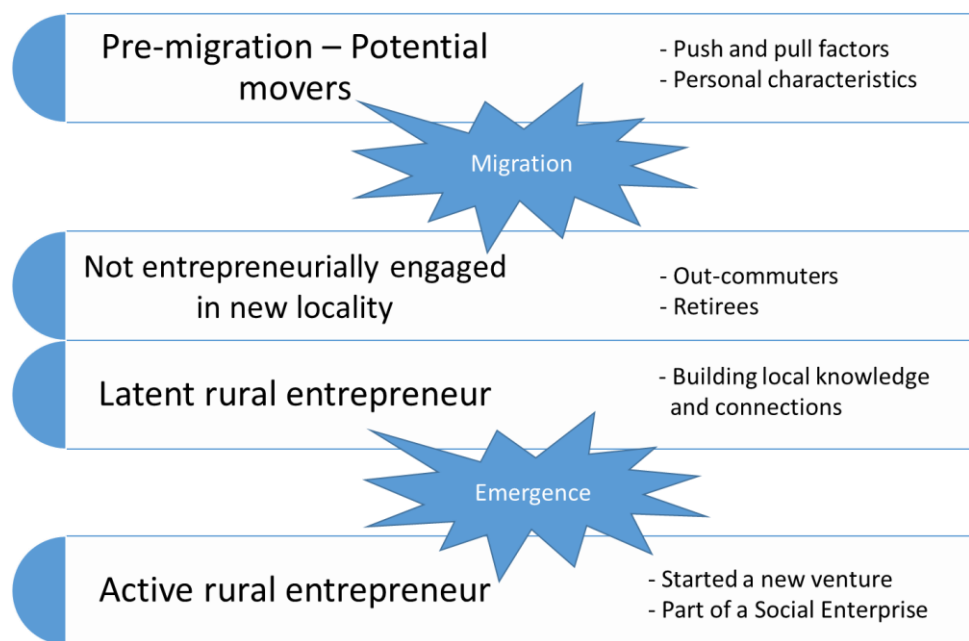
The latest OECD’s *Rural 3.0* report recognises that “Rural regions must take advantage of context-specific immobile assets which can represent areas of absolute advantage” (OECD, 2018: 19). However, the mechanisms for leverage value from these assets remain unclear and the report overlooks the potentially important role of in-migration as a mechanism to recognise the value of distinctive rural assets. The report does however note the importance of urban-rural connections and the increasing diversity of rural economies, which might point to more enlightened policies in the future.

Given this trend of rural economic diversification running alongside the urbanisation of rural societies, it is somewhat surprising that rural economic policy, especially in the European sense, continues to be so strongly aligned to agriculture. A healthy range of businesses can support rural community wellbeing through the provision of key services and infrastructure, the creation of meeting spaces and the enhancement of the rural built environment, as well as their job creation and direct economic impacts. In many cases, rural businesses provide a valuable voice in local politics and support local events too (Bosworth 2010), all of which have been recognised as key features of “sustainable communities” in the Bristol Accord (OPDM, 2005).

The premise of this paper is that “sustainable communities”, and particularly the vibrant economy dimension of the Bristol Accord definition, requires continuing renewal through commercial counterurbanisation. This renewal is not simply the importing of new businesses (as with the urban-rural shift in manufacturing or the implementation of growth policies for peripheral regions) but emerges as part of a dominant trend of residential counterurbanisation in the UK. It is also distinct from the residential preference hypothesis (Woods, 2005) as it is more complex than business owners being attracted by the residential environment. Instead, business trajectories and migration

are interconnected and each process influences the other. Counterurbanisers might not be economically engaged in their new locality, they may be “latent entrepreneurs” building local knowledge and networks to complement their wider experience and connections, or they may be entrepreneurs. Some will move slowly along this continuum but some might arrive as latent or active entrepreneurs and essentially an incomer to a rural community could arrive at any of the stages set out in Figure 1. In some cases, there might also be movement back out of entrepreneurship but for the purposes of this research we concern ourselves with the “emergence” trajectory.

Figure 1: Commercial counterurbanisation pathways



To further examine and develop the diagram above, this paper seeks to develop a clearer understanding of the factors that encourage counterurbanisers moving through the “latent” entrepreneurship phase in Figure 1. Potentially there will several phases within this and movement towards becoming an “active rural entrepreneur” might be influenced by complex interactions of personal, social and place-based factors.

Methods and data

To satisfy the definition of counterurbanisation as the “inversion of the traditionally positive relationship between migration and settlement size” (Fielding, 1982), we focus on those who have moved from a larger settlement. In each case, business owners had moved at least 30 miles and

that move occurred during their adult lives. These included businesses moving to premises in smaller settlements as well as individuals moving house and subsequently starting a business from that new location. In total, 22 cases from Northumberland interviewed between 2006-2008, four from Lincolnshire, interviewed between 2015-2017, and two from Scotland, interviewed in 2018, were included. This was effectively a “convenience sample” drawing from earlier projects but the new analysis was aligned with a common approach that focused on the entrepreneurial emergence in each case. Through analysis of interviews with these rural entrepreneurs we evaluate the significance of key resources, social connections, personal attributes and features of the local environment in facilitating entrepreneurial emergence.

To understand the importance of different types of interactions, a critical moment technique was used whereby the type of contact and the value for the business could be examined for every incident where another individual had an impact upon the business. Curran & Blackburn explain that this technique can expose “the character and content of the linkages between small business owners and others within the social and economic community” (1994, p106). In particular, changes in the patterns of these network linkages throughout the process of migration and embedding within a rural community provide a valuable insight into entrepreneurial emergence and commercial counterurbanisation.

This critical moment analysis was broken down into two categories of “planned” and “unplanned” start-ups allowing comparisons to be drawn between the characteristics and businesses of in-migrants arriving with clear business intentions and those for whom entrepreneurial emergence developed at later stage. These are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Diverse influences of rural entrepreneurship among in-migrants who moved with and without business plans.

Planned start-ups	Unplanned start-ups
Specialist profession, seeking licenced premises/vacancy (pub, pharmacy)	Commuting first – wanted to save time and cost and establish independent business later
Needed to move for family reasons and sought a business to run alongside the move (village shop/newsagent)	Meet local friends – ideas emerge (New brewery; New B&B)
Early/semi-retirement; often return migration for at least one family member	Family owned property became vacant – opportunity for tourism enterprise

Cost of house move escalated but had fallen in love with the property – only way to afford it was to open a B&B	Saw unused apples in the village orchard, began a community venture to produce cider
Making the move from part-time work on the side of professional employment	Cheaper house prices as an attractor for residential move
Farmer's wife as the driver of a farm diversification enterprise (in one case from reading a magazine article)	Unemployment as a trigger for self-employment (pub-brewer; sawmill operator)
Need for space and suitability of rural property (Old farm buildings for stock & <i>"the children were mad on horses so they had a paddock as well"</i> ; Redundant farm buildings for a brewery; unused room in a historic monument turned into a gallery)	Technology facilitated lifestyle decision to be away from London or other big city (Advertising consultant; market researcher; copywriter)
Local expertise as a rural planning/property specialist is reinforced by a rural location	Potential to combine quieter rural location with regional accessibility for clients and staff
Period of illness gave time to think about new business ideas and develop business plan and funding proposal (Microbrewery)	Opportunity arose to take over family business
Recognise potential of historic building and peacefulness of rural location as a "hideaway" for recording artists (Recording studio) or destination for tourists (Gallery)	Enforced move for new job location but job unrewarding. Foodie family that saw a gap in the local market. They now have a thriving deli and have recently opened a fine dining restaurant.
	Family living in rural village and working/commuting. Disappointed with available bacon products (both supermarket and local "artisan") they realised that they could fill a market gap. They have created a successful multi-award winning bacon business with various related products. They are looking to grow the business and make it their main income stream.
	Recognise tourism opportunities of location (near Hadrian's Wall) combined with suitability of property for B&B

Entrepreneurial Pathways

As Table 1 illustrates, there are many pathways into rural entrepreneurship among even this small sample. The traditional meaning of “entrepreneur”, from the French “entre-prendre”, is a go-between or an individual who brings together producers and consumers to create new market opportunities (Dana, 2011). This can be seen clearly among in-migrant rural entrepreneurs who the capacity to connect across space as well as across businesses. A good example comes from an arts and crafts gallery owner who established her business after moving to rural Lincolnshire.

Recognising the quality and marketability of rural crafts and selling them beyond the local area, the entrepreneur explained that the online business is much more lucrative than the physical gallery itself. With an understanding of the “urban chic” tastes from her previous professional networks, she has not only created a successful business for herself but has increased the exposure and profitability of a number of other local arts and crafts producers.

Breaking down the analysis, the cases identified key themes around the family, around external professional networks and around alternative perspectives of the rural that can be commodified through added value or distinctive features of their products and services. These are presented below.

Family and life-course factors

For many entrepreneurs, migrant or not, the family context shapes key decisions. In some cases, children are a constraint of choices as with a pub-restaurant owner who said, *“When we moved here I had children, I had a daughter of school age so education was important and we wanted a business that we could run together”*. Often they are a trigger for self-employment too and in some cases these grow into larger enterprises. One case from Northumberland highlights this as at the time of the interview, this company employed 28 staff but the owner explained that at the outset:

“I didn’t even think about it, there wasn’t a flashpoint where I said I’m going to set up my own business. I had two children and I decided I didn’t want to work in Newcastle any more and a client approached me and said we’ve worked with you for the last 10 years, we want to still work with you so can you do some research for us?”

In this case, the timing fitted with another friend in the locality with the right skills to support the business venture and the ability to capitalise in rapid increases in ICTs during the 2000s allowed the business to attract multiple clients in big cities across the UK based on their personal experiences in of working in their market research niche.

A second illustration of the complex interconnections between business and family is illustrated by an engineering firm in a small Northumberland town. The owner at the time of the interview had taken over from his father-in-law but the back-story highlights the thesis of this paper. After completing a university degree he explained that *“when we were having kids we needed a bigger house with more space so it was a case of what could we afford. We knew this place because my wife’s family is [nearby] and we passed [this town], we quite liked it and it’s affordable”*. At the time, it was also a convenient location for commuting to jobs back in the city but after a few years his father-in-law was growing his business from a *“one-man band”* *“...and couldn’t cope so we sat down one time and he said...do you want to come and work here?”* Without the residential move and the family connections, this may not have been feasible but over the course of a decade family, home and work factors intertwined with the result that the son-in-law eventually took on the running of this rural business.

Just as children can trigger significant changes in people’s working lives, planning for retirement has also been identified as a significant influence of new business activity among the Northumberland cases. Two bed and breakfast (B&B) operators began their businesses as stepping stones towards retirement, one bought an existing B&B and another bought her *“dream house on the beach”* and discovered that she needed an additional income to meet the costs. Interestingly, the latter became particularly involved in local campaigns and was an active member of the local Tourist Board, illustrating that *“unplanned entrepreneurs”* can be just as enterprising and impactful as any others.

Wider family events can also play key roles in business development. For example, a successful gallery owner was initially drawn to the rural area for purely residential reasons – her husband had always wanted to rebuild an old house and they saw the perfect opportunity when visiting friends, and just at the time when they were about to inherit some money following the death of her father-in-law. Later she identified a disused historic property from which to display her husband’s art and this grew into a hub for a number of local artists.

These are seldom factors that can be neatly compartmentalised by researchers, let alone provide frameworks for policy interventions to support rural entrepreneurship. However, the combinations of family and other factors that emerge from these stories confirm that approaches to create a positive business environment may generate multiple unexpected outcomes.

External experience

External networks and contacts were important to sustain the market research company above in a less traditional location and the same can be said for the founder of a recording studio who eschewed a traditional city centre location for a disused chapel in rural Lincolnshire. The entrepreneur here (Finke & Bosworth, 2016) identified a distinctive offer in terms of the acoustics and privacy of the location combined with a business model that gave bands greater freedom about how and when they worked during their stay. To realise this vision, the entrepreneur had to convince people in the industry and rely on work of mouth to attract recording artists so the combination of his passion for the new location and his professional networks were essential for the business to succeed.

A publishing company set up in rural Northumberland focused on providing secondary schools. As a former teaching who had already been doing some publishing work, the founder's knowledge and social capital within the sector offered assurance that the business could succeed. The owner confirmed this by saying *"Many of our products are recommended by the 3 major exam boards...so we've got that link in" and "A few months ago I wrote to about nine chief examiners from the various boards and asked them for testimonials about our various products."* Combining this experience with the agility of a being a small rural business ensured that their products continued to meet the demands of the education sector.

A third example comes from a business owner who changed profession completely but whose professional experiences were vital in the start-up phase. During time off work from a job in London, the founder of a Lincolnshire brewery was able to develop a business plan and draw on previous rural consultancy work to identify grant funding opportunities, without which the business would probably not have been viable. The planning phase and funding allowed the business to start from a solid foundation with high quality machinery to ensure the quality and consistency of the product, something with which more gradual hobbyist start-ups often struggle.

While these are specific examples, there were many "critical moments" throughout the interviews where business owner referred to past professional experiences and contact helping them to develop the business. Two property professionals talked about clients outside of their core territory being based on long-term personal contacts while other professional service entrepreneurs mentioned that the encouragement to take on work for former clients helped to launch their businesses. Being an in-migrant to an area also saw business owners being more likely to attend regional business network meetings, perhaps seeking to compensate for weaker local social capital or perhaps due to greater familiarity with such environments. In one case this led to a small business

learning of financial support to invest in enhanced credit card payment facilities and this spread to other retailers in her village. In another, the outward-facing attitude of a B&B operator saw her lead a local campaign to save the town's fishing harbour. Not only do entrepreneurs benefit from their "bridging" position but they have the potential to use this to benefit the local economy in other ways too.

Aside from professional expertise, there were just as many stories of friends and family providing that key piece of information or injection of positivism to make something happen. From B&B owners recruiting their family for test-runs to a member of the local church congregation providing a tip-off about a vacant property, these are all tiny events that could make the difference of turning an idea into a reality. A pub-restaurant owner from Northumberland summed up these types of social nudges: *"We'd camped in this area a long time ago... and we'd spent a lot of time on Hadrian's Wall and loved it...and always knew we'd come back."* Later she added, *"We've got a friend in [the region] and she'd always said Northumberland was woefully short of good dining places"*. Although these factors in isolation didn't make the business happen, they all build up to create the right blend of social, lifestyle and business perceptions that underpin commercial counterurbanisation.

Alternative perspectives of the rural

As we live in a world that is increasingly dominated by consumerism, rural businesses face increasingly competitive markets where consumer demands increasingly encompass the quality, authenticity and experience associated with the product or service. As consumers of rurality, counterurbanisers are arguably better placed than indigenous people to recognise where rural assets are best able to deliver these additional values. There are many examples of local food and drink products benefiting from authenticity and artisanship combined with a provenance of local production, as well as publicly-funded networks and initiatives to support them. Local as well as migrant entrepreneurs have been very successful at exploiting these markets for some years now but some commercial counterurbanisers do more than just promote the local qualities of the product. For example, a cider manufacturer in Lincolnshire has created a local heritage around the product with community events staged to celebrate the harvest and photos displayed in his shop – despite the fact that the business was only founded this century and cider tends to be associated with the West of England, not Lincolnshire.

In the restaurant and hospitality trade, commercial counterurbanisers consistently showed a desire to use local produce and built this into their own branding. However, this local loyalty was

dependent upon the proven quality of the produce and incomers were quick to look elsewhere if the local suppliers were inadequate. This outlook drives quality and competition in a local area whilst also promoting the wider economy – as one restaurateur explained: *“This business brings an awful lot of trade to the village because people travel so while they’re here people will ask where we get our steak from, I’ll say “the local butchers”.*

Incomers often feel a certain pressure to use local suppliers and services as part of the embedding process but where business rationality dictates, people are reticent to take any chances on quality. A B&B operator explained *“there have been people that have moved in and brought roofing companies from Newcastle and people don’t like that...we wanted to integrate so we tend to make an active decision [to use local firms], but sometimes you think you don’t know whether someone can do this job [to the same quality as someone from outside].”* An exporter in Northumberland also expressed reservations over the local accountancy firm on the basis that city accountants were perceived to have better experience of handling international activities. Balancing these negative portrayals of rural businesses with the perception of higher quality and more personalised service is not straightforward.

Related to the tourist sector two additional examples demonstrate wider thinking about their markets. The first is a pharmacy shop owner who works closely with accommodation providers to pre-arrange prescriptions for holiday-makers, recognising that the area attracts a number of older tourists and these can boost business in the summer season. The second comes from a B&B owner who advertises with a North Sea ferry company, capitalising on the status of Hadrian’s Wall as an international tourist attraction and looking beyond traditional marketing channels to improve her competitive position in the local area. The B&B operator is active in many local groups but also commented that some of these are not very professional: *“they squabble about and don’t get on with what they should be getting on with.”* Again, finding a balance between building local connections while retaining a distinctive entrepreneurial mindset provides a social as well as economic challenge.

Whilst many of these examples are about recognising opportunities to sell things beyond the local areas, a recent English interview (not yet analysed) provided an interesting example of entrepreneurial emergence in action. The vignette below illustrates that in-migrants also see gaps in local services but it remains to be seen how their aspirations might evolve as they settle more permanently and acquire more local knowledge. These are questions that will be examined in greater depth as our projects moves into a more longitudinal phase.

My husband and I are moving to a small village from a city of 700,000. The initial idea was to buy the house, renovate it, and use it as a vacation cottage until we retire and move there. The more time we spend in the village, though, the more amenities we see lacking, and we have started talking about starting a small business once we're living there full time. My husband wants to run a music school (he's a bagpiper) and I want to run an arts & crafts school and gallery. But we've also toyed with running a small cafe, because there's very little in the way of restaurants in the village.

Discussion

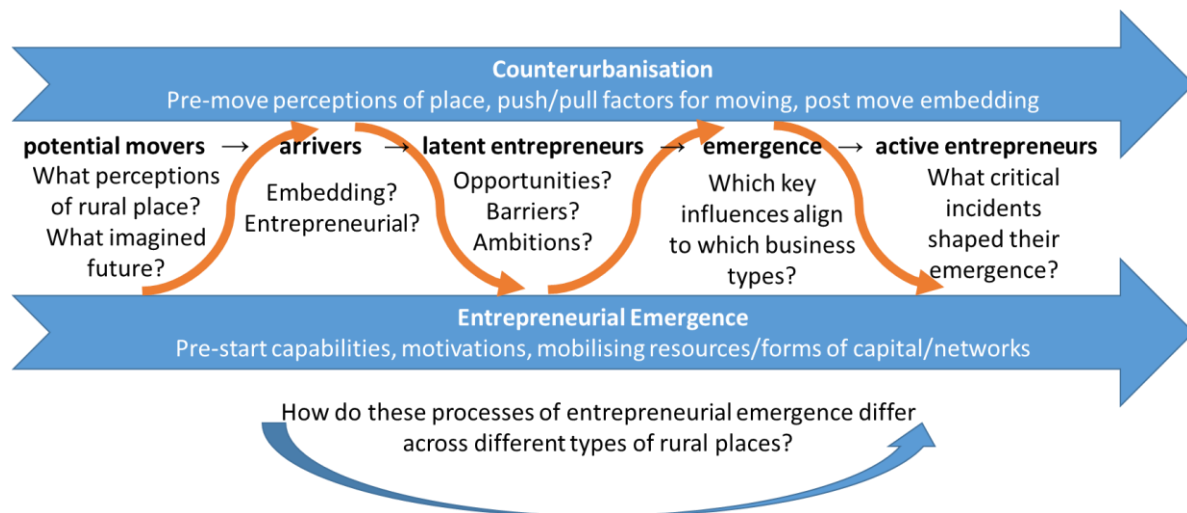
From the cases analysed here, it is clear that the bridging position occupied by counterurbanisers does create distinctive business opportunities. One of the B&B businesses was run by a couple where the husband was a return migrant, using the business as a step towards retirement in the village where he grew up. The husband spoke about the changes in the village population and noted that *"a lot of them are die hard locals but all the movers and shakers connected with this village are what they call incomers"*. His wife added *"There aren't that many locals that bridge the gap, there's locals and there's incomers"*. The implication was that "locals" are less ambitious which might add to the competitive advantage of counterurbanisers. However, the lower earnings in rural workplaces combined with the growing propensity of rural dwellers to engage in economic activity outside their localities (Bosworth and Venhorst, 2018), each confirm that rural businesses cannot rely solely on local markets for growth.

The study demonstrates that the network position of counterurbanisers allows them to promote local assets and other local products. For some, this helps to create a more "authentic" business identity which can be important in the tourism and food and drink sectors. For others, it provides access to both local and extra-local knowledge and markets, each of which can create a competitive advantage. The migration process brings processes of embedding/integration into the active decision-making of entrepreneurs. Decisions are influenced by perceptions of the rural place as well as by aspirations of becoming more embedded (or not) in that place. As Figure 2 illustrates, we can present these complex interactions between counterurbanisation processes and entrepreneurial activities occurring on multiple occasions along the commercial counterurbanisation journey.

Halfacree and Rivera (2012) set out the need to view migration and embedding as a continual process and not see migration as a fixed action at a given point in time. The same is true of entrepreneurial emergence – ideas develop from different triggers and at different speeds.

Revisiting the rural cases here shows very few clear patterns of how the entrepreneurial development occurred, indeed the variety of factors and pathways is itself noteworthy. What we do observe is that ideas emerge from the intersection of personal characteristics and experiences (including retained extra-local networks and social capital), new local connections and the availability of local resources/local economic opportunities. The act of migration shapes the first two of these and provides an alternative perspective on the third.

Figure 2. Mapping the potential entrepreneurial trajectories of counterurbanisers



This leads us to call for new research into a “latent entrepreneurship” phase where potential entrepreneurs are most responsive to new ideas from multiple and diverse stimuli. This paper indicates that some counterurbanisers are already entrepreneurial while for others, the period of latent entrepreneurship coincides with moving into an area with distinctive economic opportunities and resources that can complement individuals’ existing knowledge and skills in different ways. For rural development policy, a better understanding of this phase could yield more dynamic rural economies, boosted by increasing rates of commercial counterurbanisation.

In order to explore the entrepreneurial trajectory of commercial counterurbanisers, Figure 2 provides a useful guide for action. The data in this paper highlighted both reasons for residential relocation and drivers of entrepreneurial emergence. Sometimes these were clearly inter-related, sometimes links between the two processes were more obscure. In order to avoid selective memory bias among respondents and skewed sampling, more longitudinal research that can follow people through their counterurbanising and possible entrepreneurial journey is required. This will also help to identify those rural areas that are more or less conducive to commercial counterurbanisation in terms of the asset base, population structure or degree of remoteness.

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