

UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EUROPE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper provides a systematic literature review (SLR) of policies supporting rural entrepreneurship in Europe. It responds to calls for contextualized studies of rural entrepreneurship and contributes to the rather scant literature which is fragmented across several fields of study. The findings from this SLR complement advances on conceptualization of rural entrepreneurship with empirical evidence, showing the effects of policies designed to promote rural entrepreneurship and highlighting the contextual factors that influence their effectiveness. The results underline the importance of innovation, quality infrastructure, financing, and social capital for effective rural entrepreneurship policies. For rural entrepreneurs, they show the importance of investing in human capital and communication with funding institutions. Finally, this SLR suggests some recommendations for evidence-based policymaking such as the need for flexible scoring systems aligned to policy priorities, the need to reduce the bureaucratic burden for entrepreneurs, and the importance of fostering rural entrepreneurship among local populations.

Keywords

Rural entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, CAP, SLR.

Word count: 6,980 words.

1. Introduction

Wortman's (1990) pioneering work identifies rural entrepreneurship as key to economic growth. For several decades, rural entrepreneurship has been considered important for job creation (Malchow-Møller et al., 2011; Schumpeter, 1934), innovation (Wong et al., 2005), a source of income (Reid, 1988), and a driver of development and adoption of technology in rural areas (Wortman, 1990). Policy interest in rural entrepreneurship has increased in recent years alongside an understanding "that geography matters and that newly created ventures in rural areas face different barriers than their urban counterparts" (Pato & Teixeira, 2019, p. 1). A prominent example of this interest is the European rural development policy which provides start-up support and training for rural entrepreneurs (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2016; OECD, 2015; Ortega-Argilés, 2022).

Although calls for evidence-based policies to support rural entrepreneurship have increased, the academic literature has often overlooked the spatial contexts of entrepreneurs (Müller & Korsgaard, 2017; Pato & Teixeira, 2016, 2019; Ortega-Argilés, 2022; Westlund et al., 2014; Yamak et al., 2014). While rural entrepreneurship compared to entrepreneurship more generally tends to be unique in both theoretical and empirical terms, the study of entrepreneurship in rural areas remains largely unexplored (Meccheri & Pelloni, 2006; Munoz and Kimmit, 2019; Fortunato, 2014).

The lack of attention to place has led to what Welter et al. (2019, p. 319) describe as a "decontextualized body of literature" where the effect of context is often being relegated to other research fields. This fragmentation across fields makes it difficult to obtain a comprehensive view of rural entrepreneurship and the policies put in place to promote it (Fortunato, 2014). Evidence based on entrepreneurship in dynamic urban settings will hardly be applicable to entrepreneurs in rural areas of Europe (Aguilar, 2021; Ortega-Argilés, 2022). Likewise, the reality of rural entrepreneurs in Europe differs substantially

from the case of developing countries (Graham & Bonner, 2024; Urbano et al., 2024), and also between European Union countries and other industrialized regions due to idiosyncratic administrative bodies and multilevel entrepreneurship policies (Ortega-Argilés, 2022). These multilevel policies enable pursuit of common priorities across European countries, while adapting to local needs (Sgroi et al., 2018; Yamak et al., 2014). Thus, several authors have called for a greater emphasis on contextualization. For instance, Welter et al. (2019, p. 327) discuss progress on and future efforts required to achieve a “sensible contextualization” of rural entrepreneurship and Aguilar (2021) provides a systematic review of work on the concept of rural entrepreneurial ecosystems. Joining in this effort, Munoz & Kimmitt (2019, p. 1) argue that the understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems needs to be expanded to capture the reality of rural territories rather than be used as a “descriptive category for understanding what rural contexts are not”. They use a place-based lens to examine the factors that can lead entrepreneurship to flourish in rural contexts, identifying enablers, drivers and dynamics of rural entrepreneurship and building an integrated framework. Similarly, Aguilar (2021) had provided a classification of institutional arrangements, resource endowments and value creation processes of rural entrepreneurial ecosystems. Some authors discuss public policies designed to enhance entrepreneurship and highlight interregional differences but do not focus specifically on rural areas of Europe, which require in-depth study (Fotopoulos & Storey, 2019; Ratinho et al., 2020). Fortunato (2014) had explored the questions of how to support rural entrepreneurship within the United States, emphasizing the importance of context in formulating impactful policy recommendations. To the best of our knowledge, there is no work that expands this research to rural entrepreneurship in the European Union.

Thus, the SLR provided in this paper is designed to assess work on institutional support for rural entrepreneurs in Europe and complement these theoretical frameworks with a review of empirical evidence. We include articles published in peer-reviewed journals and listed on the Web of Science to address the question: How do aid programs contribute to rural entrepreneurship in Europe? The aim is to add to the contextualization of rural entrepreneurship and evidence-based policymaking in three main ways. First, by providing a map of the literature on this area and identifying the types of policies in place. Second, by capturing evidence on the effect of rural entrepreneurship policies and the factors that influence their efficiency. These will complement and support comprehensive rural entrepreneurship frameworks. Third, by offering a series of recommendations for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and academics. Although we focus on these three topics in particular we also explore many other issues including the reasons why the authors believe intervention is warranted, and the econometric strategies employed.

2. Is Rural Entrepreneurship Different?

Entrepreneurship is a multifaceted phenomenon defined by Reynolds et al. (2005, p. 223) as “any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business”. In recent years, this field of work has increasingly focused on contextualization, and is shifting away from an overly-narrow definition of entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2019). A literature review by Aguilar (2021) shows that rural entrepreneurs operate in contexts with distinct resource and institutional endowments and contribute differently to value creation. Similarly, Fortunato (2014) had emphasized the specific challenges and opportunities for rural entrepreneurs and Munoz

and Kimmit (2019) had established a rural entrepreneurship framework with particular entrepreneurial dynamics, rooted enablers and drivers.

2.1.Rural Entrepreneurs' Resource Endowments

Aguilar (2021) highlights differences in the resource endowments of rural as opposed to urban entrepreneurs, in terms of physical and financial resources, human capital, knowledge, demand dynamics, and leader role models. Rural entrepreneurs also seem to employ and develop local resources differently (Gyimah & Lussier, 2021). Their spatial contexts offer unique resources and location-specific advantages -rooted enablers (Munoz and Kimmit, 2019)- which rural entrepreneurs can harness to contribute to the development of their communities (Müller & Korsgaard, 2017; Stathopoulou et al., 2004).

Local physical resources might provide privileged opportunities in rural areas. However, these territories also suffer from considerable infrastructure and accessibility problems, including lack of adequate transport (Paola et al., 2022; Fortunato, 2014), lack of access to basic services (Kompil et al., 2019), barriers to the development economies of scale, lower levels of human capital (Meccheri & Pelloni, 2006), and poor provision of technology and crucial resources such as broadband connectivity (de Clercq et al., 2023). These access problems matter a great deal since access to physical infrastructure can increase rates of entrepreneurial activity (Díaz & Casero, 2018). Access to a high-speed broadband connection is likely to attract new activities to rural areas which increase diversification and allow remote working (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022; Hunt et al., 2021). Taneja and Toombs (2014) argue that better broadband access in rural areas reduces the cost of distance and increases market access and local entrepreneurship. This, in turn, reduce vulnerability in remote areas. Rural areas on the outskirts of urban centers provide

affordable locations for start-ups and access to specialized labor and thus benefit from better access to faster broadband (Mack, 2014). However, some studies highlight negative aspects of broadband coverage for rural retailers who are forced to compete with more diversified companies that are able to offer lower prices (Cumming & Johan, 2010; Freathy & Calderwood, 2016). This aspect in particular demonstrates the importance of sectoral and context-specific policies (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022), since both policies and their outcome are “heavily shaped by place” (Ortega-Argilés, 2022, p. 585).

Several authors refer to the problems experienced by rural entrepreneurs in obtaining finance (Alloza et al., 2021; Fortunato, 2014; Kärnä & Stephan, 2022; Romero-Castro et al., 2023). Access to capital is vital when starting a business (del Olmo-García et al., 2023) and is crucial for small ventures, young entrepreneurs, and disadvantaged groups who often have poorer access to credit and financing services (OECD, 2015). Depopulation implies threats in the form of both reduced demand and availability of employees with high levels of human capital (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022). Since rural areas also often have lower concentrations of formal entrepreneurial knowledge, this increases the need to promote the skills required to start small or medium-sized businesses (Meccheri & Pelloni, 2006). This formal entrepreneurial knowledge includes the ability to recognize and develop market opportunities, analyze and implement business perspectives and approaches, and good communication skills (Ataei et al., 2020). However, rural areas often include individuals with considerable tacit knowledge and experience (Pato & Teixeira, 2019) which increases the propensity for entrepreneurship in these territories (Mancilla et al., 2010; Yu & Artz, 2019). The lack of other opportunities can result in necessity-driven entrepreneurship where starting a new venture is a form of self-employment (Martirena, 2020; Su et al., 2023).

2.2. Rural Entrepreneurs' Institutional Arrangements

Similar to the case of institutional endowments, there are differences in rural entrepreneurs' relationships with formal and informal institutions, and membership of social networks (Pato & Teixeira, 2019; Munoz and Kimmit, 2019). Given the difficulties related to entrepreneurship in rural territories and its potential for transforming these locations, institutional support plays a major role (Wu et al., 2017). An example of such support is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for European countries. The CAP involves European national, regional, and local institutions to support the development of rural territories and serves as a unique example of objectives and measures that are common to different nations. It includes the freedom to adapt the various measures to national and local needs by providing economic and financial support for new ventures to access capital and credit schemes (Harpa, 2017; Smallbone, 2009), urbanization and infrastructure developments (Westlund et al., 2014), investment in entrepreneurs' human capital (Lampadarios, 2017), and innovation (Pato & Teixeira, 2019).

Rural networks provide access to opportunities and local resources (Korsgaard et al., 2015a). Some studies provide evidence of higher levels of social capital in rural areas where networks might be narrower but are stronger (Freire-Gibb & Nielsen, 2014; Müller, 2013; Steinerowski & Steinerowska-Streb, 2012). Individuals in rural areas tend to be more willing to act cooperatively and support one another, although this behavior might depend on the embeddedness of the entrepreneur (Pato & Teixeira, 2019, Munoz and Kimmit, 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1. Systematic Literature Review Protocol

This SLR addresses the following research question: How do aid programs contribute to rural entrepreneurship in Europe? We began by constructing a search string (see Table 1) that included:

- a) Variations to cover public policies or programs, including those related to the CAP.
- b) Terms capturing the idea of entrepreneurship; following Champenois et al. (2020), Patrício and Fernandes (2023), and Sutter et al. (2019) we included ‘entrepreneurship’ and its variations complemented by terms related to startups or new and young businesses (Matthews et al., 2018).
- c) The term rural and its variations was included to capture only those articles focused on a rural context (Pato & Teixeira, 2016).
- d) Different variations to include the 27 European Union countries. As stated in the introduction, we focus on Europe because of its idiosyncratic multilevel framework which establishes common objectives and requirements across countries while allowing for a degree of adaptation to national contexts. In addition, rural areas in European territories face different problems from those experienced by rural areas in developing countries and other areas, making it necessary to narrow our scope (Graham & Bonner, 2024).
- e) Empirical papers published in peer reviewed journals listed on the Web of Science. To address our research question, we wanted to identify articles evaluating the ex-post impact of programs and thus restricted the sample to empirical papers. In line with recommendations related to achieving a transparent process, we include only journal articles (Kraus et al, 2020) included in the Web of Science (Patrício &

Fernandes, 2023). We used the Cabell's Predatory Reports database to ensure exclusion of predatory journals (Dony et al., 2020). While this database list is not perfect (Strielkowski, 2018), it is one of the best instruments available to identify non-standard journals (Dony et al., 2020).

Table 1. Screening stage inclusion criteria

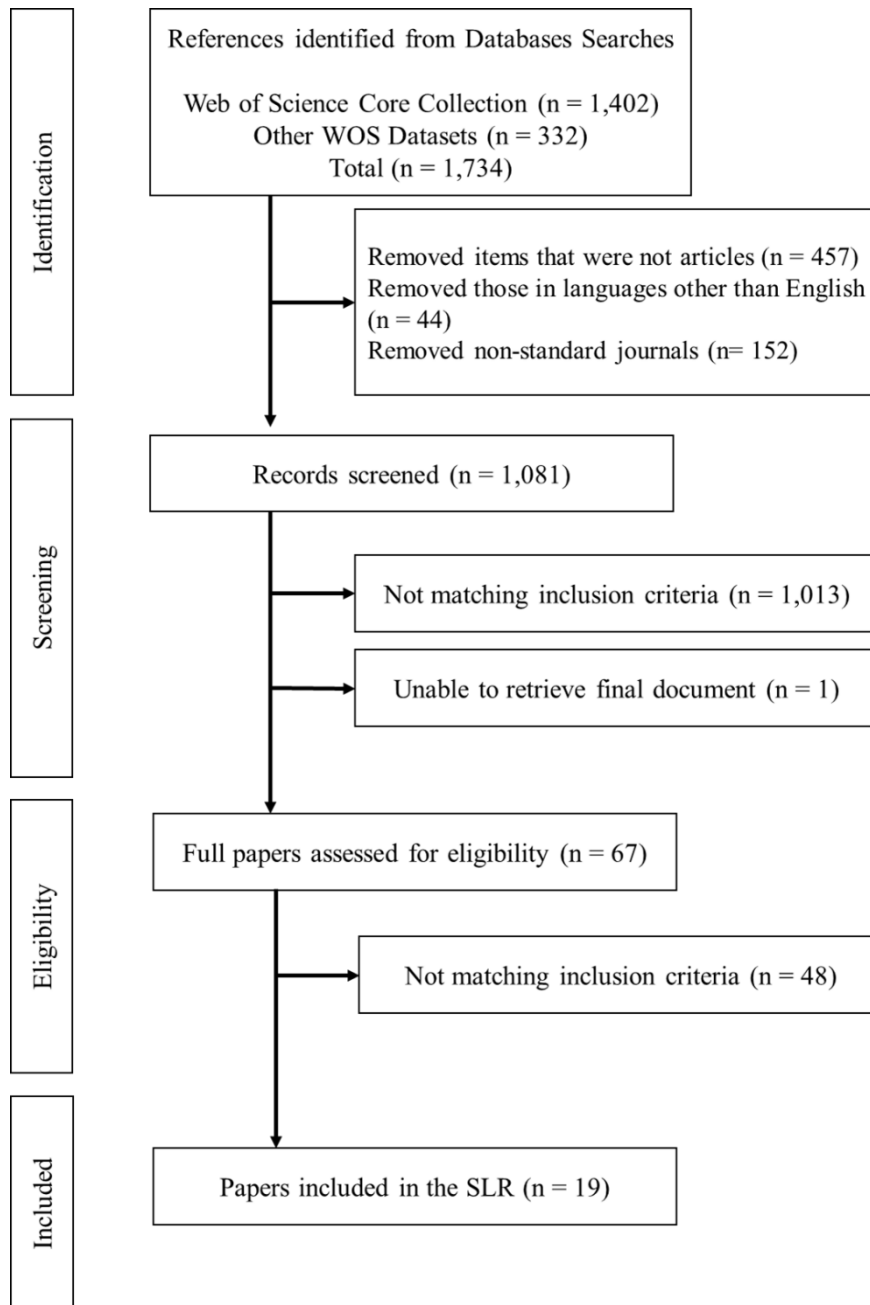
Keywords	a) aid OR program* OR 'public policy' OR 'CAP' OR 'C.A.P' OR 'Common Agricultural Policy' OR 'CLLD' OR ('LEADER' AND 'rural') OR 'programme' OR polic* OR support* b) entrepreneur* OR startup OR start-up OR (new AND (business* OR firm* OR venture* OR compan*)) OR (young AND (business* OR firm* OR venture* OR compan*)) OR (creation AND (business* OR firm* OR venture* OR compan*)) c) rural* d) Europ* OR 'E.U.' OR 'E.U' OR 'CAP' OR 'C.A.P' OR Austria* OR Belgi* OR Bulgaria* OR Croatia* OR Cypr* OR Czech OR Denmark OR Danish OR Estonia* OR Finland OR Finnish OR France OR French OR German* OR Greece OR Greek OR Hungar* OR Ireland OR Irish OR Ital* OR Latvia* OR Lithuania* OR Luxembourg* OR Malta* OR Netherlands OR Dutch OR Poland OR Polish OR Portug* OR Romania* OR Slovak* OR Slovenia* OR Spain OR Spanish OR Swed* e) impact* OR effect* OR evaluation* OR analys* OR empiric*
Inclusion criteria	Language: English Methodology: Empirical Publishing practices: Excluded predatory journals

	Type of publication: only journal articles Years: no limitation Area of research: Excluded areas related to medical sciences ¹ Intervention: Evaluation of the effect of a policy
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To design and document our review of the literature, we used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). We ran our search on all items listed on the Web of Science in March 2024. This initial search identified 1,734 items. After removing items that were not journal articles, work in languages other than English, and articles in non-standard journals, we obtained 1,081 abstracts which were screened for their match to the inclusion criteria. We retained only articles which evaluated the effect of a policy (or an aspect of a policy) on entrepreneurs in rural areas of Europe. After excluding those articles that did not match our inclusion criteria plus one item where we were unable to retrieve the full paper, we obtained a sample of 67 full papers. After checking our inclusion criteria against the full paper (rather than just the abstracts), we excluded 48 papers, which left a sample of 19 papers for inclusion in our SLR. Fortunato (2014) explains that literature on rural entrepreneurship is fragmented across several fields and Fotopoulos and Storey (2019) pointed out that work on the ex-post evaluation of regional entrepreneurship is relatively scarce but is growing. The final sample includes papers published between years 2005 and 2023.

Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

¹ The Annex provides a complete list of excluded areas which include life sciences, thermodynamics, and archeology.



3.2. Descriptive Analysis

We present the journals publishing the articles included in the SLR, based on their quartile according to the Journal of Citation Reports² and number of articles published in each journal. Table 2 shows the dispersion across topics, with journals indexed in Business,

² For those indexed in multiple categories, table 2 presents the highest available quartile.

Management, Economics, Regional Studies and Political Science, among others. This shows that work on support for rural entrepreneurship is scattered across several disciplines and that there is room for further development within entrepreneurship literature (Fortunato, 2014).

Table 2. Journals publishing the articles included in the SLR

Journal	Quartile (JCR)	Number of Articles
<i>Technological Forecasting and Social Change</i>	1	2
<i>Entrepreneurship and Regional Development</i>	1	1
<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	1	1
<i>Journal of Rural Studies</i>	1	1
<i>Land Use Policy</i>	1	2
<i>European Countryside</i>	2	1
<i>European Planning Studies</i>	2	1
<i>Amfiteatru Economic</i>	2	1
<i>Growth and Change</i>	2	1
<i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i>	2	1
<i>Journal of Regional Science</i>	2	1
<i>New Medit</i>	3	1
<i>Scientific Papers-Series Management Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development</i>	3	2
Total		19

4. Results

The results of our analysis fall into three categories. The first refers to the policies under study, and a description of the policies and the methodology used by the study. This includes their theoretical background, their definitions of entrepreneurship and rurality, their econometric method, treatment of endogeneity and causality, country addressed and data sources. This could be valuable for authors who want to tackle this growing stream of research (Pato et al., 2016). The second category is based on the results of the evaluation and on the elements shaping the effect of the policies, many of them in line with previous research by Aguilar (2021). Finally, the third category includes the implications for scholars, policymakers, and entrepreneurs.

4.1. The policies under study

4.1.1. Policies that promote rural entrepreneurship

The majority of the articles included in the SLR focus on the two pillars of CAP (Aggelopoulos & Arabatzis, 2010; Angioloni et al., 2019; Calza et al., 2018; Fanjul et al., 2023; Lehtonen, 2023; Sgroi et al., 2018). The second since 2000 is the European Rural Development Policy – the most frequent focus of the papers included in the SLR. It provides support for entrepreneurship, young farmers, innovation, diversification, and other rural development strategies (Van Arendonk, 2012).

One policy in particular is worthy of special mention. Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) is a measure that takes a bottom-up approach to financing innovation in rural communities and has evolved over different funding waves. The CLLD originated in the previous LEADER program - considered ‘the flagship of a new rural development paradigm’ (Servillo & De Bruijn, 2018, p. 223) and in 1991 began operating as LEADER I. Its coverage and funding have increased continuously. Given

that it is aimed directly at fostering entrepreneurship, the CLLD is studied in several of the sample papers (Angioloni et al., 2019; Fanjul et al., 2023; Shishkova, 2020).

Table 3 presents the programs financed by individual rural development programs along with their policy priorities. It can be seen that many measures are implemented using a coordinated and consistent framework with common priorities and mechanisms across countries. However, the sample papers show that there have been marked differences in the implementation of these programs across countries and areas. This shows that there is no ‘one size fits all’ for rural entrepreneurship policies and that they need to be adapted to each regional context (Ortega-Argilés, 2022, p. 585).

Table 3. Policies included in the SLR

Programmi ng period	Priority axis	Key actions and authors in the SLR	Num. articles
National Rural Development Program 2000-2006	Axis 1. Agriculture and forestry	Bottom-up approach, diversification for new member states (Chaplin et al., 2007)	1
	Axis 2. Competitiveness of rural areas	Innovative approach to develop new activities, products and methods, start-up support and marketing services (Meccheri & Pelloni, 2006)	1
	Axis 3. Preserve Europe's rural heritage	Education, training and employment, help for young farmers setting up their first venture and support for farm viability (Aggelopoulos & Arabatzis, 2010)	1
National Rural Development Program 2007-2013	Axis 1. Competitiveness for agriculture, food and forestry	Dynamic entrepreneurship, technology adoption, vocational training and information, and increasing the value added of agricultural products (Lehtonen, 2023) and renewable natural energy crop schemes (Tate et al., 2012)	2
	Axis 2. Land management and environment	Environmental services, preservation of landscape and forests, organic farming, provision of environmental goods, sustainable development	-
	Axis 3. Quality of life and diversification of the rural economy	To develop micro-businesses, promote entrepreneurship, tourism, diversification, business creation (Angioloni et al., 2019; Lehtonen, 2023; Sgroi et al., 2018; Ureche & Jitea, 2021), infrastructure, and quality of life (Calza et al., 2018)	5
	LEADER axis	Encourage entrepreneurship, promote inclusiveness through provision of local services, contribute to job creation (Angioloni et al., 2019)	1
National Rural Development Program 2014-2020	Priority 1. Innovation	Foster innovation, cooperation, and vocational training	-
	Priority 2. Competitiveness	Farm modernization, generation renewal, provision of training (Góngora et al., 2019)	1
	Priority 3. Food chain	Improve competitiveness of primary producers, reduce the risks related to farming	-
	Priority 4. Ecosystems	Restore and preserve biodiversity, improve water management, prevent soil erosion	-
	Priority 5. Resource efficiency	Increase efficiency of water and energy use, and increase sources of renewable energy	-
	Priority 6. Economic development and inclusion	Facilitate diversification, enterprise creation (Pato & Teixeira, 2019; Ureche & Jitea, 2021), foster development, and enhance access to information and communication technologies	2
	Community-Led Local Dev.	Support entrepreneurial projects financed by local action groups (Shishkova, 2020; Fanjul et al., 2023)	2
National funding		Government transfers (Chaplin et al., 2007), French Very High-Speed Broadband Plan (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022), The Irish Gathering (Mottiar, 2016)	3
Private and semi-private institutions		Entrepreneur orientation, incubators, contests, credit lines, and investment (Silva et al., 2011)	1

Source: built by the authors from information of several sources (EC, 2006, 2013; Ureche & Jitea, 2021; Van Arendonk, 2012; ENRD, 2016; EC, 1999)

4.1.2. Methodologies used

4.1.2.1. The definition of entrepreneurship employed

The authors included in our sample employ different definitions of rurality and entrepreneurship with Del Olmo-Garcia et al. (2023) providing the most comprehensive definition. Meccheri and Pelloni (2006, p. 372) suggest that ‘the concept of entrepreneurship in rural areas remains largely unexplored’. Wortman (1990, p. 330) defines rural entrepreneurship as ‘the creation of a new organisation that introduces a new product, serves or creates a new market, or utilises a new technology in a rural environment’ while Henry and McElwee (2014, p. 7) define ‘the rural entrepreneur [as] an individual who manages a venture in a rural setting’.

However, this last definition would seem to be too simple; the motivations for establishing a venture in a rural setting inevitably differ. This has led Korsgaard et al. (2015b) to distinguish between ‘rural entrepreneurship’ and ‘entrepreneurship in the rural’, with the former referring to entrepreneurs who exploit local resources and give back to the local community and the latter referring to profit-oriented ventures with limited embeddedness. Pato and Teixeira (2018) also differentiate between ‘rural entrepreneurship’ and entrepreneurship activities in rural areas. They also consider rural entrepreneurs as integral to of their community, influenced by its social environment, and as contributing to the region. Thus, there is a notable difference between entrepreneurs located in a rural area and rural entrepreneurs from the local environment. This suggests the need for a socio-spatial oriented approach to the study of rural entrepreneurship (Munoz and Kimmit, 2019). While both types of entrepreneurs will contribute to local development, for several authors rural entrepreneurship is more significant for the local community.

Mottiar (2016) discusses the similarities between concepts of rural entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship both of which are driven by reasons other than economic motives and ‘bring about social change’ (Vasakarla, 2008, p. 32). Thus, social entrepreneurs in rural areas can be considered ‘changemakers’ who address a problem in society rather than focusing primarily on profit (Gupta et al., 2020; Sharir and Lerner, 2006). For these changemaking entrepreneurs, the ‘mission related impact becomes the central criterion’ (Dees, 2001, p. 20). This echoes Welter et al. (2019, p. 326) reflection on how the world changes ‘in part as a result of entrepreneurship’. The main difference between the concepts of rural and social entrepreneurship is that rural entrepreneurship is a reality deeply embedded in the local context and community although both types of entrepreneurship might overlap in rural areas (Bonfanti et al., 2024; Kaushik et al., 2023). Meccheri and Pelloni (2006) emphasize the importance of entrepreneurial human and social capital in rural areas. They understand the former as the skills and knowledge that determine the ability to perceive and exploit new economic opportunities and the latter they understand as the ability to exploit social structures, networks, and ties (Bourdieu 1983; Portes, 1998). Several authors suggest that rural entrepreneurs address new opportunities through diversification (Calza et al., 2018; Angioloni et al., 2018; Chaplin et al., 2007; Lehtonen, 2023). For example, Sgroi et al. (2018) define ‘agritourism entrepreneurs’ as farmers whose core business is agriculture but who (perhaps cooperatively with other family members) start a new enterprise. Tate et al. (2012) study diversification in terms of the adoption of renewable energy enterprises either as part of the current business or in a new firm.

While all these notions enrich the concept of rural entrepreneurship, Westlund et al. (2014) caution against too free use of the term. They argue that ‘entrepreneurship is generally defined as the foundation of new businesses’ and believe that its core meaning

is being lost and that it has been used too broadly. Following this definition, some authors use the term entrepreneurship to describe new companies (Ureche & Jitea, 2021), enterprise creation (Silva et al., 2011), and new ventures (Pato et al., 2019; Angioloni et al., 2018). A perhaps more all-embracing definition of entrepreneurship proposed by Mottiar (2016), considers event creators to be entrepreneurs since they have ‘adopted business models’ (Zahra et al., 2009) and used their ‘entrepreneurial abilities’ to develop their events (Vasakarla, 2008). It is notable that several of the papers included in the SLR do not define rural entrepreneurship which suggests the need for a definition that can be applied across different fields (Góngora et al., 2019; Shishkova, 2020; Skuras et al., 2005).

4.1.2.2. The definition of rurality employed

The concept of rurality also leaves room for interpretation. Pato et al. (2019) suggest that there are various definitions of rurality – based mostly on population density. Some authors use the regional typology proposed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or rely on national classification, most combining population density with a population size threshold (Pato et al., 2019; Brezzi et al., 2011; Westlund, 2014). Some use more complex combinations of labor, population, density and other regional traits (Lehtonen, 2023).

Meccheri and Pelloni (2006) argue for a further distinction between center and periphery rural areas. The former are located close to an urban center and have a higher population density, lower dependence on agriculture, greater proximity to markets, and a diversified economic base. The latter are more remote from markets, suffer depopulation and poor infrastructure, and are heavily depending on agricultural activities. Similarly, Silva et al. (2011) describe ‘peripheral areas’ as suffering from depopulation and poor growth prospects, and Angioloni et al. (2018) refer to ‘less favored areas’, understood as areas

with natural handicaps, tendency for depopulation, and scarce job creation (OECD, 2002). Less favored areas often include mountainous areas (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006; Aggelopoulos, 2010; Skuras et al., 2005). Some authors apply the definition provided by the Accessibility Index in the European Commission Report dated 2009 which describes remote areas as local administrative units with a more than 45 minute travel time to an urban center of at least 50,000 inhabitants (Ureche & Jitea, 2021).

Several papers do not propose a definition of a rural area (Calza et al., 2018; Chaplin et al., 2007; Tate et al., 2012; Góngora et al., 2019; Sgroi et al., 2018; Shishkova, 2020). For instance, Mottiar (2016) does not use the term rurality although the territories analyzed are classified as ‘predominantly rural’ according to the European Urban-Rural Typology (Eurostat, 2013). This may show that authors writing in some disciplines do not consider that they are contributing to the field of rural entrepreneurship which makes it difficult to achieve an overall view of the phenomenon.

4.1.2.3. Empirical strategies and econometric methods

Empirical strategies differ across studies, as summarized in Table 4. It is important to note that the timespan has a strong effect on the results of the evaluation since longer time spans allow for the accumulation over time of spillover effects (Acs et al., 2013; Fotopoulos, 2022; Jones & Ratten, 2021).

Research methods also differ considerably. Most studies show no endogeneity concerns, but identification of causal relationships is not possible using several of the econometric methods described above. This reflects recommendations to take into account that ‘the drivers and outcomes of entrepreneurship are heavily shaped by place’ and that there is still a need for further evaluation of remote territories (Ortega-Aguilés, 2022, p. 585).

Several authors highlight lack of local (especially municipal) level data as one of the main obstacles to the evaluation of rural entrepreneurship programs (del Olmo-García et al., 2023; Pato & Teixeira, 2019). Some authors believe that this is one of the main reasons for the scant evidence-based recommendations to improve rural development programs and explains why so many papers use primary data or a higher geographical level of analysis (del Olmo-García et al., 2023; Lehtonen, 2023).

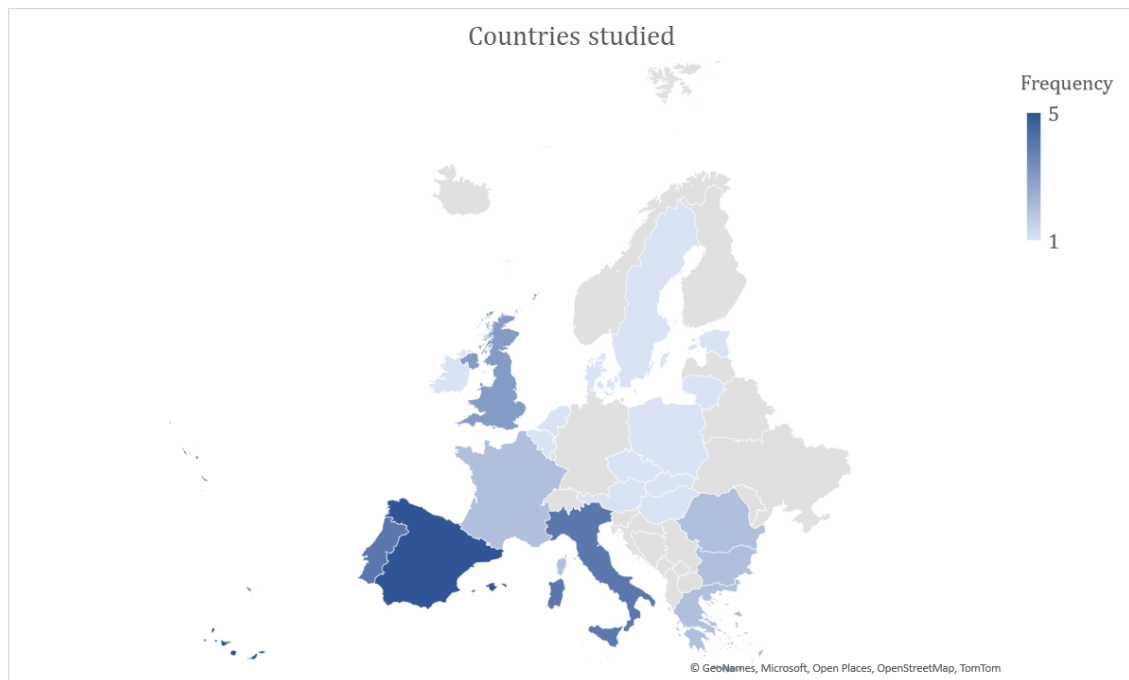
Table 4. Summary of study characteristics

Authors	Type of program evaluated	Program timing	Program target	Sample description	Dependent variable	Methodology	Causal analysis	Sample unit	Sample size	Data origins	Sources of data
Aggelopoulos et al. (2010)	RDP 2000-2006	2000-2006	Young people establishing their first farm	Investment plans from beneficiaries	Viability of new farms	Categorical regressions	No	Investment plans	100	Institutional data	Regional Operational Program of the Region of Central Macedonia
Angioloni et al. (2018)	RDP 2007-2013	2007-2013	Entrepreneurs and start-ups; Rural firms and microenterprises; public organizations	Applications for CLLD, 29% of which were approved	Probability of receiving funds; number of jobs created	Binomial model (Probit)	No	Aid applications	5,973	Institutional data	Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
Calza et al. (2018)	RDP 2007-2013	2007-2013	Farm diversification	Seventeen European countries	Correlation between diversification and cultural traits	Bivariate correlation	No	Countries	17	Institutional data & other secondary data	European Network for Rural Development and Hofstede's cultural dimensions index
Chaplin et al. (2017)	RDP 2000-2006; National Funding	2000-2001	Farm diversification; government transfers	Farm households	Barriers to venture creation and diversification	Cluster analysis	No	Farmers	342	Primary data	Questionnaire
Del Olmo et al. (2023)	Incentives for EU depopulation policies	2007-2018	Rural firms and microenterprises	New companies in Spain	Propensity for rural entrepreneurship	Random effects regressions	No	New firms	204	Institutional data and other secondary data	SABI, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Spanish Statistical Office and Bank of Spain
Duvivier & Bussière (2022)	National Funding	2013-2018	Firms and households without broadband coverage	2,161 treated municipalities and 10,750 controls	Numbers of new firms (Average Treatment Effect)	Difference-in-difference with pre-matching	Yes	Municipalities	12,911	Institutional data	French Digital Agency, French Institute of Statistics, INSEE, IGN
Fanjul et al. (2023)	RDP 2014-2020	2014-2020	Entrepreneurs and start-ups, Rural firms and microenterprises	Spanish municipalities	Unemployment	Difference in Difference (Callaway et al., 2021)	Yes	Municipalities	8,095	Institutional data and other secondary data	OECD, Eurostat, Spanish Agrarian Guarantee Fund, National Statistics Institute, Ministry of Rural Affairs, Spanish Public Employment Ser.
Góngora et al. (2019)	RDP 2014-2020	2016-2017	Young first-time farmers	Young Spaniards joining the farming sector	Profiles of young individuals attracted to the livestock sector	Factor analysis and Q Methodology	No	Young farmers	24	Primary data	Questionnaire
Lehtonen (2023)	RDP 2007-2013	2007-2013	Rural firms and microenterprises	Firms (including start-ups and established firms)	Number of jobs created	Regression with matching	Yes	Firms	10,900	Institutional data	Finnish Agency of Rural Affairs, Finland's Register of Enterprises and Establishments and Register of Public Corporations.

Meccheri & Pelloni (2006)	RDP 2000-2006	2000-2001	Entrepreneurs and start-ups; Rural firms and microenterprises	Rural entrepreneurs and firms members of the UK National Farmers' Union	Probability of adopting institutional assistance	Binomial model (Probit)	No	Firms	123	Primary data	Questionnaire
Mottiar (2016)	National Funding	2013-2014	Event-organizers	Event-organizers for the Irish Gathering	Differences counties	T-tests	No	Organizers	73	Primary data	Questionnaire
Pato et al. (2019)	RDP 2014-2020; other institutions	2016-2017	Firms in incubators and science parks	Newly created ventures (new technology-based and knowledge-intensive start-ups)	Firm performance (turnover, gross value added, and exports)	Binomial model (Logit)	No	New firms	408	Primary data and institutional data	Questionnaire and Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture, Sea, Environment and Territory
Sgroi et al. (2018)	RDP 2007-2013	2013-2014	Farm diversification	Grants for diversification through agritourism	Grant amounts	Multilinear regression models	No	Grants	64	Institutional data	Sicilian Agriculture Department
Shishkova (2020)	RDP 2014-2020	2016-2019	Entrepreneurs and start-ups, Rural firms and microenterprises	Local action groups distributing CLLD (100 projects)	Funded initiatives	Multilinear regression models	No	Local action groups	34	Secondary data	Bulgarian Registry Agency, websites from local action groups
Silva et al. (2011)	National Funding	2008-2009	Entrepreneurs and start-ups	Micro, small and medium industrial enterprises	Differences in use of aid programs	Qui-square test	No	Firms	59	Primary data	Questionnaire
Skuras et al. (2005)	Rural training programs	1999-2000	Entrepreneurs and start-ups	Businesses owners in remote regions	Probability of a firm increasing employment in the last five years	Binomial model (Probit)	No	Firms	513	Primary data	Questionnaire
Tate et al. (2012)	RDP 2007-2013	2011-2012	Farm diversification	Farmers	Differences between adopters and non-adopters of renewable enterprises; Factors affecting adoption	Chi-square test and factor analysis (principal component analysis)	No	Farmers	393	Primary data	Questionnaire
Ureche & Jitea (2021)	RDP 2007-2013; RDP 2014-2020	2007-2020	Entrepreneurs and start-ups; Rural firms and microenterprises	Rural municipalities	Factors for microenterprise investment, population change, growth and tourism	Factor analysis (principal component analysis)	No	Municipalities	140	Institutional data	National Romanian Statistics Institute (TEMPO Database) and Romanian Agency for Financing Rural Investments
Westlund et al. (2014)	Perceived local support for entrepreneurs	2002-2008	Entrepreneurs and start-ups	New companies	Start-ups (new firms) per 10,000 inhabitants	Ordinary least square	No	Firms	289	Institutional data	Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis and Swedish Confederation of Enterprises

The most studied countries are Spain, Portugal, and Italy, followed by the UK, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and France (see Figure 2). Several studies focus on more than one country with Calza et al. (2018) examining 17 European countries.

Figure 2. Countries studied by the SLR sample



4.2. Program Evaluations: Results and Contextual Factors

We summarize the results of the interventions in terms of policy outcomes, entrepreneurship framework conditions, and policy design.

4.2.1. The results of the interventions

Most studies find positive effects from the policies implemented. Some enabled firms and entrepreneurs to benefit more from the comparative advantages and opportunities in their regions (Aggelopoulos, 2010). In this context, Del Olmo-Garcia et al. (2023) show that rural entrepreneurship is driven by opportunities rather than by entrepreneurs' needs. Several policies had facilitated entrepreneurship (Mottiar, 2016), new firms (Pato et al., 2019; Westlund et al., 2014) and venture diversification (Tate et al., 2012; Angioloni et

al., 2018). Others had enabled better performance by new firms (Aggelopoulos, 2010; Pato et al., 2019), or increased job creation (Lehtonen, 2023) or population growth (Ureche & Jitea, 2021).

However, the effects differ considerably across studies. For example, Angioloni et al. (2018) found that funding some types of projects created more jobs than funding of other projects. Those that showed the best results include farm diversification projects, business development, and tourism which all outperformed socio-cultural projects. Social entrepreneurs benefit from local knowledge and the desire to contribute to the local community also increases job creation (Mottiar, 2016). However, it seems that applicant characteristics have an influence on the number of jobs created and the probability to request aid (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006; Angioloni et al., 2018). Younger entrepreneurs tend to be more dynamic and more likely to need and to access public funding whereas older aged entrepreneurs benefit from reputation and have a higher probability of receiving external financial support (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006).

4.2.2. The contextual factors shaping the results

In the context of new venture creation, there are several framework conditions associated to the decision to start a rural business (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023), some of which had already been captured by comprehensive theoretical frameworks (Aguilar, 2021; Munoz and Kimmitt, 2019). One is access to capital, whether from a bank (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023), via a social network (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006), or from some other institution (Pato et al., 2019). These alternative institutions -like incubators or private organizations- also offer networking opportunities (Pato et al., 2019).

Another key factor is good infrastructure, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for entrepreneurship (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023). Infrastructure includes access to basic services – especially broadband – which can promote youth entrepreneurship

(Góngora et al., 2019). Several authors found a positive effect of a good broadband infrastructure on entrepreneurship (Pato et al., 2019; Duvivier & Bussière, 2022) although Duvivier and Bussière (2022) found a positive effect of broadband only in municipalities with good initial conditions (good economic climate, natural amenities, and positive demographics). They found that broadband access has a positive effect on services (by increasing visibility) and retail trade (by attracting new residents and increasing local demand). It also increases opportunities for remote working in the creative industries. A high speed connection is crucial for the creative industries, enabling flexible work in rural areas and allowing them to benefit from the quality of life of rural territories (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022). Duvivier and Bussière found a small negative effect of broadband access deriving from stronger global competition but for only the finance and real state sectors. Overall, the effects of broadband access are positive although conditioned by factors such as amenities and age-group (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022).

Social capital is also indispensable for rural entrepreneurship, even more important than in urban contexts (Pato et al., 2019; Westlund et al., 2014). Territorial embeddedness is more likely to encourage funding from friends and family and reduce the need for institutional assistance. Also, reputation derived from family entrepreneurial experience is likely to attract local support (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006). The example of other local entrepreneurs (Pato et al., 2019) and local perception of entrepreneurship influences start-up propensity (Westlund et al., 2014).

Innovation is also necessary and those regions with greater investment in R&D have a higher propensity for rural entrepreneurship (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023; Pato et al., 2019). Product and organizational innovation contribute to new venture performance in rural areas (Pato et al., 2019) and entrepreneurial innovation can attract higher levels of funding (Sgroi et al., 2018). Support for R&D collaboration has a greater impact on rural

compared to urban located start-ups which emphasizes the potential of public policy intervention (Pato et al., 2019).

Human capital is another element crucial for rural entrepreneurship although the relationship is complex. Skuras et al. (2005) define human capital as the accumulation of codified (education and training) and tacit knowledge (managerial and work experience). Several authors find that education and training programs are associated to better venture performance (Pato et al., 2019; Skuras et al., 2005), higher levels of youth entrepreneurship (Góngora et al., 2019), establishment of renewable enterprises (Tate et al., 2012), and higher use of aid (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006) to create the new business (Silva et al., 2011). Some studies show differences in the effects of human capital accumulation by geographic area (Skuras et al., 2005) or project type (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023). Del Olmo-Garcia et al. (2023) find that secondary but not tertiary education leads to higher levels of entrepreneurial activity. It is suggested that this is because the opportunity costs are higher for individuals with higher education in rural areas due to the lower returns on investment in education. This makes it more probable for individuals with tertiary education to migrate to an urban environment (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023). Duvivier and Bussière's (2022) findings complement this argument by demonstrating that rural municipalities well-endowed with amenities (especially high-speed broadband access) attract more higher educated individuals. These better amenities allow qualified workers to work remotely and benefit from the better quality of life in rural areas. Pato et al. (2019) find that support in the form of business advice, training, and access to new markets helps rural ventures more than urban ventures. However, some public training might be low quality (Pato et al., 2019) and have overlaps between the different training programs (Silva et al., 2011). Thus, coordination among the agencies providing support for rural entrepreneurs is essential.

In the case of diversification, Chaplin et al. (2007) found that seed money for business startups, low cost finance, and training were the most useful resources to promote it. Ureche and Jitea (2021) suggest that in rural areas diversification is related positively to population growth although the level of risk aversion in the local community has an effect on diversification (Calza et al., 2018). Diversification depends also on the amount of accumulated capital (including public aid) and education level achieved (Chaplin et al., 2007). Remoteness, entrepreneur age, and accumulated investments in the current economic activity all reduce the likelihood of diversification (Chaplin et al., 2007). The likelihood of diversification is reduced also by the provision of subsidies in the agriculture sector. Although subsidies provide farmers with support and stability, diversification is often used to smooth income and balance unstable agriculture returns (Chaplin et al., 2007).

4.2.3. Policy design affecting the results

Studies show that the criteria for evaluating applications for aid, can unintendedly reduce the effectiveness of the policy. Angioloni et al. (2018) evaluated CLLD applications and found that new business have a lower probability of being awarded public funding despite the CLLD being aimed at increasing innovation and targeting new firms. The criteria used to select applications de-facto penalize those with higher potential for job creation, attributing less value to innovation -where private companies score higher-, compared to financial planning or measurability, where usually public companies tend to score higher. Thus, less micro-businesses could access the program. Funding probability depends also on the project category, sector, and local institution evaluating the project. In some cases, the complexity of the application processes leads to sizable differences in funding depending on the applicant's familiarity with the aid scheme (Sgroi et al., 2018), and can

result in little relationship between need for and award of public support (Chaplin et al., 2007).

In general, these results highlight the need for application evaluation processes to be better aligned to the policies' objectives and especially in relation to the more decentralized CLLD projects (Shishkova, 2020). This would be helped by better communication with program recipients; it has been shown that more frequent and better communication between applicants and the local authority result in more new jobs and reduced moral hazard (Angioloni et al., 2018; Shishkova, 2020). More emphasis should be put on publicizing funding opportunities – not all local entrepreneurs are aware of what is available (Silva et al., 2011).

4.3. The implications of the studies reviewed

The implications include recommendations for entrepreneurs, academics, and policymakers.

4.3.1. Implications for rural entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs in rural settings 'need to recognize that they are critical contributors to the social and well-being of the regions and countries', and should exploit social networks, innovation, and share their knowledge and expertise (Pato et al., 2019, p. 16).

Entrepreneurs can also invest in education and training to improve their chances of accessing aid, to enable recognition of new business opportunities, and to boost performance (Chaplin et al., 2007; Pato et al., 2019). Better digital skills and website design capabilities would increase the opportunities available and their market coverage (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022). Enterprises operating in the entrepreneur's local context seem to do better (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023) and are better able to exploit

opportunities for collaboration and synergies among social entrepreneurs in the rural area, and with the local tourism and hospitality sector (Mottiar, 2016).

Better knowledge about the criteria used to assess applications for funding would increase the chances of being awarded public finance (Sgroi et al., 2018). In some cases, the probability of obtaining public funding depends on the type of business regime, existence of a partnership with a private entity, the local institutions, and the particular funding category (Angioloni et al., 2018). Regular communication with public representatives of the agencies managing the aid program would allow both parties to better understand the requirements and ensure that funding is used as intended (Shishkova, 2020).

4.3.2. Implications for academia

Several papers contribute to the growing literature on rural entrepreneurship. Del Olmo-Garcia et al. (2023) study the drivers of rural entrepreneurship and the factors that might contribute to its development, adding to the literature on the drivers of rural entrepreneurship (Munoz and Kimmit, 2019). Others add to work on rural policies by evaluating the factors that condition the impact of broadband in rural areas (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022), refute claims about the ineffectiveness of rural development programs (Lehtonen, 2023), or call for policy evaluation models based on better municipal-level data (Westlund et al., 2014). Pato et al. (2019) contribute by highlighting the differences in institutional effects for rural and urban ventures, adding to the ones identified by Fortunato (2014). Calza et al. (2018) consider the determinants of diversification based on rural entrepreneurship, cultural diversity management, and integrated rural tourism theories which they apply to investigate the supply-side determinants of diversification toward tourism activities.

4.3.3. Implications for policymakers

There are several implications for policymakers. First, it is important to note that there is no ‘one size fits all’ for rural entrepreneurship policies and that they will be heavily influenced by the regional context (Ortega-Argilés, 2022, p. 585). Thus, the authors in the SLR will provide indications that would need tailoring to each specific context. Mottiar (2016) suggests that objectives should be set by central government with decisions about how to achieve those objectives a local level responsibility. For example, local institutions should be allowed to design flexible training programs tailored to their territory, to suit local needs and requirements (Skuras et al., 2005). Central objectives would allow long-term planning across program periods (Shishkova, 2020) and coordination among entrepreneurial support agencies which would avoid duplication and enable more efficient support (Silva et al., 2011). Programs with multiple policy objectives need to have flexible scoring systems based on priority to avoid the exclusion of vulnerable groups (Angioloni et al., 2018). Governments can also help identify problems and encourage their address by social entrepreneurs (Mottiar, 2016).

Several authors stress the importance of reducing the bureaucracy in the application process which for entrepreneurs implies ‘costs associated with the time, effort and money to access assistance’ and has major negative consequences for rural development, start-up growth, and start-up performance (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006, p. 388). Sgroi et al. (2018) highlight both the bureaucratic burden and the time lapse between funding award and receipt of the finance. To reduce the time spent on approving project and to provide support for a larger number of initiatives, Shishkova (2020) recommends diversifying sources of funding for local development which would reduce dependence on a single donor and allow more efficient project evaluation. Dissemination of public support opportunities to potential entrepreneurs is essential (Tate et al., 2012).

Given the relevance of embeddedness-related factors in rural municipalities, policymakers need to create a local environment favorable to entrepreneurship and establish an entrepreneurial culture in the municipality (Pato et al., 2019). This could be achieved through the provision of entrepreneurship training in local primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions, and on-the-job training and learning-by-doing programs, and ensuring that entrepreneurs are able to access resources (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006; Góngora et al., 2019) such as venture capital and financing (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006; Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023; Aggelopoulos, 2010), and access to land (Góngora et al., 2019), infrastructure, services (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023), and networks (Silva et al., 2011). Networks should include industry, academic, public, and private partners and would be strengthened by R&D collaboration within the ecosystem (Pato et al., 2019; Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023). For example, the location of several start-ups in a single location such as an incubator or coworking space would foster the emergence of networks and enable positive externalities without entailing costly applications for aid (Meccheri and Pelloni, 2006).

Broadband provision has positive results and enables entrepreneurial activity, reduces brain drain, and supports rural businesses (Bowen & Morris, 2019). Access to high-speed symmetrical networks outweighs the advantages related to low-speed technologies, by generating additional diversification benefits and spillover effects for local consumer services (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022). However, in addition to internet access consideration should be given to the local economic conditions (e.g. population density, proximity to an urban center), the local amenities, and the municipality's demographic composition (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022). Rural areas endowed with services provide opportunities for entrepreneurs with higher levels of education and enable remote working (Del Olmo-Garcia et al., 2023; Duvivier & Bussière, 2022). High-speed

broadband needs to be complemented by education programs to explain broadband opportunities and training in the building of company websites. In addition, natural capital needs to be protected and municipalities should welcome new entrepreneurs (Duvivier & Bussière, 2022).

5. Conclusion

It is clear that the contextualization of entrepreneurship is crucial. It requires policies tailored to real situations and specific challenges. This review highlights the importance of data availability to enable policy evaluations, combined with robust econometric methods that account for endogeneity, and the need for a common definition of rural entrepreneurship across different fields of research. We contribute to existing efforts to contextualize rural entrepreneurship by providing empirical evidence on the effect of institutional support for rural entrepreneurs. Most of the articles in the SLR sample find that European, national, and local policies have positive effects on new venture creation, diversification, employment, and firm viability. This review identifies some contextual factors shaping these results and highlights the importance of innovation, R&D investment, good quality broadband and services infrastructure, financing, and social capital. We have highlighted some recommendations to reduce overly rigid bureaucratic application processes and refine application scoring criteria which could be a barrier to young firms and entrepreneurs accessing public funds. The studies stress that local institutions should adapt programs to territorial idiosyncrasies and should advertise funding opportunities and foster environments that promote rural entrepreneurship within the local population.

We have highlighted some insights for rural entrepreneurs such as importance of investing in human capital and digital capabilities in particular to enable exploitation of opportunities from broadband programs. We have underlined the importance of

collaboration with members of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem to tackle local problems and social needs. We pointed to the importance of applying to the most fitting funding category and partnering to increase the chances of being awarded funding.

This review highlights recommendations for policymakers about how to encourage rural entrepreneurship, complements existing theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence and suggests ways that rural entrepreneurs could increase the chances of obtaining public and private funding. Further research could explore empirical evidence for rural entrepreneurship across several other dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystems, validating and enriching conceptual advances.

Finally, it should be noted that our paper has some limitations. First, a reduced number of papers met the inclusion criteria which means that the results provide limited information on author networks and collaboration. Nevertheless, this SLR explores a wide range of issue relevant to the field such as why policymakers should intervene and some recommendations for improving policy design. Most importantly, it highlights opportunities to address gaps on this growing strand of literature. Our results must be considered indicative but provide some valuable policy insights in relation to the areas studied, the econometric methods employed, and the geographic scope of the papers. Future work could include papers that focus on other world countries experiencing similar depopulation dynamics and could compare European rural development programs with other policy instruments. Future work could also enable policy evaluations that do not use empirical methods which would offer valuable insights into real situations and provide more nuanced explanations, able to reflect some dimensions of rural entrepreneurship frameworks that might be harder to quantify, such as Munoz and Kimmitt's (2019) entrepreneurial sense of rurality or the importance of leadership for rural entrepreneurial ecosystems, as described by Aguilar (2021).

Annex: Areas of research not included in the SLR

Microbiology, Parasitology, Toxicology, Infectious Diseases, Health Care Science Services, Nutrition Dietetics, Pharmacology Pharmacy, Chemistry, Pathology, Immunology, Geriatric Gerontology, Dentistry, Psychiatry, Gastroenterology, Hepatology, Entomology, Dermatology, Applied Microbiology, Obstetrics Gynecology, Surgery, Neuroscience Neurology, Respiratory Systems, Research Experimental Medicine, General Internal Medicine, Biochemistry Molecular Biology, Marine Freshwater Biology, Genetics Hereditary, Mathematics, Mathematical Computational Biology, Reproductive Biology, Tropical Medicine, Biomedical Social Sciences, Evolutionary Biology, Hematology, Nursing, Cardiovascular System Cardiology, Legal Medicine, Substance Abuse, Archaeology, Medical Laboratory Technology, Developmental Biology, Oceanography, Radiology Nuclear Medicine Medical Imaging, Endocrinology Metabolism, Integrative Complementary Medicine, Medical Ethics, Medical Informatics, Oncology, Physics, Urology Nephrology, Virology, Allergy, Anesthesiology, Architecture, Criminal Penology, Emergency Medicine, Anatomy Morphology, Paleontology, Thermodynamics, Meteorology Atmospheric Sciences, Pediatrics, Physiology, Life Sciences Biomedicine Other Topics, Veterinary, Zoology.

Declaration of competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests relevant to the content of this research and no relevant financial or non-financial interests.

Funding

Grant PID2022-137379NB-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by ‘ERDF A way of making Europe’.

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