

Journal of Rural Studies

Call for Papers

Special Issue on “Rural Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship”

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In advanced economies internationally, social enterprise is increasingly promoted as a significant feature of post-welfare responses to un/under-employment, low skills, individual and place-based disadvantage, increasing community capacity and even to addressing public health and wellbeing problems (Roy et al., 2014). This is premised on the proposed benefits arising from encouraging citizens to take responsibility in providing needed goods and services (Ferguson, 2013). The encouragement is targeted at individuals (supporting opportunities for work experience), organisations and communities (support, training and grants for starting social enterprises), procuring organisations like public services and even venture capitalists (e.g. through social impact bonds) (Teasdale, 2012; Nicholls, 2010). Social enterprise is proposed to have individual, group and place-based impacts in a policy environment that increasingly discusses stimulating citizen and community participation for local and place-based transformations.

Social enterprise is defined as a business with primarily social objectives and an organisational format that uses trading to tackle social, economic and environmental challenges (Teasdale, 2012). Combining and interconnecting social and economic benefits is its unique contribution (Barraket et al., 2010). To date research has tended to focus on social enterprise in urban contexts or has paid scant attention to the relevance of place – in the sense of relational, relative or location context. The literature of social enterprise has moved from analysing what it is, to exploring the relevance of organisational forms, governance, impacts and understanding these in terms of different client groups (e.g. young people), sectors (e.g. food/catering or domestic services delivery), and within different countries’ cultural and political contexts (e.g. tradition of co-operatives in Spain and Italy). There has been scant consideration of social enterprise in rural contexts and how it might work.

In contemporary advanced economies rural places that are more distant from capital cities tend to share a set of challenges, including outmigration of young people, concentrations of older people, constrained economic opportunities, difficulties attracting specialist workers, low volume, but ongoing demand for health, social and transport services (Bosworth and Glasgow, 2012; Steiner and Atterton, 2015). It has been suggested that social enterprise could help rural communities to respond to change and become more resilient (Munoz et al., 2015). Social enterprise is sometimes recommended or implied to be an ideal solution for rural places. Rural places are regarded as traditionally high in social capital, cohesion, embeddedness and mutual knowledge (Jack and Anderson, 2002) and they need services and opportunities for work experience. Rural residents have shown that they can work collectively to address challenges and produce innovation (Zografos, 2007; Farmer et al., 2008). On the other hand, however, the nature of rurality (e.g. sparsely populated areas, low economies of scale) also raises concerns about the sustainability of rural social enterprises (Steinerowski et al., 2008a). While a social enterprise model may increase the feasibility of rural interventions, the capacity to achieve transformational change is questioned (Cieslik, 2016). In reality the deployment of social enterprise as a rural ‘solution’ has been little explored. The issues of

volunteer burn-out, reinforcement of hegemony and 'dark' and complex aspects of rural social capital as well as positive aspects, are largely unexplored – in relation to social enterprise - in rural contexts.

A further relatively unexplored dimension relates to rural social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs might be perceived as a type of entrepreneur (Dees, 1998) who “[makes] use of entrepreneurial processes for social purpose” (Parkinson and Howorth, 2008:291). Steinerowski et al. (2008b) found a variety of motivations for rural social entrepreneurs. Munoz et al. (2015) studied the concept of entrepreneurial communities as opposed to individuals. Significant study of rural boundary crossers/ boundary spanners has been conducted (Kilpatrick et al., 2015) and Farmer and Kilpatrick (2009) considered rural health practitioners as social entrepreneurs, highlighting that strong knowledge of a field and significant bridging and linking networks underpinned rural peoples’ capacity to develop socially entrepreneurial initiatives. We have found scant evidence of contemporary studies of social entrepreneurs (as individuals or collectives) acting in a rural context. Lack of evidence about rural social entrepreneurship seems a significant gap as it is important to understand how social entrepreneurs might navigate rural social capital, leveraging collective capacity, bridging gaps between formal and informal provision of services that can exist in rural places and running social business in a highly relational context.

All told, this call for papers is timely because social enterprise now seems established as a contemporary business model of advanced economies, and its relevance is increasingly promoted in international policy. Rural areas continue to be challenged socially and economically and thus if social enterprise and social entrepreneurs do represent some sort of 'solution' for rural places, more evidence about how they might work optimally, is needed. This special issue seeks to explore the significance of context when enacting social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in rural areas. Focusing on the international evidence from advanced economies, we welcome articles situated within the broad areas of *Rural Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship*. Papers might focus on, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Examples of rural social enterprise best practice in establishment, operation, outcomes and impacts
- Rural social enterprise as a response to public service retrenchment
- Opportunities and challenges for social enterprises delivering rural services and/or producing goods for sale
- Operating social enterprise within the realities of social and economic life in rural places
- Social enterprise operations, functioning and governance in remote, rural and regional contexts
- Social enterprises and their relationships with commercial businesses in rural places
- Outcomes of rural social enterprises – e.g. resilience, capacity, wellbeing
- Technology and rural social enterprise
- Novel ways of measuring social enterprise impact in rural contexts
- Communities and/or individuals as rural social entrepreneurs
- Examples of rural social entrepreneurs – how they work, are motivated and how they navigate rural social, cultural and economic realities
- Social entrepreneurship qualities and skills
- Innovation and rural social entrepreneurship

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Proposed timetable:

The deadline for abstracts submission: 31st August 2016

The deadline for submission of full papers: 31st March 2017

Review process deadline: 31st May 2017

Authors' revisions deadline: 31st July 2017

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