

# Commercial Counterurbanisation: A driving force in rural economic development

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**Abstract**

Counterurbanisation is transforming rural communities and has implications for entrepreneurial opportunities in rural areas. The rural economy has seen a shift away from the dominant productivist paradigm towards an increasingly consumption-led array of businesses, facilitated by increased mobility and connectivity. Part of this transition has seen increasing rates of new businesses started by people moving into rural areas. This ‘commercial counterurbanisation’, is stimulating local economies but the ensuing nature of ‘development’ demands deeper investigation. In particular, this paper explores the ways in which entrepreneurs moving into rural areas are able to recognise distinctive opportunities and assets associated with rurality, drawing on a combination of their extra-local connections and access to local forms of capital. We conclude that the spatiality of social capital and the degree to which commercial counterurbanites become locally embedded are key factors in determining the characteristics of the businesses that they develop.

**Keywords**

Commercial counterurbanisation, rural economy, rural businesses, rural representations, rural assets

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## Introduction

Heightened mobility combined with accelerating digital connectivity is transforming rural communities and their economies. Describing the post-war changes of a small village in Friesland in the Netherlands, Geert Mak observes that, 'Everything of importance used to take place within the village. Now everything takes places outside the village' (Mak, 2010: 195). This leads us to ask, what does rurality mean in modern society and what still takes place *within* villages to sustain their communities? To address these questions, this paper explores the changing characteristics and functions of rural businesses, drawing on three cases from rural Lincolnshire, in eastern England. Specifically, we select businesses where the owner has moved into the rural community in an attempt to capture the complex inter-relationships between local and extra-local influences, networks and economic linkages that envelop the contemporary countryside.

The uncertain status of rurality is illustrated by a number of contradictions. For example, Bell et al. (2010) discuss a range of literature citing the 'death' of the rural and indicate that rurality could be seen as little more than 'a cultural trick, a fading myth to be marketed to the unsuspecting and romantic or a desperate grab for political power' (Bell et al., 2010: 209). Meanwhile, counterurbanisation trends see rural populations increasing, expressing distinct residential preferences for features considered to be 'rural'. Additionally, statistics indicate that these rural residents enjoy higher incomes and a better quality of life compared with their urban counterparts (e.g. ONS, 2011) and yet other authors emphasise the 'persistent nature of rural poverty' (Milbourne, 2014: 568) which perpetuates because it is scattered, remote and largely invisible.

At the heart of these complexities lies the increasing inflow of counterurbanites into rural communities, with implications for housing, local services, economic inequalities, community cohesion and employment provision. There is no space to examine all of these impacts in one paper but here we explore the connections between counterurbanisation and rural businesses, in particular the entrepreneurial function of new rural residents bringing with them external networks, knowledge and experience. Previously, this has been termed 'commercial counterurbanisation' (Bosworth, 2010), and subsequent studies have continued to affirm the role of counterurbanites in driving rural economic change (Mitchell and Madden, 2014; Mitchell and Shannon, 2018; Stockdale and MacLeod, 2013).

Locally based businesses have the potential to capture a range of values attached to rurality whilst simultaneously promoting activities that cultivate sustainable rural communities. With a growing proportion of these businesses created and run by counterurbanites (Bosworth, 2010; Stockdale and Findlay, 2004), the changing business models, the changing character of rural businesses and the changing patterns of their networks are explored. Within a densely networked society 'cultural identities become the trenches of autonomy' (Castells, 2005: 39), thus, we can infer that unique features of local areas offer potential for place-based development. As the OECD notes, a place-based view of rural development should consider the different conditions and needs of communities depending on their geographies/linkages and their local specific assets (2018a: 2). Rather than homogeneity, diverse local characteristics and immobile resources or assets within the rural region (OECD, 2018b; Terluin, 2003) should be leveraged to enhance local development potential. In this vein, we have previously argued that rural businesses are both agents of change and continuity (Author & Author, 2016), bringing new services, employment and innovations and also sustaining the vitality of rural communities by virtue of these activities.

Valorising local assets through extra-local networks forms the foundation of neo-endogenous development (Ray, 2006) and commercial counterurbanisation recognises the

role of entrepreneurial in-migrants as key links in the process (Bosworth, 2010). Effective neo-endogenous development can overcome the ‘capital insufficiency of endogenous development’ (Mitchell and Madden, 2014: 147) and enable rural areas to benefit from urban-rural interdependencies (Lichter and Brown, 2011) rather than be subjected to exogenous, urban influences. Rural business owners with extensive networks, particularly in-migrants, are then viewed as conduits for extra-locally accumulated capital that has the potential to develop territorial identities, mobilise local labour and build local capacities; each an element of a neo-endogenous development approach (Mitchell and Madden, 2014: 147). As such, rural in-migrant business owners enable us to explore how perceptions of rurality can influence business performance and identify how rural assets are valorised through entrepreneurial processes. Specifically, the paper addresses the questions *how can rural in-migrants create new value and recognise value from rural assets?* and *to what extent do their local and extra-local networks and their degree of local embeddedness affect the impact on the wider rural economy?*

### **Commercial Counterurbanisation**

Counterurbanisation, the inversion of the traditionally positive relationship between migration and settlement size (Fielding, 1982), has attracted considerable research attention across Europe and North America, exploring the motivations for migration trends and the impacts for areas attracting significant numbers of new residents. Despite the apparent simplicity of this definition, research into counterurbanisation has attracted criticisms for being chaotic, inconsistent or elusive (Mitchell, 2004) with a need for more focus directed towards the people migrating into rural areas themselves (Halfacree, 2008).

Highlighting the complexity of counterurbanisation, more recent research has identified that a lot of rural in-migration is ‘lateral’, originating from other rural places (Mitchell and Madden, 2014; Stockdale, 2016). This is a welcome addition to the conversation beyond the simplistic urban-to-rural movement of population but one that is still reflective of heightened mobility and the freedom to express rural residential preferences whilst participating in urban economies. Also, not all rural areas attract counterurbanites leading to downward spirals of depopulation and economic decline in some more peripheral and lagging regions (Thiesen et al., 2010). Meanwhile, those regions attracting counterurbanites experience localised inequalities due to increased house prices, gentrification (Phillips, 2004) and high rates of out-commuting among the new residents.

In this increasingly interconnected world, rural in-migrants provide a valuable lens through which to examine contemporary representations of rurality and the ways in which these representations influence economic as well as residential patterns of change. Specifically, the growing number of rural in-migrants starting businesses (Bosworth, 2010; Herslund, 2012; Kalantaridis and Bika, 2011; Mitchell and Madden, 2014; Stockdale, 2006) offers opportunities for evaluating the influences of difference features of rurality that spark entrepreneurial motivations, and examining the subsequent effects of their business activities in rural places. The majority of research has developed in the UK, Europe and North America and arguably underplays economic dynamics by following a residential-preference perspective, but new trends are emerging in developing countries based on more production-led rationales (Geyer and Geyer, 2017).

Commercial counterurbanisation has been defined as ‘the growth of rural economies stimulated by inward migration’ (Bosworth, 2010: 977), which could include 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. This study also recognised that migration and business start-up were often two distinct events that

could occur some years apart wherein the process of embedding into the local community could contribute to the creation or identification of business opportunities. Categorising in-migrant entrepreneurs as 'planned' and 'un-planned', recognising that their business ideas emerge from different places, influenced by different networks and opportunities alongside changing lifestyle preferences. This is an important distinction when we consider the rural development potential of significant numbers of highly educated migrants who are attracted to peripheral regions for non-economic reasons (Hansen and Aner, 2017).

Contemporary patterns of internal migration are not solely influenced by potentially higher returns to employment (Morrison and Clark, 2011) but include more nuanced lifestyle preferences, downshifting and lengthening commuting distances (Champion et al., 2009). Morrison and Clark (2011) draw a distinction between 'employment-enabling' and 'employment-enhancing' migrations, to differentiate those pursuing social and consumption-driven goals from those actively seeking to enhance their labour market prospects. From a rural enterprise development perspective, we might add the category of 'entrepreneurship-enabling' migration, aligned to the concept of commercial counterurbanisation. This could be a purposive move to establish a new enterprise in a new locality, chosen for business or non-business attributes. Alternatively, it might reflect the process where risk-averse movers initially satisfice, rather than maximise, their employment choices when selecting alternative labour markets (Morrison and Clark, 2011) and subsequently start up their own businesses if enhanced employment opportunities do not arise.

Mitchell and Madden (2014: 146) proposed that Commercial Counterurbanisation is used to describe 'the movement of commercial activity from larger to smaller places'. Arguably this definition offers little to extend earlier literature on the 'urban-rural shift of manufacturing' dating back to the 1980s, (e.g. Keeble, 1980; Keeble and Tyler, 1995) and if we are solely concerned with businesses moving to rural areas, the demographic terminology seems inappropriate. To address their criticism that 'commercial counterurbanisation' is not in keeping with the spirit of demographic counterurbanisation because it reflects neither movement nor settlement system change (Mitchell and Madden, 2014: 146) we emphasise the role of rurality more generally and/or the rural place more specifically as a driver of residential migration and, to varying degrees, as a driver of entrepreneurial activity. In Bosworth (2010) and Mitchell and Madden's (2014) research, migrants to the rural North East of England and to St Peter's in Canada, were drawn to both local communities and natural environments/landscapes, not just to the economic opportunities that they provide.

We suggest that commercial counterurbanisation can be studied as both a migratory process and as a process that brings about changes in rural settlements. The use of 'counterurbanisation' as a socio-demographic term is intended to highlight the fact that social and lifestyle factors as well as livelihood choices underpin economic and business outcomes, both for pro-rural migrants individually and for rural communities collectively. At the community level, there are positive and negative impacts for both popular and less popular migration destinations so we cannot study rural economies without appreciating the complexity of rural residential preferences and related social changes. We, therefore, need to understand more about the pro-rural migration of people with entrepreneurial aspirations or latent entrepreneurial capabilities and we need to better understand the implications of these movements for the local economies, services and built environments in the destination settlements.

Mitchell and Madden (2014) found that commercial counterurbanites in Nova Scotia, developed 'strong social, moderate civic, and weak economic ties within the village' (Mitchell and Madden, 2014: 147). This leads them to suggest that commercial counterurbanites' contributions to wider dimensions of rural development should be reflected in a more nuanced definition. To capture the heavily socialised nature of commercial

counterurbanisation and to emphasise that this is part of a wider trend of migration down the urban settlement hierarchy, we propose the following definition: *Business creation and new entrepreneurial activities resulting from migration that expresses residential preferences for living in smaller and less densely populated places.* This also overcomes the tautology identified by Mitchell and Madden (2014: 139) in Bosworth's earlier work, where the conclusion that 'economic growth in rural areas has been enhanced by commercial counterurbanisation' (Bosworth, 2010: 977) now requires that rural economies benefit from business creation connected to in-migration. For this to be true, the businesses created must become embedded and form part of the rural economy and not be isolated satellites of urban-centric economic systems. By implication, we are, therefore, suggesting that it is possible that business creation in rural places might NOT contribute to rural economic development if no jobs are generated and no trade is conducted within the rural locality.

This definition also allows deeper exploration of the indirect effects generated through business creation (e.g. network formation, social capital development) as well as the ways in which new business activities themselves connect to the rural place. This socially embedded conceptualisation also moves beyond the residential preference hypothesis because it describes a dynamic movement of people and considers the community-level outcomes, rather than seeking to understand the motivations of individuals. With in-migrants to more remote rural communities able to pay higher house prices to express their rural residential preferences compared with local wage earners (Liu and Roberts, 2012), the implications for these rural communities are potentially dramatic. Commercial counterurbanisation suggests that the threats of reduced service provision and economic stagnation within the community will be reduced if the incomers engage in a range of community and businesses activities (Bosworth and Glasgow, 2012; Kalantaridis and Bika, 2011).

Champion noted that a true 'counterurbanite' assumes 'a lifestyle which, if not identical with the traditional rural way of life, should essentially be the modern equivalent of it' (Champion, 1989: 27). This view is captured in Halfacree's (2006) 'back-to-the-land counterurbanisers' who are seeking to make a clear counter-cultural move – something that is increasingly difficult in the face of spreading urbanisation and the blurring of the urban-rural dichotomy (Fertner, 2013). By contrast, Slee (1994) asserts that reverse migration is a 'spread effect' emanating from urban growth, echoing views that counterurbanisation enhances the diffusion of urban-centred behaviour and culture, rather than expressing any true counter-trend to urbanisation in a socio-cultural sense (Vartiainen, 1989: 220). Highlighting the range of perspectives on counterurbanisation, Fertner (2013), in a Danish context, distinguished between three categories: 'ex-urbanisation', mainly located relatively close to the city centre; 'displaced urbanisation', strongest in areas located at a medium distance from the urban core; and 'anti-urbanisation' mainly in areas far away from the centre and with high natural amenity values

In order to analyse this, a framework is needed to help us understand what constitutes *a business style which, if not identical with the traditional rural way of life, is essentially the modern equivalent* (paraphrasing from Champion, 1989). 'Rural businesses' have always included a range of activities including services, manufacturing and primary production, but, just because they are rural, should we conceptualise them differently from any other?

## **Conceptualising rural businesses**

From a geographical perspective, the composition of rural economies has shifted away from agriculture with rural regions having similar shares of manufacturing and services sector

industries as urban economies (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008; European Commission, 2013). The shift towards increasing consumer-driven activities (Slee, 2005) has seen growth in leisure and tourism activities while improved communications allows greater home-based business and digital business activity. In order to understand the extent to which businesses are integrated into rural networks, support rural jobs and provide rural services, a more nuanced approach is required.

It has previously been argued that location alone is not a sufficient indicator of a 'rural' business but that either the products and/or the customers should also be rural in their character (Bosworth, 2012) in order to fulfil more of the above functions. In other words, a business that trades solely with urban customers and employs no rural assets is simply a displaced component of an urban economy. However, interrogating the meaning of 'rural assets' raises a number of pertinent questions that can help us to better understand the contemporary rural economy. In particular, Moyes et al. (2015) focus on the employment of rural social capital as a resource for rural businesses when arguing that engagement with rural business networks can also characterise a 'rural business'. Here, we extend the scope of rural capitals to include the local landscape, local community and natural features, often conceptualised as less tangible qualities (Bosworth and Turner, 2018; Svendsen and Sorensen, 2007) but as we will demonstrate a highly active material component in shaping rural economic potential.

In-migrants to the rural economy are able to exploit local resource advantages by simultaneously recognising the value of diverse rural assets and embracing an 'inside-out view of their business venture' (Kalantaridis and Bika, 2011: 881). This is linked to findings that in-migrant entrepreneurs were considered to be more innovative than locally born entrepreneurs, possibly as a result of their access to more diverse social capital (Kalantaridis and Bika, 2011). Alternative representations of rurality and distinctive interactions with rural landscapes (Carolan, 2008; Cloke and Jones, 2001), might also lead counterurbanites to engage with and place values upon rural assets in different ways. This is reinforced by Rodríguez-Pose and Hardy (2015), who advocate cultural diversity as a driver of entrepreneurship. Participation in extensive networks then allows rural business owners to communicate these values to more receptive elements of urban consumer demand, creating new economic potential for rural places.

Returning to the question of whether we should conceptualise a 'rural business' differently, this line of thinking indicates that a combination of the people and the positional assets that provide value to the business are important. Korsgaard et al. (2015) made the helpful distinction between 'rural entrepreneurship' and 'entrepreneurship in the rural', where the former is more embedded in the local area. Commercial counterurbanites engaging in 'rural entrepreneurship' might, therefore, be expected to have a greater impact upon the local economy and develop business models and approaches that are more rural in character. In line with Champion's (1989) observation that a true counterurbanite should adopt the modern equivalent of a rural way of a life, so the embedded commercial counterurbanite should adopt a business model that is sensitive to the rural context. By contrast, those practising 'entrepreneurship in the rural' might be more comparable to commuters employing their human capital outside of the local economy, developing businesses that are essentially satellites of the urban economy and, thus, only create secondary economic impacts in their immediate locality.

Drawing together the literature on rural entrepreneurship and counterurbanisation, it is possible to present different entry points for commercial counterurbanites. Figure 1 does this by applying two axes to represent the extent to which rurality matters in the location choice and the balance between planned business start-up intentions and purely residential

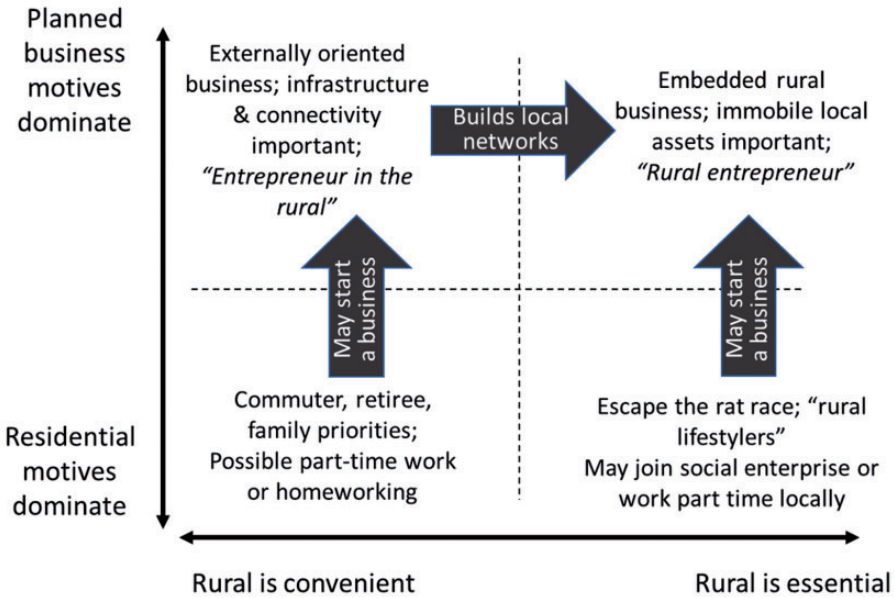


Figure 1. Entry points and pathways of commercial counterurbanisation.

choices. It is then possible to imagine different types of (potential) entrepreneurs entering in each quadrant and to envisage mechanisms through which businesses develop towards becoming ‘rural entrepreneurs’ (in Korsgaard et al’s sense) across the quadrants as their owners recognise the value of different rural assets and engage in different networks.

These different types of counterurbanisation highlight distinctive perspectives of the rural as either something to be cherished for its very lack of development or as a convenient, accessible and connected part of the modern urbanised society. This has implications for the types of entrepreneurial opportunities that counterurbanites might identify and the types of businesses that might emerge. Translating this into a commercial counterurbanisation context suggests a distinction between businesses that fit a modern equivalent of some form of traditional rural model (to the right of Figure 1) and businesses that are integrally part of the urban economy, exhibiting urban behaviour and culture (in the left portion of Figure 1).

In the remainder of this paper, we examine the hypothesis that commercial counterurbanites are able to identify distinctive forms of value in rural places by virtue of their personal experiences and representations of rurality as well as their involvement in more extensive social networks. Through a selection of cases, we also explore the extent to which local and extra-local networks and different representations of rurality overlap to augment the entrepreneurial opportunities for commercial counterurbanites.

**Methodology**

Five cases from the UK and Denmark are used to examine the ways in which commercial counterurbanites recognise and promote rural assets within their business activities. The case studies are drawn from the regions of Lincolnshire and Funen, respectively, which both have strong agricultural economies, thus providing a contrasting context to earlier research which first identified ‘commercial counterurbanisation’ in the North East of England,

a largely upland region with a weaker agricultural base (Bosworth, 2010). Additionally, by drawing on examples from different countries, the cultural and rural idiosyncrasies between nationalities can potentially open up new research agendas concerning European rural economic development. The Danish cases form part of a larger study of rural businesses and the British cases were conducted as part of a research visit to complement the Danish research. These were selected to mirror the types of enterprise studied in Denmark. We drew on the wider experience from interviews across parts of England and Denmark in our conceptualisation phase of the paper but then selected the five cases here to best showcase the distinctive examples of capturing value from rural assets and combining local and extra-local networks.

Interviews were undertaken to understand individuals' motivations for moving to a rural area and for starting a business there, as well as to dig deeper into the ways in which the rural context, landscapes, neighbourhood and collaborative networks, impact the ongoing operation of their business. Interviews took place at the business premises to capture the essence of the place. Each was recorded and transcribed and, including tours of the properties, they ranged from 45 minutes to over 90 minutes. With each interviewee having moved into their locality prior to starting the business, the aim was to identify how they perceived the rural environment to offer resources and opportunities for their businesses, as well as any barriers or constraints. Being particularly interested in the very small communities and interactions with rural landscapes, each of the cases are located in, or on the edge of small villages within rural districts.

## Findings

The key assets recognised by the commercial counterurbanites and the ways in which these were capitalised upon are shown in Table 1. The five cases are then set out using pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, prior to analysis of the ways in which aspects of counterurbanisation and rural representations have shaped their business dynamics.

**Case 1:** (A commercial counterurbanite who sought to capitalise on the existing natural, social, physical and economic assets in the rural area). Charlie manages a music studio and tourism accommodation designed to accommodate large groups. Previously based in London, the decision to leave the fast-pace, congested and high-cost lifestyle was principally driven by family motivations. With sufficient experience and contacts in the industry to be confident that new recording studios could succeed in an alternative location, the challenge was to create an identity and a distinctive offering that capitalised on the location as a benefit rather than focusing on any challenges associated with peripherality.

The location on the edge of a very small village was ideal so as not to disturb neighbours and the acoustics of the building were perfect for music recording. There were agricultural fields and designated footpaths around the property and the technology and technical support was equivalent to those in larger city studios. As a result of the location, Charlie felt that 'Bands are more relaxed and more focused' and the technical assistant emphasised that the opportunity to go out and take in the scenery was better than rushing a fast-food lunch. Charlie also explained that:

*'Band members enjoy the anonymity – they are less distracted and there are no hangers-on ... The ability to have five week residential to work on a major project rather than being tied into to booked timetables in a bigger, busy studio allowed more freedom for when to work.'*



**Table 1.** Illustrating a range of rural assets and mechanisms by which commercial counterurbanites have capitalised on them in their businesses.

Recognising the value of rural assets	Capitalising on rural assets in the business
Acoustics of the building	Marketing a unique venue for a music studio
Best view in Lincolnshire	Design accommodation to take in its best features
Open landscapes nearby	Encourage clients to use the footpaths and natural scenery for creative inspiration and relaxation
Good pub down the road	Building positive relations with the local community to ensure support for business development
Not as congested and busy as London	Flexibility for clients to use the space more freely than in urban areas
Privacy	Allows famous clients to escape the media and fans' attention
Unused apples in a local orchard	Make cider and apple juice through a community cooperative
Available land for expansion	Develop new fruit varieties and introduce beehives
A nice house to bring up the family	Rural family heritage as part of the brand identity
Waste wood from adjacent forester	Opportunity for woodcrafts in the gallery
Non-profitable agricultural land perfect for pig breeding	Reinventing small-scale animal breeding and ethical meat products for gourmet restaurants
Innovating and proving a new farmer-style on a relatively small piece of land	The image of a happy peasant caring for his animals
Daily work with plants in a remote, peaceful landscape	Drawing on professional skills and research within healing aspects of nature in a new outdoor rehabilitation concept

He implied that this working environment led to more creativity and he also mentioned specific genres, like folk music, where the rural setting would directly influence creativity. It is also a good example of the business model changing to fit the rural context as longer-term bookings are essential to widen the market reach of the venue.

With the tourist accommodation on site, they use five different catering firms from within a 30-mile radius depending on the clients and they will book beach huts or other activities for guests as part of the service. This illustrates the integration of these activities into the local economy and the disappointment when the village pub closed was a further indication that the commercial counterurbanite sees the wider services in the location as part of the overall asset base for the business.

**Case 2:** (A commercial counterurbanite who seeks to transplant business approaches from outside the rural area whilst also valuing the natural surroundings within the business model). Glyn combines a professional marketing service with a craft retail gallery. The gallery/shop is based in open countryside about eight miles from the nearest market town and 40 miles from the nearest city. Having lived in different parts of Europe and previously lived and worked in a large city in the UK, Glyn explained:

*'For me, rural retail has to be all about experience, having something different or having something niche. You come here because it's not like going into town'. Moving as a couple, Glyn added: 'For us, we always just loved this space, this place. It's a difficult situation because what you're dealing with has never been a pure business case, it's sort of a vanity project in that sense . . . my mother-in-law wanted to retire, and we both need somewhere to run our businesses.'*

Recognising the value of the natural environment, Glyn commented:

*'We can be sitting here watch the beaters in the winter, we have lots of red-legged partridges and then as it comes into nesting season, it's amazing ... teeming with birds and bees. First of all, we have the house martins, then the swallows and the swifts, they do this balletic thing feeding across here ... it's just amazing ... it absolutely sums up what is beautiful about this [place's] landscape, absolutely unspoilt ... you can immerse yourself in it.'*

Glyn also recognised that, *'it is an agri-landscape, it's not like you're looking out onto something that's untouched, it's a working landscape and that is important to us.'* Taken as a whole, these quotations illustrate the positive representations that this commercial counterurbanite attributes to the rural location which has generated ideas to create new accommodation and meeting space at the gallery to capitalise on the natural assets and the 'best view in [the county]' as Glyn described it.

While Glyn values the local environment, the local business community is a source of greater frustration. Glyn perceives a mismatch of aspirations, saying, *'There's a lot of good enough, but good enough isn't good enough for me, it has to be exceptional. One of the big challenges we've got is raising aspirations here.'* Similar sentiments are expressed about customers too:

*'You've got a bit of mismatch as well because the tearoom customers are more elderly and they might come round and go "oooh, 20p, that's a bit expensive" ... This is why you need to raise the aspirations ... I get other people that come, visitors for example, who look at my stuff and go "Wow ... I'll have that, that, that and that...£300!" It's about attracting the aspirational customer.'*

*'I've done a Facebook and a twitter workshop here – they were for local people and they were charged really low but they were still balking at the prices. I charged £75 and it would have been £200–300 in London.'*

Through participation in local business groups, there is a desire to promote more aspirational ways of working but, in this example, there is an implicit assumption that the prevailing rural ways are inferior and the professional corporate approaches of urban businesses will always be superior. As a result of growing frustration with the apparent lack of aspiration among local businesses, Glyn said, *'I'm trying to surround myself with people that get it.'* This is reflected in the recruitment of a junior copywriter who Glyn hopes will develop her skills to succeed outside the local area. Referring to the costly and infrequent rural bus service, Glyn said, *'She has to pay for that out of here wage, I'm not subsidizing it because I want her to learn to drive'* – a strong indicator that Glyn is seeking to influence the apprentice beyond simply training her to do the job.

**Case 3:** (A commercial counterurbanite, moving from another rural region into a smaller settlement, whose new business drew from both natural and built assets in the new home). Lyndsey produces cider from converted farm barns in a small village in a peripheral rural location, some 10 miles from the nearest town. Moving from another rural region of the UK, this could be considered an example of 'lateral migration' but strictly following Fielding's (1982) definition, the commercial counterurbanite is moving down the settlement hierarchy. More importantly, the arrival of a commercially minded in-migrant to a very small, remote village still fits the narrative of commercial counterurbanisation. As a newcomer with a new perspective on the opportunities with the new locality, Lyndsey saw an

unused resource, namely waste apples, and started to make cider both to start a business and to help their social integration.

Although the local landscape and the village are important elements in the business, so too are extra-local connections. When asked about collaboration, the answer was *'not locally ... just on the Internet we talk to each other and exchange ideas and things. That's people in the US, Europe all over but mainly for me it's people in [other parts of] the UK.'* As the business has grown, additional fruit is purchased weekly from a town some 55 miles away. One distinction for the rural-to-rural migrant arises when turning to the question of quality of life. There was no misconception of a 'rural idyll' here as Lyndsey explained:

*'I've had a lot worse jobs – I worked in a dairy in Somerset and I didn't like that at all, it was just for the pay packet ... I enjoy everything I do, it's a mental thing, you have to get yourself to like it because you're spending 12 hours a day doing it!'*

A further distinction comes in attitudes towards mainstream regulations. The health and safety inspector advised that the barn should be lined with stainless steel but allowed some flexibility as the costs would have been unfeasible. In this case, Lyndsey was also adamant that it works better this way because any problems, such as vermin, in the barn would be visible and not hidden behind a layer of steel. Lyndsey added, *'There's never been a case of food poisoning attributed to cider yet these standardised regulations are still encroaching on "traditional" production methods.'*

By embracing distinctive rural practices, the product carries a strong local brand which is made even more authentic by connections within the local community. Lyndsey explained, *'We started as a cooperative, taking apples and then we gave back about half of what we made and used the rest to invest in the business.'* As the business has grown, there are annual 'wassailing' events where the community participate and on the day of the interview, their first apprentice was starting his new job – a significant investment for the business but also a significant opportunity for a young employee in this very sparse labour market.

**Case 4:** (An example of commercial counterurbanisation where a couple moved from a small city, attracted to the remote rural life and the idea of creating a new kind of farming business from a relatively small piece of land). Christian and Ellen have developed their own new pig breed and have specialised in a protected brand of pig-meat products with direct sales to the best chefs in Copenhagen. For the Danish-Canadian couple who have a background as respectively a contractor and a master in English, they have succeeded in making a high-quality brand with high demand from the Michelin restaurants in Copenhagen. Besides their own farmhouse directly attached to the pig fields, another farm nearby has been adapted into a butchering hall where they make sausages, dried ham and various pâtés. They also host 'chefs in residence' with whom they collaborate to invent new gastronomical ideas.

Christian expresses his motivation for the pig-breeding project as a personal drive to demonstrate that it is possible to be a modern farmer in contrast to the conventional and highly industrialised large-scale pig production:

*'We wanted to make a living out of a relative small property, we get a kick out of inventing things with our peasant-like setting. The idyllic rural image from Funen gave us a push as a start-up for quality meat delivery, and the small-scaled non-profitable agricultural landscape was just perfect for our pig-breeding project.'*

By the 'non-profitable landscape', he is referring to the hilly terrain, divided into small parcels by protected hedgerows which is difficult to manage with the bigger machinery

developed for conventional agriculture. This is a good example of the outsider's perspective identifying a new opportunity from an undervalued rural asset.

Besides sales in Copenhagen, Ellen sells at local markets in the nearest town, some five miles away, every Friday, and in the biggest city in the region, over 30 miles away, every Saturday. As their products are associated with the finest dining experiences in Denmark, Ellen's presence at more local markets contributes to a positive representation of rural business opportunities, raising the image of Funen as Denmark's Garden. Moreover, their story inspires a new interpretation of a rural lifestyle as the 'happy peasant' which is reinforced by Christian's participation in talks and food festivals, encouraging other younger people to start small-scale farming enterprises in the region. For Christian the ethical aspects of food production are crucial: *'It is very important for us, that we are honest about what we do. . .and that we are explicit about that animal welfare is part of the price.'*

The local economic impact extends to creating new demand for organic grain to feed the pigs and to creating opportunities for apprentices. Although it can be difficult to find *'the right employees who can work manually'*, Christian has a special interest in educating young people who, as he explains, *'hardly can read'* but are often very good at handling animals and skilled with their hands.

The pig farm is an example of a rural business, that is highly dependent on extra-local networks, but at the same time needs local cooperation because their organic land management requires acceptance from the neighbours and the landscape planning authorities in order to safeguard their brand.

**Case 5:** (Counterurbanites moving from the biggest city on Funen to a remote rural village, where they manage a combination of wine production and therapy). Laura and Finn used to work in social psychiatry, but Finn wanted to live in the countryside and see their children grow up there. Although Laura was more attached to city networks, Finn convinced her to move and buy a small farm near the coast. As Laura wanted to continue using her psychiatry expertise the couple started a wine and therapy business, combining their therapeutic knowledge with their common passion for plants. Having transformed five hectares of traditional grain fields into a vineyard, they now offer therapy courses and wine-tastings as a way of making a living. The rural lifestyle had turned out to be a possibility for Laura to invent a niche business concept, where she interacts with several local municipalities and collaborates with a range of people across different areas of psychiatry and environmental psychology.

The farm has been carefully renovated with a traditional thatched roof and the restoration of an old building the 'vinegar barrel' where wine-tastings, direct sales and therapy conversations take place. Finn is still working part-time as a social educator but he manages to carry out some of this work in the vineyard, providing practical exercises and a different environment for young people. The business activities are designed to be carried out directly between the vines, and Laura explains how they are valuing the work with plants through the creation of new interaction spaces:

*'Working with vines needs your attention continually, so you really need to be present and outside among the vines all the time . . . We can use this attention when we work with our clients and other people. If we can find the peace and pass on the joy we feel from nature . . . this is our way of conducting psychiatry'.*

Laura further explains that not all regions in Denmark are suitable for winegrowing, and that their location, with its mild climate and not least the South Funen landscape variations along the coast, plays a big role on several levels for their business. Recognising the value of

the natural capital she explains: *'It is so idyllic on South Funen. Just overwhelming! We receive so many people from the harsh parts of West Denmark. They haven't got trees with round well-grown treetops. People love it, and they keep returning to us year after year.'*

The vines themselves generate value as part of the therapy, but also as a wine product cherished and marketed locally for its 'Nordic taste'. The vineyard receives guests from a broad geographically dispersed audience and, as wine production is rather new in Denmark, there is a lot of interest from across the Danish wine industry too. Finn and Laura are happy to collaborate, in particular seeking to overcome regulatory problems that arise as a result of this being such a new industry for their region. *'We make seminars and share knowledge, because it helps all of us. Nobody keeps their secrets and . . . by collaborating we can contribute to new regulations.'* Breaking out from traditional rural business stereotypes, commercial counterurbanites like Finn and Laura are forcing local authorities to design new policies to accommodate the ambitions of a new wave of rural entrepreneurship.

## Discussion

For both Glyn and Charlie, their positive personal values about the local landscape are reflected in positivity about their businesses. As they have 'consumed' these attributes through expressing residential choices for particular rural locations, they can easily translate this into their marketing to other external customers. For Lyndsey, the value of local community attributes was also recognised at an early stage with the decision to establish a cooperative within the village to support the enterprise development. Each of these demonstrates how personal perceptions of their rural settings influenced the ways in which these rural entrepreneurs conceived of different local attributes. For the two Danish cases, the positive values attached to the physical landscape are even stronger – challenging the hegemony of scale economies in agriculture to create distinctive business opportunities that focus on high quality and unique products, embedded in their local rural settings.

In two of the English cases, the attitudes of the business owners towards the prevailing rural economy lead to distinctive trajectories. Where the desire to maintain a professional image for urban clients dominates, this sits uncomfortably with local collaboration. Glyn stopped volunteering with a local business group and even stopped helping a relative to maintain their website due to frustration with the perceived lack of aspiration and unwillingness of local business owners to use new marketing approaches. Glyn commented about one of these local businesses:

*'She does amazing food but it's chintzy and dated, the decor is poor, since I've stopped doing marketing for them, they've still got 2013 events on their website but I'm not going to do it for free.'*

Glyn clearly expects these businesses to adopt modern marketing styles because, in Glyn's professional networks, digital marketing and corporate identity are the norm and anyone not upholding these standards is behind the curve and lacking aspiration. Charlie also moved from a highly professional urban industry where image was crucially important. However, rather than expecting the local economy to mirror that of the London music scene, Charlie sought to identify how the distinctive features of the local area could provide new opportunities for marketing, branding and the creation of a distinctive offering for recording artists where the very absence of distractions and the space for creativity turns the remote, sparse landscape into an asset for this business. In a similar vein, the mental health benefits of such environments provide an added dimension to the Danish winery case too.

Returning to Glyn, this distinction is summed up in a comment about some free advice offered to a local retailer:

*'It makes me cross because he's had more than that in value of advice from me and I've introduced him to someone who's working for corporate brands who can do an amazing job but he just doesn't get it.'*

This may be true but perhaps the local retailer has a different type of market from those where corporate branding works and, perhaps, there is an element of Glyn 'not getting' the rural economy too. Perhaps the music industry has more scope for capitalising of a rural counter-culture, especially in the folk music world of Show of Hands (Yarwood and Charlton, 2009) and Vashti Bunyan (Halfacree, 2009), but Lyndsey showed a similar attitude in shunning modern ideas that are not suited to some rural enterprise. In the case of cider manufacturing 'new-fangled ideas' related to health and safety were viewed as 'urban' concepts, fitting large, mainstream production but not rural production. As a rural-to-rural mover, the cider producer shows a different attitude to those commercial counterurbanites who are familiar with the legislative as well as supply chain demands around health and safety. By contrast, the Danish pig producers are fully aware of the need to maintain consistently high-quality throughout their business in order to satisfy the demands of Copenhagen restaurants, and a general concern related to animal welfare and increasing demand of organic products. While a rural brand provides a sense of authenticity, this must be combined with the quality control of big business if the product is to sustain a price premium in larger markets. Further obstacles arise at a local level, when the practices of conventional large-scale agriculture and small-scale organic farm households meet, expressed by the pig farmer:

*'The worst scenario for us is, when our neighbours fertilise or use pesticides on their side of the hedgerows, as this both damages our fields and reputation in general. This is the reason why we don't want any agricultural subsidy ... the whole EU system is one big paradox'*

Essentially, our case studies here show that the target market as well as the entrepreneur's personal experiences each influence the ways in which the juxtaposition of modernity and rural-ness can be portrayed in a positive or a negative light. Breaking this down further, there are two dimensions to the commercial counterurbanisation story that shape the dynamics of their business activities. The first is the spatiality of networks and social capital and the second is the mechanisms through which value is recognised and created. These are now examined in further detail.

### **Recognition and creation of value**

All of the cases above represent rurality in different ways. Peaceful backwaters (although maybe lacking economic dynamism); natural resource-rich places with abundant opportunities from the land, scenic landscapes to inspire tourism, wellbeing and creativity; strong communities to support local enterprise; and increasing connectivity to larger markets and networks beyond the rural locality. Having shown that similar attributes of rurality carry different values just within the five cases outlined above, it is quite clear that any consistent notion of 'rural capital' (Castle, 1998), Countryside Capital (Garrod et al., 2006) or a consensual agreement on the value of the rural idyll are quite unrealistic.

In *The Differentiated Countryside*, Murdoch et al. (2003) highlighted the contestation that can emerge at a community level when disparate perceptions of rurality come into conflict around community development issues. Commercial counterurbanisation sees these debates reflected in the ways that rural entrepreneurs conceive, portray and commodify aspects of their local rural area which may not always be in accord with the perceptions and feelings of others living and working in that locality. This has significant implications for rural business policies and destination branding activities (Giles et al., 2013) and demonstrates that commercial counterurbanites have the capacity to recognise, create and act upon new economic opportunities for value creation that would otherwise go undiscovered. From Table 1 alone, we can see that a number of sources of value are either overlooked by locals completely (e.g. the waste fruit; the acoustics of the building; the health potential of working with plants) or that their potential for commercialisation beyond the community is not recognised (e.g. the good pub down the road; the view; the lack of congestion).

One thing that each of the cases has in common is that the commercial counterurbanites are looking to create value for their new locality as well as for themselves. This might be mutually beneficial, of course, but each interviewee offered a clear indication that they wanted their activities to do good for the wider community, whether that was creating jobs for young people (Christian and Ellen; Glyn), volunteering to support a local business group (Glyn), staging community events (Lyndsey) or purposefully supporting and collaborating with other local businesses (Charlie; Finn and Laura). In line with counterurbanisation research, this outlook can be connected to the individual's own feelings towards the rural area to which they chose to move. Becoming embedded in the new locality can then convey business benefits to commercial counterurbanites just as with local businesses (Jack and Anderson, 2002). These are not simply footloose businesses that happened to land in a rural area for reasons of lower costs or convenience but they are businesses operated by individuals whose migration to the rural area involves a complex web of personal and family, social and economic factors. To the aspects of personal preferences for a 'non-urban' lifestyle, all five cases provided here demonstrate how entrepreneurial wishes are mediated and even changed by the landscape values they experience in their daily practices.

The processes through which they then seek to create value depend on a host of variables, often connected to their wider work and life experiences. For example, the entrepreneurs establishing the recording studio and the winery could draw on professional expertise and contacts from outside the region, while capitalising on immobile local assets (OECD, 2018b; Terluin, 2003). In each case, the product was not innovative per se, but the ideas to turn waste apples into cider in Lincolnshire or to grow vines on Funen were out of the ordinary in their local contexts. In these cases, the residential location was a personal choice and the businesses became an extension of these expressed preferences. For Glyn, family members had strong attachment to the rural setting and this led to a business approach that sought to translate ideas from outside the region into ones that could be made to work locally. Here, the business was, perhaps, more of an attempt to make the attractive natural/agricultural environment and the strong family ties cohere with a personal approach that was more urban, even international, and corporate. The contradictions proved more difficult to overcome but a balance was realised, aided by improvements in technology that allowed a combination of local and non-local activities to continue.

Therefore, these cases highlight that commercial counterurbanisation is both a demographic and entrepreneurial process shaped by residential preferences (c.f. Mitchell and Madden, 2014). Counterurbanisation is a complex process, resulting from multiple economic and non-economic factors (Halfacree and Rivera, 2012; Mitchell and Shannon, 2018) but a key feature of commercial counterurbanisation is that rural residential attraction can, in

many cases, lead to future activities that contribute to rural economic development. The important point is that the economic outcomes of commercial counterurbanisation are shaped by people's motivations for moving and their perceptiveness towards new opportunities within that rural context which may lead them to become rural entrepreneurs. Moving forward, the connections between demographic patterns and the resultant forms of enterprise that emerge in rural areas demand closer investigation.

### *The spatial dimension of rural capitals*

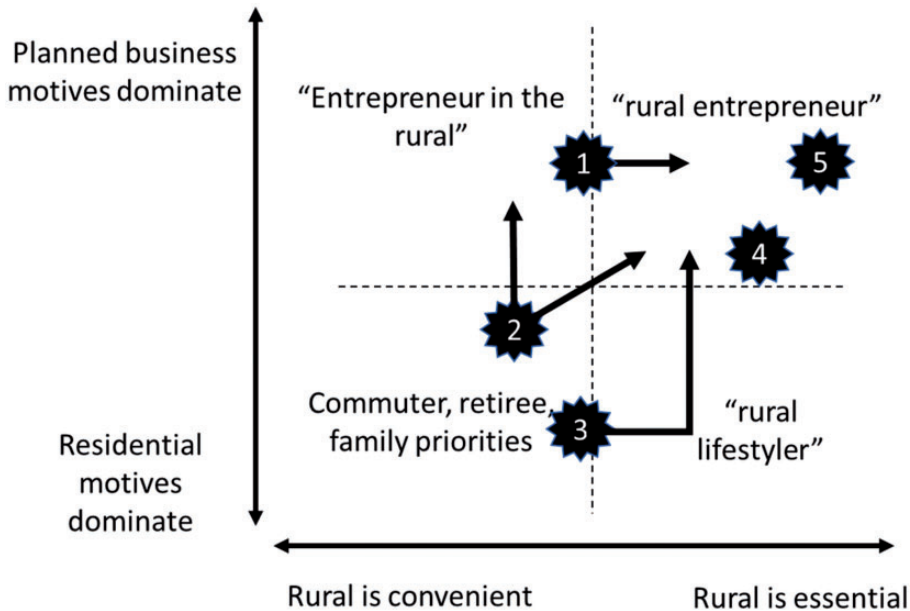
The commercial counterurbanites discussed above are clearly drivers of change but others adapt business models to fit the prevailing rural context. While all businesses draw on various forms of capital, a rural location shapes their quality and accessibility (Bosworth and Turner, 2018). Laura and Finn's winery and Glyn's gallery with guestroom integrate the landscapes into the performance and identity of their businesses but their business models rely heavily on external networks and social capital too. Meanwhile, Christian and Ellen, Charlie and Lyndsey each embraced the distinctive opportunities of their rural settings and sought integration and acceptance rather than change. Cider production and music recording represented innovative activity within the Lincolnshire context and the Danish pig-production model was deliberately unconventional, but each entrepreneur sought to prove that these businesses could thrive in the rural settings where they had chosen to live.

In each case the commercial counterurbanite provides a connection between embedded rural networks and more extensive connections, fulfilling a bridging role in the neo-endogenous development perspective (Ray, 2006). Glyn and Charlie both depend on urban clients from their previous home areas and, therefore, maintain social capital through those extensive networks. There was very little evidence of this social capital being actively shared across newly forming networks in the local rural area although there were trickle-down effects where external clients were using other local businesses when visiting the area and where they supported new employment in the rural economy. In the case of Glyn in particular, the local business activity remained quite distinct from the higher value work carried out for national and international clients. The two Danish cases illustrate that local effects can be seen in terms of knowledge spill-overs and inspiration for other businesses to become more innovative and imaginative, not just through quantifiable trade effects, but rather through appreciation of landscape values and a rising demand for quality food. These examples reinforce the value of intangible forms of capital in a rural context (Svendsen and Sorensen, 2007).

The motivations for engaging in local networks also varied somewhat. As advocates of the local area, commercial counterurbanites tend to want to work with other local businesses and through combining local and extra-local networks they can also become a link for other businesses across their networks. In each case there were some business motivations, notably needing the local residents to be supportive of planning applications and generally accepting of the business activities in their neighbourhoods (Charlie). For Glyn, active local networking was used as a means to tout for new business while for Charlie it was also important to build up a trusted group of suppliers, particularly as the business grew and diversified. For Christian and Ellen, engaging proactively with other local businesses was also a mechanism to help their unconventional methods to become more accepted in the locality. However, in each case, we see the rural entrepreneur as the gatekeeper of external network connections whose values are clearly recognised.

Although direct network relations are not always shared, the underpinning norms and expectations of how to conduct business do spill over into the local economy to some extent.





**Figure 2.** Plotting our case studies' entry points and trajectories towards becoming rural entrepreneurs.

The way that Glyn's apprentice learns about dealing with professional clients will be informed by exposure to national, urban clients and then implemented in the local economy: this is an example of the intangible effects of social capital within evolving network constellations. Similarly, the employee on Christian and Ellen's pig farm will be learning a very different business model from other trainee farmers due to the expectations of others in their supply chain networks. The knock-on effect of this is that other businesses engaging with Christian and Ellen, Glyn or Lyndsey will have to meet the expectations of their external clients in terms of service and communications, which will see a further penetration of extra-local business practices into the local rural economy, confirming the diverse benefits of cultural diversity (Rodríguez-Pose and Hardy, 2015) and networks that transcend instrumental trade relationships (Herslund, 2012). In the case of the wine and therapy concept the rehabilitation of mental illnesses or stress has proven to be more effective than the conventional public methods carried out as conversations in an office sitting behind a desk. In Denmark, outdoor healing concepts are gaining momentum, and this actually demonstrates a new vein for the public savings of health expenditures and leads to new entrepreneurial possibilities in remote rural areas in private-public collaborations.

With local forms of rural capital, our commercial counterurbanites were more willing to share, for example, promoting the natural beauty of the area to their clients, cross-promoting local products and incorporating these elements into their own product offers. The local built environment, both for housing these enterprises and for providing other valuable local services, is also actively promoted as part of the identity of the rural business. The local context is clearly recognised and capitalised upon through the business approaches of the entrepreneurs presented here. The representations that are portrayed, however, are shaped by a combination of the entrepreneurs' backgrounds and expectations as well as their understanding of the needs of their clients and the potential for adding value to the end product. Capturing the cultural heritage capital of authentic production adds value to local

cider and selling the aesthetic and tranquil appeal of the rural environment adds value to the offer of the recording studio. Basing a gallery on local crafts and setting it within the landscape also creates a clear opportunity to add value to the end product through the creation of a distinctive consumer experience – which even translates to the online shop through rural branding and imagery. The argument within the philosophy of commercial counterurbanisation is that entrepreneurs who see these rural assets from the outside first, and who have been influenced by them in their residential choices, are then better placed to capture the value of those assets through their business development.

## Conclusions

Commercial counterurbanites are commodifying aspects of rurality, and sometimes rurality itself, but not just to sell to an urban population desiring leisure pursuits (as with earlier tourism literature in this field, e.g. Garrod et al., 2006; Kneafsey, 2001; Perkins, 2006) but also to enhance other business activities. Drawing on landscape aesthetics, quietness, new agricultural practices, inspirational values and ‘authenticity’ or provenance, a wide range of rural enterprises have the potential to add value to their products and services through the strategic employment of rural capital. They are also creating local opportunities in terms of employment, trade for other local businesses, sharing expertise and networks, (attempting to) raise aspirations and attracting external investment. Thus, in response to our opening question, quite a lot is taking place within villages today but these activities are embedded within diverse and often far-reaching networks.

These activities ‘enhance’ rural development beyond the measurable impact of the new business itself and demonstrate the potential that commercial counterurbanisation can offer to rural economies. In the selected cases here, the businesses have identifiable impacts upon their local economies and their success is at least partly shaped by the ways in which the entrepreneurs conceive of opportunities in relation to their spatial settings. The framework proposed in Figure 1 also provides a tool for charting the trajectories of rural in-migrants towards becoming rural entrepreneurs. Capturing each of the studies in Figure 2 illustrates the initial motivations of our case studies and their pathways to creating locally embedded rural businesses. While each trajectory is complex, the case of the cider manufacturer (Case 3) whose move revolved around family influences and whose business emerged through embeddedness in the local rural community can be traced distinctly from the recording studio (Case 1) who arrived with very clear business intentions. Our two Danish cases saw moves that were planned to enable rural business development, so can be positioned in the ‘rural entrepreneur’ quadrant from the outset. Case 2, the gallery and copywriter is more complex as there are different business trajectories emerging from the initial point of arrival where family influences dictated the rural location but through both local and external networks, new enterprise development occurred.

In this paper, we have argued that commercial counterurbanites are able to recognise different opportunities due to combinations of their diverse networks and extra-local experiences as well as their local embeddedness. Figure 1 identified that commercial counterurbanites have multiple starting points and research has identified that their diverse pathways continue to be influenced by the ways in which these factors evolve over time. Of course, as populations are increasingly mobile, and even those villages in traditional agricultural regions are no longer dominated by agricultural jobs and related businesses (such as Jorwert in Friesland as well as the case study villages in Lincolnshire & Funen), this is in fact the new normal. Businesses in rural areas (to apply Korsgaard et al’s distinction) are part of extensive supply chains, complex information networks and arise as a result of

multiple personal choices and motivations. On the one hand, this creates interesting new opportunities for businesses to act as drivers of change and modernisation but, on the other hand, through recognising how different forms of rural capital can add value, rural entrepreneurs might help to preserve key features of rurality such as working with plants and animals, interacting with nature and weather and sustaining a lifestyle that benefits from being beyond the urban crowds. Arguably, those that have moved into the rural area, expressing a pro-rural residential preference, will be equally if not more eager to preserve valuable forms of rural capital too.

Assuming that the forms of capital that create value for businesses are similar to those that contribute to sustainable communities, we can assert that policies aimed at creating positive business environments should be designed in conjunction with policies to address community development objectives. The embeddedness of economic activity has been written about for many decades, especially in rural studies literature, so it is surely time for policy to mirror this idea and recognise the positive roles played by rural entrepreneurs, including commercial counterurbanites, as agents of change *and* continuity in contemporary rural communities.

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