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# UNDERSTANDING RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND A PROPOSAL OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK BASED ON THE ENTREPRENEUR-PLACE RELATIONSHIP

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## Abstract

Interest in rural entrepreneurship among researchers has been systematically growing in recent years, which allows for noticing specific research trends. However, a comprehensive methodological approach to this topic is lacking, especially in the context of new definitions of rural entrepreneurship. This article focuses on the results of a systematic analysis of the literature on rural entrepreneurship aimed at distinguishing emerging research trends. The authors base their conclusions on research of articles from the international databases of Scopus and Web of Science journals. The paper also proposes an original model of rural entrepreneurship, based on the relationship between a rural entrepreneur and the place of activity, concerning new ways of defining this type of entrepreneurship. This model may help understand the mechanisms of rural entrepreneurship and the factors determining its development and may constitute a conceptual framework for further empirical research. Moreover, the conclusions from the study have application values, as they can be helpful for decision-makers in formulating local policy assumptions and strategic development plans, especially for rural areas.

## Keywords

rural entrepreneurship • rural entrepreneur • place • literature review • research in rural entrepreneurship • conceptual framework • model

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## Introduction

After a period of little researchers' interest in rural entrepreneurship, in the first decades of the 21st century there is a noticeable increase in it in various academic disciplines, especially geography, sociology and economics. This trend is mainly due to the growing interest of farmers in undertaking non-agricultural business activities in rural areas. Researchers are looking for new methods of identifying and measuring rural entrepreneurship, considering its complex nature and analysing it in the context of the functioning of a rural entrepreneur in the local environment. The complex nature of rural entrepreneurship has been noted in international literature, so two terms refer to economic activities in rural areas: "entrepreneurship in the rural / entrepreneurship in rural areas" and "rural entrepreneurship" (Korsgaard et al., 2015). The first one concerns companies only located in rural areas, while the second one covers activities that, apart from being located in a rural environment, use and supply local products and resources resulting from local natural, cultural and social values (Massomi et al., 2022), thus linking entrepreneurship with place. However, some researchers, including those in Poland, do not notice these differences, analysing rural entrepreneurship mainly in the traditional positivist approach, which should be considered insufficient (Kulawiak & Rachwał, 2023). In light of progress in research and the growing importance of entrepreneurship for the development of rural areas, it is essential to analyse and sort out current research directions, deepen the discussion on the essence of rural entrepreneurship in terms of the relationship between a rural entrepreneur and a place, and attempt to formulate a comprehensive theoretical and methodological approach to research on this phenomenon, according to new approaches.

In the context of the issues discussed, an important aspect is the reference to the concept of rural areas, highlighting the difference between the concepts of a village, rural area and rurality. These concepts are often used

interchangeably, but as Bański (2011) points out, treating them as synonyms leads to incorrect interpretations of some phenomena and processes. Both "a village" and "a rural area" refer directly to a specific space, with "a village" generally treated as a settlement unit. In contrast, "a rural area" refers to a space created by the village and its surroundings. The concept of a village is, however, very spacious. As Stanny (2014) points out, it includes not only a lifestyle, economic structure, a specific way of developing space or a particular relationship with nature, but it is also a symbolic category that is of great importance in culture and social life (Stanny, 2011: 127). The term "a rural area" takes on a different connotation. It ceases to operate as a whole and focuses on a selected element of the characteristics of the village. This element is a certain space distinguished by some specific feature. In geographical studies, this feature is most often a demographic criterion (identified by the number of people living in a given area or population density) or a functional (economic) criterion based on the source of income, type of professional activity and the function of agriculture for the entire area. In sociology, definitions of rural areas are often based on the features of local communities, including the agricultural (peasant) society (Stanny, 2011: 128). In addition to those mentioned above, the literature also distinguishes administrative criteria related to the division into town and village, architectural criteria considering spatial development, and mixed criteria, which include additional elements (Krzysztofik, 2017: 302). Notably, the Polish legislator has not introduced a legal definition of a rural area. However, several legal acts use it but do not define its content, including "the Act of 20 February 2015 on supporting the development of rural areas with the participation of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development under the Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020", or "the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 12 October 2015 on the limits of funds available in individual voivodeships or years under specific measures

or sub-measures of the Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020” (Krzysztofik, 2017: 301). In Poland, however, the concept of a rural area functions at the institutional level. The Central Statistical Office characterises rural areas in Poland based on the territorial division, according to the National Official Register of Territorial Division. Under this, rural areas in Poland are those located outside the administrative boundaries of cities, or more precisely – rural communes (gminas) and rural areas of urban-rural communes (gminas). Using only the administrative criterion, specifying whether an area is rural is difficult. Therefore, as Krzysztofik (2017: 303) points out, rural areas in Poland include both those with an urban character of development and infrastructure, where non-agricultural economic activity is conducted, and those with dispersed development, wholly subordinated to agricultural activity. In addition, the concept of “a rural area” also appears in international documents. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines this concept through the prism of the demographic criterion, considering the population density which must not exceed 150 inhabitants per square kilometre. A similar criterion is also used at the level of EU statistics (Eurostat), classifying an area as rural when the population density is below 100 inhabitants per square kilometre.

What connects the concepts of “a village” and “a rural area” is undoubtedly “rurality”. However, as Bański (2011) points out, their semantic content is somewhat broader and multidimensional, as social, cultural and economic features determine it. “Rurality” as a research category is considered particularly in the context of British rural geography.

Considering the above premises, the article’s primary goal is to synthetically present the results of the literature analysis on rural entrepreneurship based on systematic and bibliometric analyses. Additionally, it is to propose an original model of rural entrepreneurship, which may constitute a framework for research procedures related to identifying this type of entrepreneurship. Firstly, a systematic

review of the literature on rural entrepreneurship aims to clarify the concept of rural entrepreneurship and highlight its differences from entrepreneurship in rural areas. Secondly, it is to identify the main research directions and the more critical problems (threads) undertaken within them. Taking up this issue seems particularly important at a time when rural entrepreneurship is treated in Poland and other countries as one of the most critical factors and indicators of the level of socio-economic development of rural areas (Kamińska, 2006, 2011; Bański, 2008, 2016; Kłodziński, 2010; Wasilewski, 2011). There is a need not only to revise and evaluate the existing achievements in this field but also to develop new research concepts that will allow for a better understanding and description of the complex essence of this phenomenon.

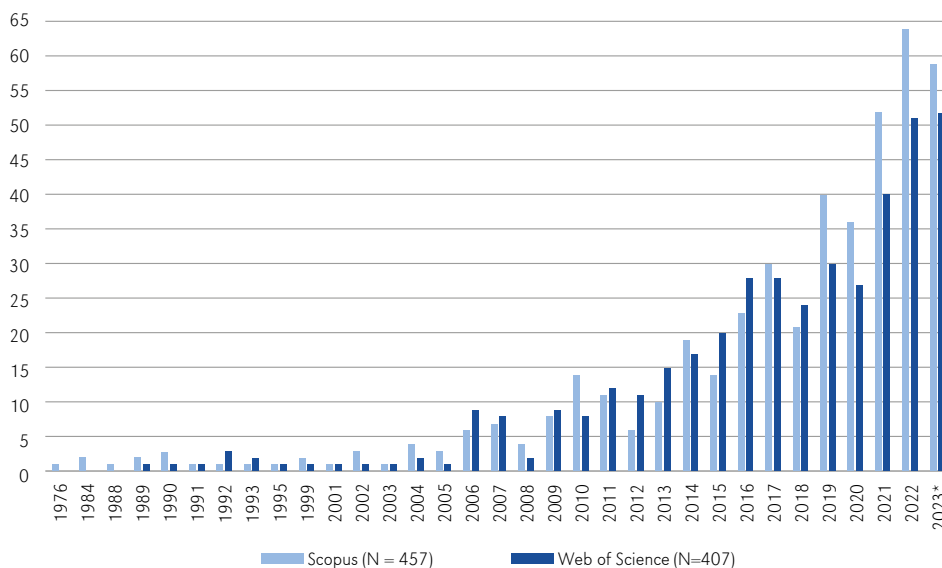
Moreover, despite numerous discussions in the international literature on understanding the term “rural entrepreneurship” and the search for increasingly better ways of measuring and describing it, this topic, apart from individual studies, has not been discussed by Polish researchers, including rural geographers. Therefore, another aim of the article is to present the author’s model of the functioning of rural entrepreneurship and its research method, focusing on the relations between a rural entrepreneur and their local environment. The motivation to develop this model is the growing importance given in literature and practice to the role of the local environment in the context of the development of rural entrepreneurship (Kalantaridis et al., 2006; Korsgaard et al., 2015). At the same time, there is a lack of comprehensive models that consider the relationships between the entrepreneur and the place of their business. This constitutes a significant gap in the research the authors are trying to fill.

## Data and methods of literature analysis

The data sources for the analysis were two sets of articles and other studies, such as chapters in monographs and conference

publications, indexed in the international Scopus and Web of Science databases. The choice was dictated by the fact that these are the two most significant databases of academic publications, in which the process of acceptance for indexing requires that the editors of scientific journals and

years in which articles meeting the search criteria were indexed in these databases until 2023 (as of 1 December). In practice, these criteria were met by articles from the years 1976-2023 (Scopus) and 1989-2023 (Web of Science), although in the twentieth century, these were single articles (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Number of articles on rural entrepreneurship indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases: 1976-2023\*

\* as of 1 December

Source: own study based on search data in the Scopus and Web of Science databases

publishers of monographs or conference materials meet several conditions regarding the quality of the publication. Therefore, these two databases are generally considered the most prestigious, containing the most essential global publications in the field of social sciences. The analysis included 451 and 407 articles from these databases, respectively, meeting the search criteria for “rural entrepreneurship” in titles, keywords and abstracts<sup>1</sup>. The time range included all

After applying the indicated search procedure, 864 records were obtained from both databases (using other criteria did not bring satisfactory results, giving large numbers of publications unrelated to the researched issues). Some papers are indexed in both databases; hence, duplicates were eliminated in the next step. Then, each publication was subjected to a general qualitative analysis, i.e. based on the title, abstract and keywords. As a result of this step, works important from the point of view of this analysis

<sup>1</sup> Pilot studies were carried out during preparations for systematically analysing the literature on the subject. They included the search of the databases in other fields, as well as by related terms. Additionally, “rural” and “entrepreneurship” were used separately. However,

the latter approach did not give positive results because the analysis would include articles not related to rural entrepreneurship.

were distinguished – these were publications addressing the issue of rural entrepreneurship from the perspective of its essence, meaning and purpose. These publications were subjected to an in-depth qualitative analysis, i.e. covering the entire content. This method was used to include as many publications in the analysis as possible and objectively select them.

In the light of the data analysis of publications in the Scopus and Web of Science databases using the term “rural entrepreneurship” in titles, keywords and abstracts, it is clear that in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, these were single articles; before 1976 this term was not used at all (Fig. 1). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, several to a dozen articles were indexed per year, while in 2022-2023, over 50. This proves a significant increase in interest in rural entrepreneurship in recent years. As an aside, the most frequently cited study concerns the differences between rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in rural areas in the context of place and space, treated as two different categories (Korsgaard et al., 2015). The analysis of citation connections also indicates that those frequently cited include papers showing the relationship between rural entrepreneurship and ecology, including renewable energy sources.

### **The concept of rural entrepreneurship vs. entrepreneurship in the rural areas from the literature perspective**

The great importance of rural entrepreneurship and its role in the activation of rural areas, as pointed out by Bański (2008), and the need to counteract unfavourable socio-economic processes, including unemployment, marginalisation and social pauperisation, have caused it to become the subject of interest of many academic disciplines. Various research perspectives in analysing this issue have resulted in diverse definitions of this concept and different methodological

approaches. Research on rural entrepreneurship, as concluded from the literature, has been conducted since the 1990s, but it gained the most significant dynamics after 2000. This was primarily related to the new concept of “rural entrepreneurship” (as a category different from “entrepreneurship in countryside/rural areas” or “entrepreneurship in the rural” used by Korsgaard et al., 2015), as well as with the increased interest in “place and human” as categories explaining economic life. The foundations for such thinking about the economy were created by the so-called “new economics”, which emerged at Harvard in the 1960s as opposed to classical economics. In turn, the crystallisation of two different conceptual categories related to economic activity in the countryside (rural areas) resulted from researchers noticing certain specific features distinguishing it from other types of entrepreneurship, such as urban entrepreneurship (Fortunato, 2014) and its strong connection with the place/space (Kalantaridis et al., 2006; Korsgaard et al., 2015).

In the light of the literature, an image of rural entrepreneurship emerges as a phenomenon of a particular socio-natural compromise. Researchers agree that rural entrepreneurship results from transforming the natural and cultural environment by a human entrepreneur who creates appropriate conditions (opportunities). Thus, rural entrepreneurship has strong connections with the environment in which it operates and cannot be moved anywhere else without losing its character (Kulawiak & Suliborski, 2023). Unlike rural entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship in rural areas is slightly differently defined (Tab. 1).

According to Islas-Moreno et al. (2021), although both forms of human activity are related to the rural environment through location, in the case of entrepreneurship in rural areas, this location results only from the economic benefits (competitive advantages) that the rural environment offers to a specific company and, consequently, the entrepreneur running it. Thus, the potential development of the countryside (local environment) gives way to the entrepreneur’s

**Table 1.** Determinants of rural entrepreneurship vs entrepreneurship in the rural areas

Rural entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship in the rural areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the countryside is a place that offers a company (business venture) something more than just a location for operations,</li> <li>• the basis is the emotional connection of the entrepreneur and the company they run with the rural environment (village) and its inhabitants,</li> <li>• the priority of locating the company in a rural environment is the social, economic and cultural development of the local environment (village),</li> <li>• a rural entrepreneur puts the interests of the village and its inhabitants above their profit from the conducted business,</li> <li>• the business is based on local resources (social, material, physical), even if they are more expensive than those coming from outside of the local environment,</li> <li>• the provision of produced goods and services is mainly local,</li> <li>• strong anchoring (setting) in a place (village), which means that this activity cannot be transferred to another place without losing its character and specificity,</li> <li>• very low probability of transferring this form of activity to another place,</li> <li>• less susceptibility to changing external conditions, e.g., related to globalisation or price fluctuations,</li> <li>• a longer rate of return on investment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the countryside is a place that offers the company (business venture) only economic benefits,</li> <li>• the priority of locating the company in a rural environment is its individual development,</li> <li>• a rural entrepreneur puts profit from their business ahead of the good and development of the local environment (countryside) in which they operate,</li> <li>• local resources (physical, social, material) are used only if their price is competitive with other areas,</li> <li>• lack of anchoring (setting) in place,</li> <li>• a rural company can be moved to any place without losing its character and specificity,</li> <li>• more significant likelihood of transferring the business venture,</li> <li>• greater susceptibility to changing external conditions related to globalisation or price fluctuations,</li> <li>• a short rate of return on investment.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Islas-Moreno et al. (2021)

private interests, who sees only profit – development of their own company – in locating it in a rural area. However, in the case of rural entrepreneurship, the village is a place that offers more than just a potential opportunity for profit. In this case, the priority is the emotional connection of a rural entrepreneur with the “social nucleus” of the village, thus putting the interests and development of the village (its inhabitants) ahead of their own. In other words, the priority is the village’s cultural, social and economic development at the expense of private interests. Therefore, this type of activity is based on “anchoring” in a place, and awareness of goods and services is mainly local. As a result, in the light of the literature on the subject, a rural company is considered to be an entity that is located in a rural area, employs local people, uses local raw materials and material base, directs its products and services mainly to the local market,

and contributes to the development of the local (rural) environment in which it operates (McElwee & Atherton, 2011; Bosworth, 2012; De Rosa & McElwee, 2015; Islas-Moreno et al., 2021). However, clarifying that term did not result in an exponential increase in research on this issue. Despite the generally great interest in entrepreneurship, this theme remained on the margin of researchers’ attention for a long time. Only in 2000 did this topic appear on a larger scale in the literature, and its particular explosion is recorded today. Apart from the crystallisation of the concept of rural entrepreneurship itself, as opposed to entrepreneurship in rural areas, several factors contributed to the increased interest in this topic. In light of the literature on the subject, it seems the following factors can be considered crucial:

- researchers’ noticing and articulating specific features that distinguish entrepreneurship conducted in the countryside

(rural areas) from other forms of entrepreneurship (e.g. urban), including stressing its strong dependence on the features of the local environment (connection with the “place”), which contributed to the search for new ways of its interpretation and research in the context of social theories, including “place” and roots (Fortunato, 2014; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Pato et al., 2015, 2018)

- socio-economic crisis, affecting increasingly rural areas – the desire to counteract the unfavourable processes currently taking place in rural areas, i.e. depopulation or economic degradation, focused researchers’ attention on the issue of rural development, and thus rural entrepreneurship, which was seen as an effective remedy to counteract these negative processes (Paul et al., 2013; McElwee et al., 2014).

On the one hand, the increased interest in the issue has translated into an increase in the number of studies (Fig. 1). However, it has also made it very difficult to determine the scope and field of contemporary research on this topic. It is primarily due to the lack of clarity and unambiguity of the concept of entrepreneurship itself, which is defined differently within various academic disciplines. It also applies to rural entrepreneurship and the lack of clear boundaries between disciplines dealing with this issue. Nevertheless, such attempts are being made, especially in Western literature (Pato et al., 2016; Islas-Moreno et al., 2021; Massomi et al., 2022). As noted by, among others, Islas-Moreno et al. (2021), evidence of the growing interest in rural entrepreneurship is that in less than 30 years, nine systematic reviews of academic research in this field have been created, proposing new research directions. According to the authors, based on these reviews, the research program has evolved from theoretical aspects related to the need to develop a solid conceptual framework through understanding issues related to the development and operation of this type of activities in various rural environments to practical aspects related to the application of the acquired knowledge

in regional and local policies and the management of rural areas by decision-makers (Islas-Moreno et al., 2021: 455).

## Research directions and research problems of rural entrepreneurship

The analysis of the literature on rural entrepreneurship indexed in the databases allows for classifying the existing research into four characteristic trends (directions), in which several research problems (threads) can be distinguished (Tab. 2). As the attached table shows, the achievements in this area include theoretical and empirical studies, with the latter dominating. In papers of a theoretical nature, the authors, on the one hand, attempt to systematise and organise the current theoretical and methodological achievements in this area (Wortman Jr., 1990; McElwee & Smith, 2014; Henry & McElwee, 2014; Fortunato, 2014; Islas-Moreno et al., 2021). The research undertaken in this area tried to define, on the one hand, what rural entrepreneurship is (Korsgaard et al., 2015) and, on the other hand, to answer the question of whether it constitutes a separate category of entrepreneurship theory and practice (Fortunato, 2014; Masoomi et al., 2022). The idea of this research was also to strive to develop a program for a comprehensive study of this issue. Such an attempt was made, among others, by Islas-Moreno et al. (2021), who proposed a model of the entrepreneurship process based on four interacting components: i.e., entrepreneur, rural environment (context), entrepreneurial process (realisation) and benefits generated by this type of activity.

In the theoretical aspect, the direct impulse for interest in the issue of rural entrepreneurship in its strict sense was the work of Wortman (1990), in which the concept of “rural entrepreneurship” was first defined in its contemporary meaning, followed by the work of Korsgaard et al. (2015), which clarified the innovative approach to this issue proposed by Wortmann (1990). These

**Table 2.** Research directions and research problems in rural entrepreneurship – analysis of the results

Trend (direction) of research	Research problem	Sample research topics	Sample papers (publishing date order)
THEORETICAL – devoted to developing a coherent conceptual and methodological framework for rural entrepreneurship	Research methods and typology of rural entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• systematisation of the literature on the subject,</li> <li>• typology of rural entrepreneurship,</li> <li>• research methods in the field of rural entrepreneurship</li> </ul>	Wortmann (1990); McElwee et al. (2011); Henry et al. (2014); Smith et al. (2015); Fortunato (2014); Korsgaard et al. (2015); Pato et al. (2016); Muñoz et al. (2019); Gaddefors et al. (2019); Islas-Moreno et al. (2021); Gittins et al. (2022), Kulawiak et al. (2022); Masoomi et. al (2022); Kulawiak et al. (2023)
PERSONAL – referring to psychological features, specific sociological units and personal characteristics of the rural entrepreneur	<p>Human capital (psychological features – need for achievement, creativity, temperament, ingenuity)</p> <p>Social capital (sociological features – environmental and family conditions, type, course of education, ability to cooperate)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personality characteristics of a rural entrepreneur (biographies of entrepreneurs),</li> <li>• entrepreneurial skills and abilities,</li> <li>• motives for entrepreneurial activity in a rural environment,</li> <li>• entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions, rural entrepreneurship and gender</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• women and their role in the development of rural entrepreneurship,</li> <li>• social conditions (factors) and barriers to the development of rural entrepreneurship,</li> </ul>	<p>Pushkarskaya (2008); Costin et. al. (2016); Ahmad et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2016); Smith (2017); Katekhaye et al. (2019); Bhinekawati et al. (2020); Singh (2020); Bouichou et al. (2021); Tillmar et al. (2022); Ahl et al. (2023); Karimi et al. (2023)</p> <p>Chaudhuri (1976); Steinberg et al. (2010); Besser et al. (2013); Paul et al. (2015); Nikula (2017); Ratten et al. (2022)</p>
MANAGERIAL – referring to the way of behaving (approach) to business (rural venture)	Establishment process and running rural business ventures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• models (concepts) of rural entrepreneurship development in various local environments,</li> <li>• strategies for entrepreneurial activity in rural areas,</li> <li>• ways and methods of establishing rural businesses in various rural environments,</li> </ul>	Bock (2004); De Los-Rios et al. (2016); McKague et al. (2017); López et al. (2019); De Rosa et al. (2019); Miles et al. (2020), Dunne et al. (2021); Ratten (2021); Brown et al. (2022); Zivdar et al. (2022)



Trend (direction) of research	Research problem	Sample research topics	Sample papers (publishing date order)
<p>FUNCTIONAL – referring to economic, social, cultural, etc. functions of rural entrepreneurship in the local and supra-local dimensions</p>	<p>The influence of the local environment (countryside) on rural entrepreneurship</p> <p>The impact of rural entrepreneurship on the local environment (countryside)</p> <p>Supra-local conditions and barriers (social, economic, environmental) in rural entrepreneurship development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social context,</li> <li>• institutional context,</li> <li>• rooting rural entrepreneurship in various environments,</li> <li>• the countryside as a “place” for the development of rural entrepreneurship (spatial context),</li> <li>• the influence of local resources on the development of entrepreneurial activities</li> <li>• rural entrepreneurship and the prosperity of rural areas,</li> <li>• rural entrepreneurship and tourism,</li> <li>• rural entrepreneurship and rural revitalisation,</li> <li>• rural entrepreneurship and a local community</li> <li>• role of new technologies in supporting rural entrepreneurship,</li> <li>• influence of emigrants on the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas in various countries,</li> <li>• impact of the EU and national aid programs on the development of rural entrepreneurship,</li> <li>• rural entrepreneurship and sustainable economy,</li> <li>• impact of rural entrepreneurship on regional and supra-regional development</li> </ul>	<p>Scott et al. (1993); Kalantaridis et al. (2006); Cabras et al. (2014); Young (2010); Siemens (2012); Fortunato et al. (2016); Müller et al. (2018); Greenberg et al. (2018); Bockman et al. (2021); Saarinen et al. (2021); Corrêa et al. (2023); Liu et al. (2023)</p> <p>Gladwin et al. (1989); Akgün, et al. (2011); Direction (2015); Jarka (2015); Anderson et al. (2016); Sá et al. (2019); Patil et al. (2019); Polbitsyn (2021); Fiseha et al. (2019); Siemens (2019); Rodriguez-Gomez (2022); Kolawole et al. (2023)</p> <p>Kalantaridis et al. (2007); Vaillant et al. (2007); Ranjan (2015); De Rosa et al. (2015); Eschker et al. (2017); Muhammad et al. (2017); Deller et al. (2019); Marques et al. (2019); Dabson (2021); Gyimah (2021)</p>
<p>SPATIAL – referring to the distribution and development of rural entrepreneurship in regional and national systems</p>	<p>Spatial structure of rural entrepreneurship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development of rural entrepreneurship in various countries</li> </ul>	<p>North et al. (2006); Gurău (2009); Traikova et al. (2014); Matei (2013); Istiqomah, Adawiyah (2018); Li et al. (2023)</p>

authors, referring to the concept of space and place, developed two ideal types of entrepreneurship conducted in the countryside (rural areas), introducing the concepts of “rural entrepreneurship” – identified with place and “entrepreneurship in rural areas” – related to space. These works were an impulse for further theoretical considerations and for undertaking large-scale empirical studies.

The empirical contemporary achievements, although showing significant thematic diversity, can be classified into four main research trends (directions), i.e.,

- personality trend referring to the psychological and sociological characteristics of specific individuals and the personal attributes of a rural entrepreneur,
- managerial trend referring to the way of behaving (approach) to business (rural venture),
- functional trend referring to economic, social, cultural, etc. functions of rural entrepreneurship in the local and supra-local dimensions,
- a trend in rural entrepreneurship development in regional and national systems (spatial), focusing mainly on the spatial structure and quantitative development of rural entrepreneurship.

The idea of personality research was to search for traits that make establishing and running a business in rural areas easier (Anderson et al., 1999; Chaves et al., 2010; Besser et al., 2013; Costin et al., 2015; Paul et al., 2015; Smith, 2017). In their works, the authors most often took into account both the psycho-personal characteristics of individuals conducting such activities, as well as the characteristics defined as human and social capital, which is understood as a set of individual characteristics, i.e. innate talents, acquired skills, aspirations, motivations and attitudes that bring the individual success in the field of entrepreneurship, as well as the ability to establish all kinds of relationships and cooperate with others (Sztompka, 2016). It is worth noting that in studies addressing the challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs, social capital is viewed as a crucial factor in

building relationships and fostering conditions for the exchange of knowledge, particularly tacit knowledge, between individuals (Karevoll et al., 2024).

The research undertaken in this area has proven that entrepreneurial activity is determined to the greatest extent by the entrepreneur’s education, business skills, including negotiation, supervisory and coordination skills, and the ability to spot opportunities in the rural environment (Folmera, 2010; Ramadani et al., 2015). According to the majority of researchers, the most significant barrier in this respect is the entrepreneur’s lack of knowledge about the ways and methods of organising such a business, including the lack of business and organisational skills and limited access to the appropriate labour force. Interestingly, many studies also focus on farmers as rural entrepreneurs and examine their behaviour and dynamics as rural entrepreneurs (Kalantaridis et al., 2006; McElwee et al., 2009; Lourenço et al., 2014). Among the papers on the attributes of a rural entrepreneur, many studies emphasise the role of young people in this process (Ataei et al., 2020). As Tabares et al. (2022) noted, among others, the topic of youth in rural business seems dominant in the group of prospective themes. On the one hand, it is a vital factor in dynamising its development, especially in developing countries, where it is often the only alternative to make a living in the countryside. On the other, with appropriate support, the youth have the potential to make a unique contribution to the development of this type of business (Ningrum, 2018; Brown et al., 2017, as cited in Tabares et al., 2022).

Within this trend, researchers also undertook studies on the role of women in the entrepreneurial process in rural areas (De Rosa et al., 2021). These studies emphasise the need for women to undertake this type of activity due to, among others, their significant impact on the economic development of rural areas (Muhamad et al., 2017; Tabares et al., 2022), but also the need to support them in this activity (Nzama, 2021). World literature indicates that although females are excellent as rural entrepreneurs (Barron, 2020), it is

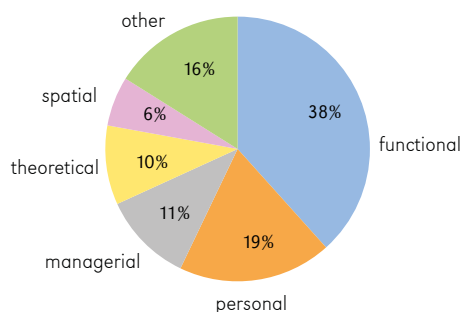
much more difficult for them than for males. It is due to numerous issues, including lack of financial independence, limited access to education, lack of institutional support or government assistance, as well as socio-cultural obstacles resulting from the domination of males in the economic life of many countries (Tabares et al., 2022; Kabir et al., 2012).

Rural entrepreneurship, seen from the manager's perspective, is, in the light of the literature, an attempt to answer the question of how rural entrepreneurs operate or transform ideas into businesses. This topic was taken up by, among others, Bock (2004), McKague et al. (2017); De Los-Rios et al. (2016), Dunne et al. (2021). Within this trend, researchers most often describe diverse strategies, ways and methods entrepreneurs use to start a business. Most of these studies concern developing countries like India, Bangladesh, and China. These studies also show that in rural communities, especially in developing countries, this business is often based on individual work, and cooperatives or social associations are less frequently preferred (Pato et al., 2019).

There is also a high percentage of empirical articles on the broadly understood role of rural entrepreneurship in the local and supra-local environment (Kalantaridis et al., 2006; Greenberg et al., 2018). As indicated in the table, three main research threads can be distinguished due to the different approaches to this issue. However, the key ones for developing the contemporary way of interpreting and describing this concept are those concerning the relationship between rural entrepreneurship and the local environment – the countryside in which it operates (Akgün et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2016). These studies empirically try to prove that rural entrepreneurship is a separate research category. In addition, these studies try to identify a group of local factors that, to the greatest extent, determine the entrepreneurial process in rural areas and, thus, realise the relationship so meaningful for rural entrepreneurship, which is the transformation of space into place (Korsgaard et al., 2015). Ini-

tially, researchers focused only on individual aspects of the local environment and studied their impact on the entrepreneurial process, including primarily the local social context (Jack et al., 2002; Anderson et al., 2016), which became an impulse to search for and verify new research methods and concepts derived from social sciences, i.e. the idea of embeddedness or social ties. Over time, these studies have been extended to include the institutional, economic (Pato et al., 2019) and cultural contexts, although the latter, as noted by Fortunato (2014), is still poorly represented. As a result, there is still a lack of research on the benefits of this type of human activity in landscape, history and culture in rural areas (Fortunato, 2014).

In terms of numbers, the functional field is the most represented – of the articles from both databases, 39% were included in it (Fig. 2). Quite a lot of articles were also included in the personal (18%), managerial (11%) and theoretical (10%) themes. The spatial field is the least represented (only 6% of articles). A relatively large group (16%) of other articles are not classified according to the above trends.



**Figure 2.** Structure of the number of articles by research fields (Scopus and Web of Science databases combined)

To summarise the literature analysis on the subject, the crystallisation of the “rural entrepreneurship” concept forced researchers to change their methodological approach. A characteristic feature of most studies undertaken in this field is small-scale research based on the narrative approach and the

case study method. It is why what distinguishes these papers is the subjective relationship between what is discovered – the object of study, and the discoverer, i.e. the researcher involved in trying to understand what they are experiencing. As Wójcik points out, case studies: “due to the observation of individual facts and fieldwork, rarely leave researchers indifferent to the reality they learn and interpret” (Wójcik, 2021: 43). Still, despite the growing interest in this issue, work in the field of rural entrepreneurship remains on the margin of research related to broadly understood entrepreneurship, and it is also controversial whether a farm based on land and agricultural-related services can be classified as rural entrepreneurship (McElwee & Smith, 2014; Korsgaard et al. 2015).

### **A model of rural entrepreneurship based on the relationship between a rural entrepreneur and a place**

In light of the literature review and contemporary theoretical and methodological views on rural entrepreneurship understood as firmly embedded in the local rural environment not only through the fact of being located in the countryside but also through employing local people, drawing on local resources and offering local products (Wortman, 1990; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Masoomi et al., 2022), it is necessary to note the need to search for new research concepts that are based on the relations between the rural entrepreneur and the place of their activity. These relations, as evidenced by the numerous literatures on the subject, constitute the foundation of rural entrepreneurship and, simultaneously, what distinguishes it from entrepreneurship in rural areas. Contemporary research shows that rural entrepreneurs, and consequently the economic entities they create, are perceived as an integral part of the place and active partners of the local environment (Masoomi et al., 2022), and at the same time, are strongly influenced by their social network (Pato et al., 2018), as well as institutional, cultural, and economic networks. It is, therefore,

impossible to thoroughly understand and describe this phenomenon without identifying these unique bonds connecting the entrepreneur with their environment. Rural entrepreneurship, in its contemporary understanding, can only arise at the interface of these two elements.

Every entrepreneurship, which is some form of action undertaken by a person, regardless of the aspect of its definition (economic, psychosocial or environmental and geographical), is conditioned in at least three ways:

- the specificity of the place – its natural, functional and locational attributes,
- the attributes of the entrepreneur resulting from, among others, family heritage, personality, experience or acquired skills,
- local socio-cultural relations resulting from the place’s historical past (genesis, tradition, roots) and contemporary processes of transformation of the local community (Kulawiak & Suliborski, 2023).

These elements also constitute the basis and starting point for all considerations related to the study of rural entrepreneurship. Considering the theoretical and methodological achievements in this area to date, in this article, we propose a model of rural entrepreneurship in which relations play a key role because, in the light of contemporary views, they distinguish rural entrepreneurship, the essence of which is a strong connection with a place, from entrepreneurship in a rural area related to the rural environment only through the fact of location. The proposed model is therefore based on two pillars – the rural entrepreneur and the place, which has much greater significance than just the local business environment and is understood much more broadly than a space with specific natural, economic or socio-cultural features. In this model, “place” is understood as Tuan calls it in his classic work “Space and Place” (1977) and is identified with humanised space; it is a product of people, it is created in the act of their reflexivity (imagination) and economic activity integrated into the natural, social, economic and cultural background.

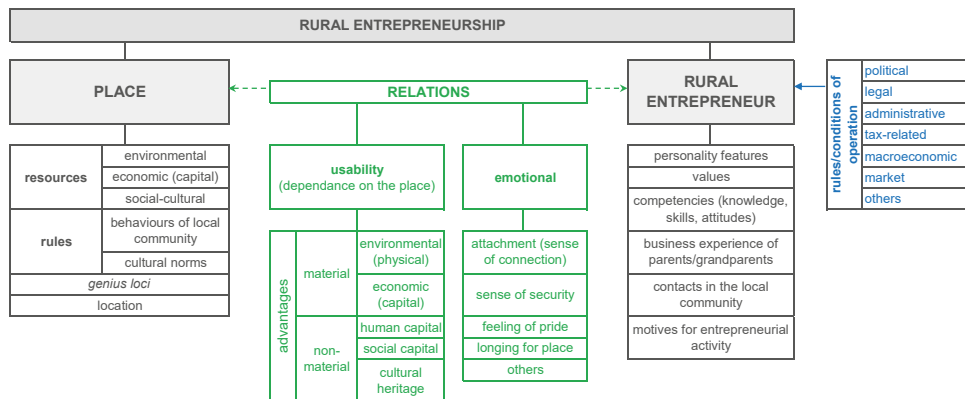
According to Tuan (1977), what distinguishes “place” from “space” is the emotional bond, which makes the impersonal and objective “space” become a subjective “place” and, therefore, something close, essential and full of meanings for the people using it. The place is “a certain fragment people have tamed according to their needs and imagination” (Wójcik, 2021: 34). Therefore, in the proposed model, a place is not only a physical space located in a broader settlement system but also natural, economic (capital) and socio-cultural resources, often of significant value to a rural entrepreneur when running a business. It is also the specific rules of behaviour of the rural community and certain cultural norms, and, what is more, the unique *genius loci* that shape and condition its specificity and uniqueness.

In the light of the literature on the subject, the essence of rural entrepreneurship is a strong connection with the place where it is created, manifested in many aspects, including the use of local social, economic, and natural resources, but also in creating the development of the local environment, even at the expense of one’s personal interest (Islas-Moreno et al., 2021). This makes studying the relationships (bonds) that cause a person to become an entrepreneur and take action in and for the local environment extremely interesting but also an essential aspect of the proposed model. In light of previous research, the bonds that connect a person with a place can be diverse (Lewicka, 2012). However, they are most often classified into two main groups. These are utility bonds (dependence on the place) identified with the opportunities created by the local environment (place) for meeting human needs (in this case, entrepreneurial activities). That is, they are derived from the material and intangible assets of the place where the rural entrepreneur operates. Material assets can be divided into natural (physical) and economic (capital), while intangible assets include human capital, social capital and the cultural heritage of a given place. The second type is emotional bonds, which result from

the entrepreneur’s attachment to the place (sense of connection). They are also associated with the feeling of security, pride and longing for the place.

In rural entrepreneurship, a vital subject remains a person – a rural entrepreneur, who is the direct creator of all changes. It is a person who, among others, uses their competencies, personality traits, experience, and contacts to create local economic activity. In the light of the empirical studies to date, entrepreneurial activity is determined to the greatest extent by features such as education, possession of business skills, including negotiation, supervision, and coordination, as well as the ability to perceive opportunities in the rural environment (Folmera, 2010; Ramadani et al., 2015). In the group of psycho-personal features, the key ones here are propensity to risk, a higher level of self-confidence, or above-average activity (Costin et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016), hence, together with the motives for entrepreneurial activity, they should, in our opinion, be included in the distinguished model. Such motives, often referred to as entrepreneurial intentions, may arise from a variety of factors, which is the subject of research by many other authors (Amofah et al., 2023, 2024; Reissová et al., 2020; Ridha et al. 2017). In addition to the features resulting from the entrepreneur and their close environment, entrepreneurial activity is also determined by the conditions of the external environment, i.e. political, legal, administrative, or tax factors (De Rosa et al., 2015; Dabson, 2021; Amofah et al., 2024). An equally important role may also be played by macroeconomic factors related to the situation at various levels: national, European, and global. Considering the above factors seems equally crucial because a rural entrepreneur, regardless of individual conditions, does not operate in isolation but functions in the environment that influences their activity to a greater or lesser extent. All these factors shape the rules and conditions of the entrepreneur’s functioning and, therefore, should be included in the proposed model.

In our opinion, the proposed model based on pillars, i.e. the rural entrepreneur, the place



**Figure 3.** The model of rural entrepreneurship in terms of the relationship between a rural entrepreneur and a place

of operation and the relations between them, can answer how rural entrepreneurship is created and, in particular, can help understand who and why creates it and what resources they use. It can, therefore, help identify the features that should be strengthened in the context of the potential socio-economic development of the countryside (rural areas). What can be treated as limitations of the model, is the lack of possibility to discover how entrepreneurship changes the place, not only in the broadly understood material sphere (natural, economic, etc.) but also in the non-material sphere, including social or cultural. Therefore, in our opinion, this model can be a conceptual framework for research on rural entrepreneurship, which, as a result of empirical verification, can be improved and possibly supplemented.

### Conclusions

The research indicates a dynamic increase in interest in rural entrepreneurship since the first decade of the twenty-first century, confirmed by analyses of publication data from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Articles on these issues are indexed in increasing numbers, and in recent years, they have exceeded 50 per year. This is a significant increase, which proves the growing interest in research in rural entrepreneurship. Although

rural entrepreneurship, as shown by the literature review, is an issue undertaken with great intensity only recently, several research directions can be distinguished in its development. Among them, the direction of theoretical and methodological considerations and four directions based on the results of empirical research were distinguished: functional, personality, managerial, and spatial, relating to the development of rural entrepreneurship in national and regional systems. Several vital problems and more critical research topics can be identified in these research directions, allowing for a better understanding of the areas of interest for researchers in rural entrepreneurship.

It is worth adding that the research problems presented in the table 2 did not arise simultaneously but evolved along with the change in the direction of researchers' interests. The clarification of the definition of rural entrepreneurship, and thus the need to refer to local factors in research and their use, resulted in the appearance of papers drawing to a greater extent on the achievements and concepts developed in the field of social research, i.e. the idea of embeddedness, social bonds, psychology of place. As a result, in studies devoted to rural entrepreneurship researchers started to refer to phenomenology and narrative research, including biographies of entrepreneurs and their individual

experiences, at the expense of strictly economic analyses. As time passed, an increasing role in the literature began to be attached to explaining how space becomes a place for an entrepreneur rather than to its strictly quantitative characteristics.

In light of the available literature on the subject, it is also worth adding that the various theoretical and methodological concepts used by researchers to measure rural entrepreneurship, on the one hand, help to understand better and explain the subtle differences in the quality and nature of rural entrepreneurship in various rural environments. On the other hand, they prove that this issue is still an inspiring and not fully discovered research subject. This results from the fact that the "content" of rural entrepreneurship is relational, and in the same situation, the same stimulus or local environment can be perceived and used differently by different entrepreneurial people. This makes rural entrepreneurship unique and can be different in each rural environment.

The analysis of international literature indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases also provides practical conclusions for research on rural entrepreneurship undertaken in Poland. There is a visible need to distinguish entrepreneurship conducted in rural areas from urban areas. Moreover, due to their specificity, distinctions and applications of different theoretical and methodological approaches also require the study of business ventures related to rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in rural areas. There is no doubt about this in light of the analysis of international literature on the subject. While entrepreneurship in rural areas can be analysed through the prism of economic theories, using concepts based on classical economics, rural entrepreneurship requires looking through the prism of social concepts, including place or cultural landscape. These approaches allow for identifying and describing the relationships that connect a person with their immediate environment, i.e., capturing the essence of this phenomenon. At this point, a special place in the study

of this process belongs to social geography, which, as a subdiscipline of geography, tries to capture and describe these relationships. Since it arose from researchers' interest in the relationships connecting human groups with the physical substrate (Wójcik, 2021: 13), social geography seems predisposed to undertake such research like no other discipline. Undertaking such research may constitute an opportunity for geography in its theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretical, because it gains a new, interesting subject of research in the form of rural entrepreneurship, the specificity of which is based on the mutual relations between the environment and humans. Therefore, correctly identifying and describing it can significantly enrich the existing geographical knowledge. On the other hand, there is an application benefit because rural entrepreneurship is widely recognised as one of the most critical factors determining the socio-economic development of rural areas. Therefore, its research can significantly contribute to understanding this phenomenon and helping decision-makers conduct regional and local policy in rural areas more effectively, including shaping appropriate development strategies that consider the specificity of rural entrepreneurship.

The proposed model of rural entrepreneurship based on the relationship between a rural entrepreneur and a place may help take advantage of this opportunity. It seems particularly interesting as a conceptual framework for socio-economic geographers' research. Thanks to this concept, it is possible to better understand the role of the place and its relationship with the entrepreneur as a vital element for rural entrepreneurship. This model considers bilateral relationships, both emotional and place utility, constituting a comprehensive approach to the study of rural entrepreneurship in this new approach. Therefore, the article constitutes a valuable contribution to research on rural entrepreneurship, presenting current trends and research directions in this area and proposing a research model based on the relationship between the entrepreneur and the place.

The research work and its results, as presented in this article, also provide directions for further possible research. First, an interesting topic may be the differences between rural and urban entrepreneurship in Polish conditions. However, it should be realised that taking up this topic is a challenging and complex task. There is also a need to deepen research in the context of rural entrepreneurship, in particular regarding the value system and traditions of entrepreneurs and the local community surrounding them, which will allow for partial empirical verification of the proposed model. Although undoubtedly requiring empirical verification, the outlined research framework for rural entrepreneurship provides for a better description and understanding of this issue. In particular, it can expand the current state of knowledge in this area with aspects such as:

- answering the question of how the local environment (place) directly affects rural entrepreneurship, and thus how these resources stimulate it and which of them are used and why, i.e. which are most important for the development of the rural environment (in other words, it allows identifying unique features of the village that enable the creation and development of a specific project),
- enabling analysis of the entrepreneurship process at the level of micro-processes and its role in creating rurality,
- allowing noticing the diversity of entrepreneurial activities in rural areas and, consequently, identifying the diversity in the way rural resources are used and its effects in various rural environments,

- allowing the capture of the “intimate relationship” between the entrepreneurial activity of a person – the entrepreneur – and the rural environment (place), where it is not just a location.

Future studies can deepen these considerations by researching how the emotional bond between entrepreneur and place is built and, where such ties exist, what characteristics these people and places have. This would allow an understanding of how ties are constructed and whether these relationships can be replicated in other territories.

Thus, using the proposed model as a research framework may contribute to a better understanding of two issues that have yet to receive much attention in the literature. The first relates to how the unique features of the local environment (place) shape entrepreneurial behaviour and the impact of entrepreneurial activities on regional development and, thus, on their ability to counteract crises (so-called resilience). Moreover, it also fits into the need to contextualise and systematise research on this issue.

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