

How online communities are important for rural entrepreneurial change – the library revolt

The library
revolt

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Josefina Jonsson and Johan Gaddefors

*Department of Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Uppsala, Sweden*

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to discuss how an online community interacts with a local community during the entrepreneurial process. By having a contextualized view of entrepreneurship, this study acknowledges the social and spatial dynamics of the process.

Design/methodology/approach – The inductive approach used in this study is empirically anchored in the case “the library revolt”. This paper analysed interviews conducted in a selected region in Sweden and followed a netnographic method to capture the social interactions online. By using qualitative modes of inquiry, this study attempts to illuminate the social aspects of the entrepreneurial process.

Findings – This study shows how social media works as a contextual element in entrepreneurship. By presenting interactions between an online community and a rural community, it is shown how entrepreneurial processes in rural areas can be shaped not only through local community relations but also by online interaction. It illustrates how an online context, where actors are located with their own unique set of resources, contributes to rural development. By being a part of an ongoing process of structuration, we can view the actors as gaining access to the resources online, which contributes to the change happening in a local community.

Originality/value – This study adds to the conversation of the role of context in entrepreneurship studies. Rural entrepreneurship largely discusses the local social bonds and actions, while this study includes the online social bonds as a part of the reality in which entrepreneurship is developed.

Keywords Entrepreneurship, Online community, Local community, Context, Embeddedness, Rural

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In 2015, 4,700 books in a rural municipality library were stolen and hidden in a secret archive, as a protest to the closing of the library. In the following days, this story was covered by local and national news media as The Library Revolt in Ravenville.

How could the many online support the few in the small rural town? In this article, we add online activities to the local entrepreneurial process. We tell the story about the Library Revolt; how a group of locals, trying to save and renew the local library, got unexpected support from a rapidly developing online community. We want to explain how a small, rural



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community of people started a movement that spread online and how the scale of this online community turned the tide in the rural municipality.

In theory and practice, entrepreneurship is seen as a key driver of rural development (Pato and Teixeira, 2016) or, actually in many rural cases, the mechanism preserving the status quo, that may help these areas in handling the challenges that are related to institutional thinness (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Cooperation within and in between groups of people located in remote areas is essential to generate new practices and building support to enable entrepreneurship (Johamisson, 1990; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Most often, the argument for more entrepreneurship is related to the blessings of small business start-ups, including, for example, new jobs and increased tax revenues for the municipality (Müller, 2016). But rural areas are more than production spaces; they are multifunctional spaces for leisure, working, living and recreation (Bosworth, 2012, Markantoni and van Hoven, 2012). The values produced in entrepreneurial processes are multifaceted; Korsgaard and Anderson (2011) emphasize values from individual self-realization over community development to broad societal impact. This is how a local library can be a valuable hub for change in a small rural town.

Entrepreneurship research has emphasized local resources and embeddedness in the creation of values in rural areas (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Local embeddedness can bridge the structural lack of resources as well as contributing with vital information (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Non-local connections have been brought out to show how rural entrepreneurs go further than the local place in the search for partners, resources and markets (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Adding to the importance of the local and the non-local, online engagement has been brought into play.

So far, the physical space has dominated the explanations, but we need to develop our understanding of how the virtual space (Aslesen *et al.*, 2019) is part of the local change processes. Fahmi and Savira (2021) state that digitalization shapes how rural entrepreneurs develop their attitude and it is the surrounding factors (social and environmental) which will influence how rural entrepreneurs choose to continue with implementing digital solutions in their venture. So, these surrounding factors, usually referred to as context, is of importance here. But what happens when the context expands and the few in a small rural town engage with the many online?

To sort out the interactions between local and online engagement, we turn to the structuration perspective in the entrepreneurship literature (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Fletcher, 2011). In particular, this perspective helps us to describe who is involved and how engagement in a social movement can be what constitutes a community; in other words, what people gather around. Our story shows how a local change process starts, how a non-local online community takes agency in the process, how the initiative moves between the local and the online community. It questions what the results can be when the initiative moves online and what happened when the online community cooled off. With this background, we ask, how does an online community interact with a local community during the entrepreneurial process?

This study argues that entrepreneurship as a change process is developing because of the interactivity between the online and local communities. In our view, the library is one of many links that together shape a productive socio-spatial context in our rural municipality case. Thus, we acknowledge and will depart from the contextual turn in entrepreneurship research where the place is seen as the nexus where entrepreneurial process and values are realized (Welter, 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). Adding the online sphere to spatial and social context makes it possible to gain new insights regarding how entrepreneurship works in a digitalizing world (Aslesen *et al.*, 2019).

In the next section, we present entrepreneurship as a local change process, emphasizing contextual factors, followed by a discussion about the local and online communities. To advance entrepreneurship research, we provide insights on how the online community and local community develop in dialogue during the library revolt. Our empirical findings illustrate in detail how the dialogue developed over time. In Section 5, we develop our theoretical framework and the contributions.

2. Contexts and communities

Individuals' actions are enabled and constrained by their contexts, but how individuals and contexts change as a result of this interaction is more difficult to explain (McKeever *et al.*, 2015). Welter (2011) gave us four contexts to handle: business, social, spatial and institutional. The business context has received the most attention in entrepreneurship research, and social as well as institutional contexts are well-developed perspectives. The interest in spatial context is increasing (McKeever *et al.*, 2015; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017) and so is the focus on the combination of the socio-spatial context. The spatial context adds to the sense-making in the entrepreneurial process by including a perspective of meaning and heritage (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b).

2.1 *Entrepreneurship and context*

Entrepreneurship has been described as strongly dependent on social interactions (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Johannisson, 2011). Anderson *et al.* (2012, p.964) view entrepreneurship as “dynamic in bringing together, connecting, interrelated and complicated elements of both self and circumstance”. This process perspective of entrepreneurship shows how connecting and embedding are fundamental to entrepreneurship in place (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). But how new technologies such as social media and Facebook influence the connecting in change processes is in need of more thorough investigation.

For understanding what happened in our case, we view the entrepreneurial process as about “‘doing contexts’; that is, [entrepreneurs] construct the contexts in which they operate as agentic responses to the environments they confront” (Welter and Baker, 2020, p. 41). We can view the “doing of context” as actions emerging from the different environments the entrepreneurs are embedded in (Welter and Baker, 2020). Gaddefors and Anderson (2019, p. 1) suggest it is “about engagement with contexts rather than simply within a context”. We use the “doing of context” to discuss how the entrepreneurial process happens in spatially dependent relations between people.

Research shows that to shape and sustain ventures in a rural context, embeddedness plays a key role (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Welter (2011) emphasized the local collective process in community entrepreneurship. In addition, Fortunato (2014) showed how local and regional elements took part in the process. Peoples' local knowledge about the landscape (physical, cultural and historical) and the local interest regarding the well-being and concern for the rural community are good examples (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Thus, social embeddedness and also “placial” embeddedness are enabling factors in entrepreneurship development (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b).

2.2 *Communities and structuration*

Anderson and Gaddefors (2016) view places as structural qualities that shape agency and are shaped by agency. As such, communities consist of people interacting and building connections in a place. However, in our library case, we do not only have a geographical place shaping agency, but also an online. To understand how entrepreneurial change and social context co-evolve, we turn to structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a lens to describe

and understand our two interconnected communities. In the field of information systems, research has taken a structuration perspective to “help reveal how technical systems [such as social media] can support or hinder human interaction” (Evans and Brooks, 2005, p. 215). Structuring can help us to explore how the online and local social structure generate responses to the environments; in other words, how context is reconstructed (Baker and Welter, 2020).

If we look at what brings people together, we can use the concept of communities of practice (CoP), where members are self-assigned and held together based on commitment, passion or expertise (Wenger, 2000). The communities are only lasting, when there is an interest maintained in the group and people act upon (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). Often, we refer to community of practice, as being rooted in place (Somerville and McElwee, 2011), but we see a growing interest in online CoP where membership is organized, not as physical meetings, but as involvement in a writing practice (Stommel and Koole, 2010). Members participating in online CoP experience relational value (Faraj *et al.*, 2016; Dubé *et al.*, 2006).

But talking about groups on social media as one community can be misleading. Hannerz (2016) raise the point that social media can be seen as a form of online co-sociality, consisting of several parallel social movements, rather than one community. However, we can use “online community” as an empirical lens for when we zoom out to look at the processes trying to trace connections (Nicolini, 2009). When we zoom in, we can rather see that the social media environment has developed into the state of being a temporary bounded sociality (Perren and Kozinets, 2018) with several social movements.

2.3 Communities, context and entrepreneurship as relational

With the expansion of social media use, the traditional boundaries between social spheres have disappeared (Berg, 2015), and in communication, we no longer are dependent upon barriers related to time and space. Aslesen *et al.* (2019) raise the point that the virtual space can reinforce as well as create new linkages of knowledge. Because of this, the distinction between the geographical and the virtual becomes more blurred (Berg, 2015; Aslesen *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the internet cannot be seen as a placeless “cyberspace”; rather, we should acknowledge that it is used by various people, in real-world locations (Martin *et al.*, 2000) as an extension of the material and enable a local place’s social relations to stretch over the world. These social processes are important for understanding how this change because of digitalization occurs, instead of only describing the outcome in the local place (Fahmi and Savira, 2021).

Wenger (1998) refer to community as a group of people who share domain and practices. He focuses on the participation in joint actions which create the community. Thus, communities can be understood as activities. In similarity to this, we use the “doing context” (Baker and Welter, 2020) to understand entrepreneurial processes as activities and Giddens (1984) structuring to understand how contexts are constantly renegotiated.

The relational aspect is important, as communities both have a vertical structure consisting of ties in a local place, and also a horizontal structure where local communities are inter-connected (Warren, 1961). This connects to Korsgaard *et al.*'s (2015a) view on how entrepreneurs use both local and non-local resources when bridging context(s). Based on Warren's (1961) idea about horizontal and vertical connection, we use the lens of context, as suggested by Korsgaard *et al.* (2015a), to explore these communities, relations and how contemporary technology enables these relations.

3. Our approach

The empirical setting for this study is located in the mid of the Swedish region *Bergslagen*. We have chosen the fictional name *Ravenville* for the specific town where the story takes

place. Ravensville is situated in a forest landscape and has a long history of mining and processing iron, which dates back to the 1500s.

We combined an ethnographic (Johnstone, 2007) and a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019) for collecting empirical material. Interviews and online text material were collected in the autumn of 2019. Three respondents (Table 2) and a defined Facebook group consisting of 1,200 individuals (Table 3) were chosen because of their involvement in the library.

By using qualitative modes of inquiry, we attempt to discuss the social aspects of the process. When focusing on the surrounding conditions, we argue in line with Flyvbjerg (2012) regarding actions being context-dependent. The process design this study takes is appropriate to explore the contexts, content and development of change (Van de Ven, 2007). This will include an event-driven approach, where the focus is to unfold “how does the entrepreneurship process unfold over time?” (Van de Ven and Engleman, 2004, p. 355). By having an inductive approach to examine the selected area, this study will explore the social world from the perspective of the participating individuals.

3.1 Material collection

Our first step in this study was to visit Ravensville. We discussed with locals and made observations. Field notes from discussions in the local grocery shop and photographs worked as a developing base for the empirical field. The second step consisted of identifying and contacting key stakeholders in “the library revolt”. We conducted interviews with three respondents and collected netnographic data from social media sources. The length of the interviews varied between 1 and 4 h, and was determined depending on the amount of emerging content. When meeting with the respondents, we focused on a semi-structured interview guide with themes that we wanted to cover. This leads to a dynamic conversation with the respondents and we attained rich material regarding the history and context of the place.

As we are interested in how people create and engage in their context, we followed the language or “online traces” (Kozinets, 2019) as well. As Welter and Baker (2020) put it: “Language is a crucial element that shapes, influences and constructs contexts and to which we need to attend in exploring and explaining differences in entrepreneurship” (p. 130). To track the online traces, we chose a “netnographic” (Kozinets, 2019) approach.

Netnography is a systematic research method for online ethnography, consisting of different research practices (Kozinets, 2019). The *investigative* procedure used in this article indicates a selective approach where we “choose from among the vast and ever-increasing wealth of informational traces created in the act of communications between people on social media platforms, and saved in archives and real-time recordings of social media interaction” (Kozinets, 2019 p.193). When we have an investigative approach, we can select a topic in a forum, follow a hashtag or select a Facebook group that will constitute our narrowing down of the field. This was our way to include online material published on the library’s Facebook page. Table 1 shows an overview of the collection and purposes of material from Ravensville and the Facebook group.

In Table 2, we present an overview of the respondents we met, their primary function in the revolt and their relationship to Ravensville. We have chosen to set fictional names to preserve the integrity of the respondents.

To capture the online material from the public Facebook group related to the library revolt, we adopted the NCapture plugin for NVivo. NCapture enabled the download of the full posts, links, images, reactions and comments as a data set to be imported to NVivo. However, the individuals’ identities are not captured in the extracted material but are instead given a generated code number. For this paper, we have reviewed 538 posts.

All were collected into a data set in which we continued with the analysis of the material. In [Table 3](#), we present subgroups from the online material, the timing for the collection and people's relationships to Ravenville.

3.2 Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were divided thematically, where we focused on touching upon different themes ([Bryman and Bell, 2011](#)). The interviews were processed through a coding technique to turn the material into a communicative story ([Saldaña, 2015](#)). The methodological techniques chosen help us to develop an understanding of the library development process and the contextual factors. Quotes from the material are presented to

Table 1.
Collection and purposes of empirics

Collection method	Participant involvement	Specific research purpose and additional comments
Field work: observation Interviews	Passive	Locating specific issues to investigate and key individuals to contact
	Active	To investigate the individuals' perception and use of Facebook
Netnography	Passive	To map the entrepreneurial process Map the online story of the entrepreneurial process To capture the online social dynamics

Table 2.
Overview of the respondents and relationship to Ravenville

Material	Primary function	Time	Type	Relationship to Ravenville
Respondent A <i>Anna</i>	Initiator of the revolt, participant in the process and coordinator	September 2019	Interview	Born in the area. Have been living in a medium-sized town for 50 years. Moved back in 2014
Respondent B <i>Bella</i>	Initiator of the revolt and participant in the process	September 2019	Interview	Born in the UK, moved to the area in 2010
Respondent C <i>Caren</i>	Initiator of the revolt and participant in the process	September 2019	Interview	Established local family

Table 3.
Overview of the online material and locational relationship

Material	Time	Type	Relationship to Ravenville
Facebook group (1,200 individuals) 1. Local inhabitants 2. Expatriates 3. Summertime residents	Material from 2015 to 2019	Online text material	Created by the organizing group 1. Living in the area 2. Emotional attachment 3. Range from well-established to newcomers
4. Political engaged 5. Library supporters			4. Emotionally engaged in rural areas in general 5. No visible relationship

provide authenticity to the text. In this way, we attempt to make sense of the studied communities and provide the reader with insights and details.

With the data set generated by NCapture, we attained the online material in chronological order. In the initial stage, we adopted a descriptive coding technique which helped us categorize the material to get an overview, in agreement with [Saldaña \(2015\)](#). This was done by examining a portion of the empirical material at the time and summarizing it with a representative label. By adopting the coding technique, it is possible to dig into the material and stimulate analytical ideas in the process ([Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019](#)). The purpose was to divide the material and abstracting it at a higher level ([Gelman et al., 2018](#)). When we approached the material, we found it useful to zoom in and out as suggested by [Nicolini \(2009\)](#). We zoomed in to capture the socialization process and zoomed out to view patterns and the effects in the larger perspective. This was important for acknowledging the diversity that occurred online, as well as locally.

With the presented steps above, we want to attain an overall understanding of the process, acknowledging the context and situational factors. If we would have done a longer ethnographic study, it would have opened up for the opportunity to create a deeper understanding of the values and power dimensions ([Flyvbjerg, 2012](#)) of the local place. However, we choose to rather focus on the online story and understanding the relations between the local and virtual place.

In the next section, we will continue by presenting our story about *the library revolt*.

4. Library revolt in Ravenville

What happened in Ravenville 2014–2018? In short, our story starts when ten locals, “the friends of the library”, decided to engage against the local municipality’s decision to close the local library. Next, they started a Facebook group, “the library revolt”, to organize their work. After a while, they got unexpected online support. About 1,000 people joined “the library revolt” Facebook group, what became an FB-based movement and an able-bodied player in the library revolt. As a result of combined efforts from locals and the online community, they succeeded in their task. In the aftermath, we saw a passive online community but a continuously engaged local community. [Figure 1](#) is an illustration of the library revolt and the most significant events that took place. In the following sections, we present a detailed account of what happened in and in between the local and online communities.

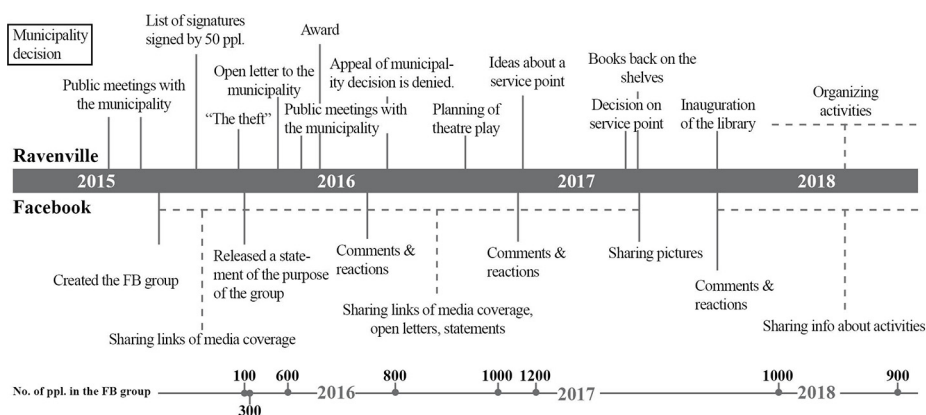


Figure 1. Process of the library revolt from 2014 to 2018, including the number of participants in the Facebook group

4.1 Local community

This section will chronologically tell the story of the library revolt in Ravenville, divided into three parts: the theft, the parley and the solution.

4.1.1 The theft. The story for this paper began in 2014. In a rural area in mid-Sweden, the municipality officials of Ravenville planned to close the local library and replace it with a book bus, a small library on wheels. The building, in which the library was located, belonged to the church and the municipality rented it to run the library. The library in Ravenville was taken care of by one part-time librarian. The rationality behind the decision was to save money for the municipality by providing full library services only in the more densely populated regions of the municipality. But, ten engaged locals got together and decided to take a stand for the library. In their view, the library was an important social hub for everyone in Ravenville:

When the church closed a couple of years ago, the library was the only place that you could meet your neighbours and friends outside of the home. It was our only meeting place! (Anna).

Engaged locals reacted and created a local protest group, *the friends of the library*, to organize their resistance towards the library being shut down. The group worked together to write open letters to the municipality, planned actions and attended public forums given by the municipality to raise their concerns. Historically, Ravenville is shaped by a collective understanding of the history of the place and its role for service development:

If something is to be done, we have to do it ourselves (Bella).

During the spring of 2015, the municipality decided to end the renting agreement with the church and replace the library with a book bus. In August 2015, the evening before the municipality would come to retrieve the books, about 20 people gathered in the library to socialize. At that point, the frustration grew and the local group explored different opportunities of stopping the closure. They decided to hide all of the 4,700 library books:

She sat and pondered and then she said "I'm making a call" and then she sat here looking at the parking lot and called the church and asked if it was ok if we could have [...] and he said yes. [...] We just started cheering and I called my husband who came with moving boxes and then it was just to pack the books. And then we just started to move them [...]. The church had some papers left. [...] It went pretty fast (Anna).

During that evening in August, the 4,700 library books were hidden in a secret archive in the library building. This was an extraordinary occasion for the locals involved. None of them had ever taken action against the authorities, nor stolen anything on this scale. The situation created strong bonds among the participants and strengthened the sense of community.

We're not saying this to anyone. Nobody in here is allowed to say anything, and we're simply just saying we've taken care of them [the books]. It took a long time before we told anyone or that it came out (Bella).

In the following days, the story was covered by local and national news media as *the library revolt* and became publicly known in Sweden. The media covered the story as "4700 books stolen by protesters". But the protesters did not perceive it as anything intentionally illegal:

And my granddaughter said to me: "Grandma, will the police come and put you in jail?" and I was perplexed! I never thought about what we did as illegal – we just hid the books" (Anna).

During the following months, the local group *the friends of the library* searched for possible solutions on how to find a new library solution for Ravenville in discussion with the municipality and neighbours, continuously sharing their struggle and progress with the

members in the Facebook group. The *friends of the library* discussed possible solutions to open their library and how it would be imaginable. They also got a lot of attention both on Facebook and in Swedish media:

We got enormous support and attention. The story was covered from the north to the south of Sweden. It was powerful (Caren).

There were many reasons for engaging in the revolt from the start. Among the participating group, some wanted to sustain the tradition of the old library in Ravenville, others saw the library as the social hub in the village and some wanted to enable access to books for the kids in the village. These social ties shaped a subset of connections within the initial revolt group. In [Table 4](#), we show the key motivation of engagement among the three respondents who were central to the revolt.

4.1.2 The parley. For the *friends of the library*, 2015 was a troublesome year, with many drawbacks. Discussions between them and the Ravenville officials continued with open letters to the municipality in question. They talked about how to solve the problem with the missing books and the closed library. The media were still interested in the revolt. There were debate articles about the right to have libraries and on a more general level the lack of services in rural areas. Thus, in the media coverage, we could see how the revolt became a symbol for the rural/urban divide in society.

However, in December 2015, the local group was acknowledged when they were rewarded with a prize “citizens of the year” for their struggle and contribution to fighting for enabling a thriving countryside.

The *friends of the library* continued to have a dialogue with people in the village, as well as with the municipality to find solutions. Many local people wanted to help with finding a location or show their support in different ways. They had ideas on renting other buildings, but as there was no money to cover the costs, it was difficult:

We went around in the village and tried to see where we could have the library, but with no funding to cover the costs – it is difficult (Anna).

Another significant point for the *friends of the library* was when a nearby theatre group decided to develop a play, based on the story of the library.

We recognized a lot of the people [in the FB group] from the theatre. They had followed our fight (Bella).

With the story of library revolt, being reframed in a theatre play, *the friends of the library* got even more force infused in their struggle. Through the play, they could feel that they have done something good for the village.

4.1.3 The solution. Amid alternative ideas, a civil servant in Ravenville presented an idea of reframing the concept of a library to a *service point*. The library would be the main activity, but they would add services such as tourist information, cultural events and internet access. With this expansion of services, they would be eligible to attain funding to enable and finance the establishment of a new library. But the idea was not welcomed by *the*

Material	Respondent A	Respondent B	Respondent C
Social ties	Enabling a social life in the village	Enabling a social life in the village	Preserving cultural heritage

Table 4.
Reason for engagement in the revolt among the respondents

friends of the library. They were still angry and disappointed at the municipality people for closing the library:

When you have a protest movement, you face a wall. It is us against them. [. . .] But it was Anna who saw the opportunity in it (Caren).

In this situation, Anna saw the opportunity in collaborating with the municipality, and she tried to rebuild confidence between the two parties. She had previous experience with working together with municipalities and had an idea of how it could be arranged. By providing the services required, they could cover the cost of the facilities they need for a library. When she was the one who presented the idea to the others in the group, they were instead positive.

In 2017, the old library building was sold, and *the friends of the library* managed to create an agreement with the buyer: they rented the lower floor for establishing a service point with library activities and the buyer's family would live on the top floor. In February 2017, *the friends of the library* got the decision from the municipality that they would get funding for having a "rural service point". The non-profit organization would attain funds for having tourist information, providing internet access and organizing social activities. However, they did not get any funding for having a library. *The friends of the library* decided to take this opportunity and create a service point, where they also could have a library.

The library was liberated through the engagements of the local agents and started to form into a private, non-profit organization based on voluntary efforts. But a lot of work was to be done. When the municipality closed the library, they managed to remove everything – except for the books:

The municipality had taken everything. So we had to go home to each other and beg for shelves to have anything to put the books in (Anna).

The books were returned to the public and the library opened again with a series of activities and celebrations. The *friends of the library* got attention again in national media and were asked to share the story with a good ending.

4.2 *The online community*

Section 4.1 shows what we usually refer to as community entrepreneurship: local group of people working together to create change. Below, we present the online story happening parallel to what we viewed in the local place.

4.2.1 *The theft*. In the summer of 2015, the *friends of the library* created a Facebook group: *the library revolt*. The local group wanted to spread the word about what was going on in the local place and inform people about what they were doing to solve the issues. The people in Ravenville with roughly 200 inhabitants managed to get over 300 people to join the library revolt Facebook group in one day. The number of followers increased continuously and the revolt became known in Sweden. As the number of followers plays an important role in mobilizing action, we can see how the increasing number of participants in the Facebook group was welcomed. The moderators in the group shared the progress: "100 likes on the page! THANK YOU to everyone who supports the LIBRARY REVOLT!" and also encouraging the people in the group to gather more people: "Invite your friends to LIKE the page! Share, share, share!!!" The group rapidly grew: "The library revolt is here. Since the start yesterday, we are now over 300 in the group. Together we can influence and create change". Although the "cost" of joining an online revolt is quite low, we can see this revolt group strive for attaining a large number of followers as a part of their action.

One reoccurring topic in the Facebook group when it started was positive and encouraging comments. The *friends of the library* said that they were in a constant struggle during the process and turned to the Facebook group to share their burdens. The reaction they

got was support for their struggle: “I admire you. Hang in there!” The *friends of the library* were asking if they did the right thing, and got instant positive feedback from the Facebook group. The online community was positive and encouraging to the actions made by the local group “I think you are fantastic who can continue and never give up” and the local group continuously confirmed the support: “Thank you, yes, we really do feel the encouragement!”.

Within the Facebook group, we can see different reasons for engagement. Because the group is consisting of individuals from different spheres, joining around a certain cause, they all had different lenses when engaging in the group. In our material, we can see some local supporters wanting to show support for their neighbours. Others have lived in the area and expressed a feeling of disappointment for what has become of Ravenville with the service reduction. We can also see summertime residents who are not embedded in the local place as much, but still express the need for service opportunities when they decide to visit their house. We can also see streams of politically engaged, who use Ravenville as an example of a systematic problem in Sweden. Another group that was visible was the library supporters, who saw this as a threat to the Swedish democratic landscape and access to knowledge. In [Table 5](#), we sum up the different reasons for engagement in the revolt.

4.2.2 The parley. We can see that it is not only the question of the library that was of interest in this Facebook group. Opinions about education, democracy and the urban/rural divide are represented in the material: “Many people argue that it is important to preserve the countryside, but few do anything at all to take their statements seriously” (*Facebook user*), “They are closing down the rural areas” (*Facebook user*), “We need a vivid countryside!” or “Having access to books is a cornerstone of democracy” (*Facebook user*).

The Facebook group rapidly grew into a vivid dialogue of the function of libraries, the exposed rural areas, views of politics and liberation. “They have hidden 4,700 books to save the village library. But the Library revolt is about much more than a collection of books” (*Facebook user*), “Join our political party! [. . .] We can be strong together all over Sweden!” (*Facebook user*) or “Civil disobedience scares most municipalities - I personally think it is a sign of health that we should use it a little more and not find ourselves in that we, in rural areas, get worse and worse” (*Facebook user*). These sorts of comments or posts were intertwined with posts from the admin group, who shared the struggles they had with the municipality.

In [Table 6](#), we present examples from the discussion in the FB group. In the material, we found several discussions developing. Some are not at all related to the core question (the Ravenville library), while some make up a massive force of positivity for the cause in question. There are many discussions about Ravenville and rural areas in general, although we can see in our material that not all participating individuals have connections to Ravenville. But the discussion developed into an online representation of what “rural” is and, should be. On the other hand, we can also see individuals offer their opinions and others agreeing or disagreeing with

Who	Reason for engagement
Local inhabitants	Show support
Expatriates	Claim identity and protect cultural heritage
Summertime residents	Protect the area from service reduction
Political engaged	Protest against service reduction of rural areas in general
Library supporters	Defend the democratic right of knowledge
	Symbolic action
	Claim identity

Table 5.
Reason for
engagement in the
revolt among
the individuals in the
Facebook group

Example	1 st level code <i>(Descriptive)</i>	2 nd level <i>(Pattern)</i>	Theme	Online engagement in a local place: COP development
<p>"Many people argue that it is important to preserve the countryside, but few do anything at all to take their statements seriously."</p> <p>"They are closing down the rural areas."</p> <p>"We need a vivid countryside!"</p>	Declining rural areas	Experiences and opinions regarding life in rural areas	Online representation rurality	
<p>"Darn, what a tough and stubborn municipality you live in."</p> <p>"Politicians should listen to the people otherwise they should be replaced!"</p> <p>"Short-term politics by politicians leads to rural poverty!"</p>	Politics			
<p>"You have been and are very capable and energetic. Keep on fighting!"</p> <p>"You're the best. You keep on!"</p> <p>"You can do this!"</p> <p>"Wonderful, sending support from Stockholm!"</p> <p>"I am sharing this in my network!" <i>(re-occurring phrase)</i></p>	Encouragement	Participation	Shared engagement	
<p>"Don't give up. Continue to fight!"</p> <p>"Continue the fight for the countryside!"</p> <p>"Civil disobedience is good and frightful for politicians. I think it is good that we do not settle by having worse off."</p> <p>"Up to battle!"</p>	Fight			
<p>"Every person in this country has the right to the library's offer!"</p> <p>"The right to culture, is that only for the urban areas?"</p> <p>"This is discrimination!"</p>	Equality			

Table 6.
Themes from the
library revolt
Facebook group

them. This created social bonds about "what we share" online, a kind of temporary bounded sociality developed online. All this together created a temporary bounded sociality among the supporters in the Facebook group.

4.2.3 *The solution.* When the library got the decision to be a "service point with library activities", the Facebook group reacted positively, claiming that "It pays to resist". The

Facebook posts about the library re-opening got many *likes* and *shares*, which reach far away from the forests in mid-Sweden. After the decision about re-opening, we can see that the comments changed character. During 2015–2016, most comments showed engagement and a willingness to help the revolt further. However, at this stage, the comments reflected a closure or departure. The individuals online wrote in similar ways: “This is great news! Good luck in the future!” or “What a success story! Best of luck” and “Congratulations! Good luck with your project”. The *friends of the library* answered these comments with “Thank you for all the support during our journey! We hope to see you at some point!” showing respect to the online community that *had* helped them and a type of exit signal.

In August 2017, the library started to have activities and ordinary library services. The *friends of the library* continued to share the activities in the Facebook group, but the engagement quickly declined when the purpose of the group changed. Now, it was no longer a bounded sociality. The group converted to a platform for marketing the activities. We can see a reduction in comments, likes and shares on the posts made after the opening of the library.

To sum up, the *friends of the library* used Facebook as a platform for spreading information about their process, but also for influencing the members of the platform to take action. By raising awareness about their cause, they put pressure on the municipality while at the same time they attained support for themselves.

4.3 Connecting the online and local community

In Section 4, we have so far told one story from the perspective of the Ravenville-based group “the friends of the library” (Section 4.1) and one story from the perspective of the online based group “the library revolt” (Section 4.2). It is now time to combine the two stories, to explain how people in place and people on social media interact to create change in a local place. We focus on the emerging socio-spatial context and how the initiative is moving between people located in the small town and people online.

When we reunite the two communities, we see how they energize each other over time. We can see the participants of the Facebook group all come from different spheres with a diverse set of sense of belonging and identities. In spite of this, they unite around a certain cause and get involved. The process of developing an online social movement, with political goals, amplified the perceived local social movement and energized the local actors to continue their struggle. The community developed online discussions, with a mutual exchange of information and support.

We saw how the two communities interacted in a process of structuring, where agency moved in between the local and online communities. We saw that these communities consisted of several groups, and how the groups were pushing for different agendas, but were united around a cause that was easy to access and affect. When we zoomed out to look at the bigger picture, we saw about 1,000 people engaged in the library revolt in Ravenville. But when we zoomed in, we saw temporary bounded sociality, where agents were joining together not based on what they were agreeing with at the moment – like a temporary fellowship (see [Figure 2](#)). In other words, looking close, we saw several social movements developing online. These movements were focused on rural politics, culture, rural areas or democracy, not only in Ravenville but in Sweden in general. Locally, we saw a more homogenous development with a clear goal, to save the library. However, all of these interests were united in the Facebook group and together they shaped temporary social bonds and a common understanding.

In the process of shaping the online community, we saw individuals as embedded in systems of social relations. However, when the purpose of the Facebook group was fulfilled, the social relations online were dispersed because the online agents were not spatially embedded in the local community. The social relations emerging from the Facebook group

were built upon the socially created online community only. When the goals were fulfilled, the community lost its purpose and there was nothing for the people to unite around.

5. How online communities are important for local change?

In this article, we wanted to explain how a small, rural community of people started a social movement that spread locally and online and how the scale of this online community turned the tide in the rural municipality. We have discussed the online and the local communities in the library revolt as two CoP, where individuals were engaged with commitment, passion and expertise (Wenger, 2000). When people in our case were involved in writing up the revolt (Stommel and Koole, 2010), they engaged with their social and spatial contexts (Dubé et al., 2006). This affected how locals understood Renville and, as such, the local place was shaped by what happened in the revolt.

To us this is what Welter and Baker (2020) talk about as constructing contexts when individuals engage in the online and local environment or when Gaddefors and Anderson (2019) discuss how agency is distributed. We can view it as a dynamic process of social interaction (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Johannisson, 2011).

We now present four themes we believe are important for further entrepreneurship research.

5.1 Arguments for and importance of embeddedness

Jack and Anderson (2002) showed how embeddedness gives access to local resources and how this mattered for entrepreneurship in rural settings. In our case, the *friends of the library* were well-known people in the village, and they had key roles in the local municipality. They had the sense of place necessary to understand how to frame the revolt in a way that gave them room for manoeuvre. Thus, to be embedded gave them access to different kinds of resources in the local environment. It was the people's local knowledge regarding the use of the landscape (physical, cultural and historical), as well as the local interest regarding the well-being and concern for the rural community that contributed to the development (Korsgaard et al., 2015a; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). We saw a group of embedded locals turn into a local community of practice that grew and developed. In addition, we saw how an online community grew and supported the local venture. Thus, we have to include the online sphere in our understanding of embeddedness and local change.

Is "online embeddedness" an empty signifier, a combination of concepts that points to no actual practice? Without doubt, people can be socially embedded online, isn't this the core

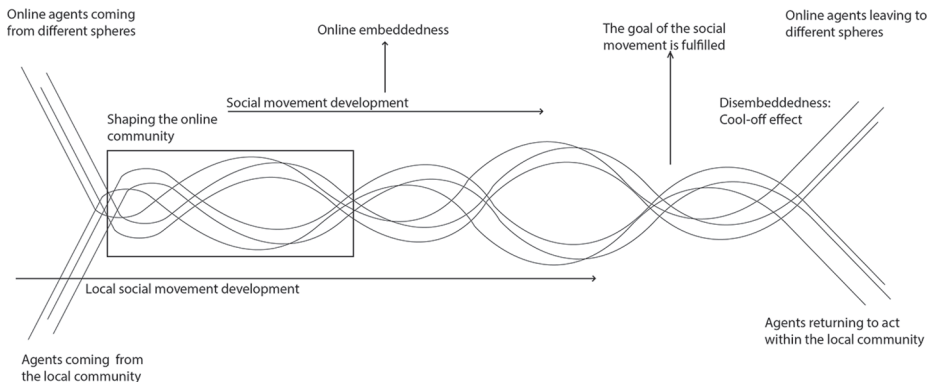


Figure 2.
Process of
structuration in the
Facebook group
during the library
revolt

idea behind social media algorithms? Our query is about the possible links between spatial and online embeddedness.

Departing from our case, it is possible to view the developing online community as a virtual place where different people come with their unique set of resources, and sometimes including knowledge of and commitment to a local place. In our case, the Facebook group was started by locals from Ravenville. Thus, some of the people active on Facebook and thus part of the social online community were also connected to the local place, a type of double spatial embeddedness (anchored online and locally). In this way, the spatial dimension of the revolt had a voice online. Depending on what of the different movements people were pushing for on Facebook (for example, rural politics, culture, democracy or Ravenville), the spatial dimension was more or less on the table. Obviously, we saw posts and comments in our Facebook material that were good illustrations of people embedding in Ravenville. But, although the group members showed high engagement, sharing emotions and offering support to the local place, the majority of them had no relation to Ravenville.

We found that time is also important. When the library re-opened, the politically engaged could no longer use the library example in their rhetoric. The summertime residents did not need to engage to secure their summer holiday. The library supporters did not need to use Ravenville as an example for the fall of democracy and knowledge, and so on. In our view, it is the temporary bounded online sociality that shapes the context and will dissolve when there is no unifying purpose.

To sum up, we saw the classic type of social embeddedness, a double spatial embeddedness (anchored online and locally) and a more transitory, fragile type of embeddedness online. The issue of online embeddedness is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research.

5.2 Online structuration

What we have seen in our case is that the *friends of the library* are recreating their contexts by engaging local and online with people, who have chosen to support the cause. The individuals in Ravenville have built a temporary online co-sociality (Hannerz, 2016), that comes to play in their doing of context (Baker and Welter, 2020). This implies that the community of practice that we can observe when we zoom out consists of many subgroups or social movements. If we zoom in, we see them creating a temporary bounded sociality (Kozinets, 2019) in the Facebook group.

Based on our understanding of places as structural qualities that are shaped by and shape agency (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016), we can see how the online and local social context is reconstructed. In our case, we have seen the people in Ravenville actively enact and construct an enabling online and local sphere for the change they aimed for. This is what Giddens (1984) talked about as a structuring process. His thinking may help us to see how individuals actively work to modify the local structure and create an expansion by engaging in social media. This is an example of how technical systems can enable social interaction (Evans and Brooks, 2005) and function as a platform for structuring processes. When we interact on social media, we are not only sharing our thoughts and ideas, we are also a part of an ongoing process of structuration (Evans and Brooks, 2005). Thus, we can see that the boundary between our experiences from a geographical and a virtual place becomes more blurred (Berg, 2015; Aslesen *et al.*, 2019).

In our case, this temporary bounded online sociality became a part of the re-structuring of Ravenville. We have showed how the friends of the library perceived the online support and acted upon it, to create local change. This conclusion calls for further research about how entrepreneurship is based in local culture versus online culture.

5.3 *Online functions in local change processes*

In the beginning, Facebook was a practical tool for the local group in Ravenville. They shared information, made plans and agreed-on meetings. Later, Facebook enabled the recruitment of activists and provided a platform for continuous updates on the development of the revolt. Thus, the initial actions were local, but later on reached more urban regions. But by acknowledging the online processes, the socio-spatial context helps us understand the individuals' perspectives in their process of rural entrepreneurship (Fahmi and Savira, 2021). The ongoing digitalization will affect the rural entrepreneurship activities taking place in communities (Lekhanya, 2018; Bowen and Morris, 2019), so by following the expanding social context being shaped online, we can improve our understanding of how entrepreneurship is developing in a rural place.

But what happened after the library re-opened? The effect of the online community cooled off when the group lost its purpose – there was no sense of unity after the goal had been obtained and the temporary sociality was dissolved. The community of practice only lasted while interest remained in the group (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). When individuals online lost interest, the online sphere lost its purpose as a community. However, in Ravenville, the actions continued because they had created a new core interest in the community: the management of the library, showing the importance of local embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

Further studies on the role of how online resources in entrepreneurship can empower local citizens in creating local change would be worthwhile.

5.4 *Local and online co-creation of change*

We know how local place is part of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). In our case, we saw how local social relations joined with the temporary bounded online sociality (Kozinets, 2019). The social relations we have observed in this case are both offline and online, and both were important for the library development. The online sociality did not consist of one group of people, but several social movements, which shaped the social reality for the local group. The social movements consisted, for example, of politically engaged, library supporters or summertime residents. They all had different incentives to support revolt, but the sum of the engagements was a positive force for the Ravenville residents.

Previous research show how rural entrepreneurship is about using local resources and build value for the rural community (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015b). We have seen how the non-local connections help rural entrepreneurs go further than the local place in the search for partners, resources or markets (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). What we have shown in our case is how an online community, consisting of a temporary co-sociality, has affected a local group of people to create local change. It is not only the local structure that hereby engages with local entrepreneurial activity, but we need a socio-spatial perspective that includes online engagements to understand our local change processes. Therefore, we argue for an expansion of socio-spatial contexts to include online social relations. Further research could usefully explore how online and local relations provide a pathway to local problem-solving.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we told the story of how a group of locals saved the local library, with essential support from a rapidly developing online community. We saw a local group of people co-creating the online community as a part of context for the venture.

When we interact on social media, we are also a part of an ongoing process of structuration. This connects to how we can perceive agency as moving between the local

and the online community. We can view the developing online communities as novel environments where actors are located with their own unique set of resources. By being embedded in the online sociality, we can view the actor's gaining access to the resources online which contribute to the change happening in Ravenville.

Thus, we argue that to understand a local change process, we need to make online CoP a part of the socio-spatial context. We have acknowledged the social reality as being both online and local. This expands the idea of the social context importance for entrepreneurial reality. We have argued in line with the ongoing discussion on a contextualized view of entrepreneurship, by examining the social context of entrepreneurs as both being local and online. By recognizing the empirical case of a library as an entrepreneurial process and the use of Facebook, we can acknowledge the social interactions in entrepreneurship that shape and form the entrepreneurial outcomes. Thus, examining the context of the 21st century as both existing in the local place and online, we can now expect social connections to occur not only in a local setting but also in an online context enabled by technological development.

Continued efforts are needed to make online infrastructure more accessible to entrepreneurs in general, and rural areas in particular. Our conclusions can be used to develop targeted interventions aimed at online community support for entrepreneurship development.

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Corresponding author

Josefina Jonsson can be contacted at: josefina.jonsson@slu.se

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