

Field dynamics as context – a multi-perspective combined analysis of the effects of context on entrepreneurship

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Alex Alterskye^a, Ted Fuller^b, Andrea Caputo^{b, c}

^a*School for Business and Society, University of York, York, YO10 5DD, UK.*

^b*Lincoln International Business School, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln, LN6 7TS, UK.*

^c*Department of Economics & Management, University of Trento, Via Inama 5, 38122, Trento, Italy.*

alex.alterskye@york.ac.uk, tfuller@lincoln.ac.uk, acaputo@lincoln.ac.uk

Corresponding author – Alex Alterskye alexalterskye@gmail.com

Abstract

Addressing the growing need for nuanced understandings of entrepreneurial contexts, this article presents a multifaceted pragmatic framework for scrutinising the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ and its associated dynamics. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and the institutional logics perspective, we introduce the concept of the field as a mid-level analytical lens—positioned between micro and macro perspectives—that captures the complex interplay of agency and structure in entrepreneurial activity. Our conceptualisation of the field enables the dissection of structural logics and actor dispositions, alongside the institutional processes that shape the entrepreneurial landscape. In response to calls for innovative methodologies in entrepreneurship research, we propose a combined analytical approach to unpack the layered complexities of entrepreneurial contexts, from individual actors to broader institutional influences. The utilisation of this ‘field of entrepreneurship’ concept, with a particular focus on field dynamics, serves as a pragmatic analytical unit, contributing to the broader discourse by balancing simplicity, accuracy, and generalisability. This research consequently offers a novel methodological avenue for exploring what facilitates or impedes entrepreneurial activity within varying contexts.

Keywords – Entrepreneurship, Context, Field theory.

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1. Introduction

Research into the context of entrepreneurship has become more important as further links in the relationship between entrepreneurial activity and contextual factors have been uncovered (Welter, 2011; Welter et al., 2019; Welter and Gartner, 2016; Zahra and Wright, 2011). Context-based studies in entrepreneurship research can take many different forms (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023; Henry and Lewis, 2023; Verver and Koning, 2023), and there are many approaches in the extant literature (Baker and Welter, 2020). However, even though there are theoretical and empirical challenges associated with researching entrepreneurial contexts, there are also calls for the use of further perspectives and innovative ways to develop understanding in this area (Welter and Baker, 2021).

This article presents a particular pragmatic framework which can be utilised to research entrepreneurial contexts. This framework tackles some of the issues inherent in studying entrepreneurial contexts but also draws upon the promise of contextual entrepreneurship research and answers the call for alternative methods and approaches (Baker and Welter, 2020; Welter and Baker, 2021). The field concept, a theorised ‘field of entrepreneurship’, and associated field dynamics, are operationalised and linked to different field-based conceptualisations along with a combined analysis to help further the understanding of the nexus of entrepreneurship and context. By focusing on the dynamics in a field through the lens of two different theories, entrepreneurial activity can be explained and the causes of this more firmly established, hence increasing the possibility of better localised support and policy intervention. In this article, field means a space in which agents participate in entrepreneurial activity (De Clerq and Honig, 2011). There are various conceptualisations of the field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2015; Normann et al., 2017), so it is suggested that there is

value in utilising such different perspectives to develop alternative ways of understanding entrepreneurial contexts. Thus, Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1990, 1977; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993), and the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008) associated with a neo-institutional theoretical lens are suggested as approaches with which combined analysis can develop an understanding of fields of entrepreneurship and field dynamics. Field dynamics refer to the structural logic associated with the combination of interinstitutional system influences, and to the movement associated with the positions available in the entrepreneurial field of practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Thornton et al., 2012). Therefore, the research question being considered is: *How can the field concept, and linked illustration of field dynamics, help to develop understanding of context in entrepreneurship research?*

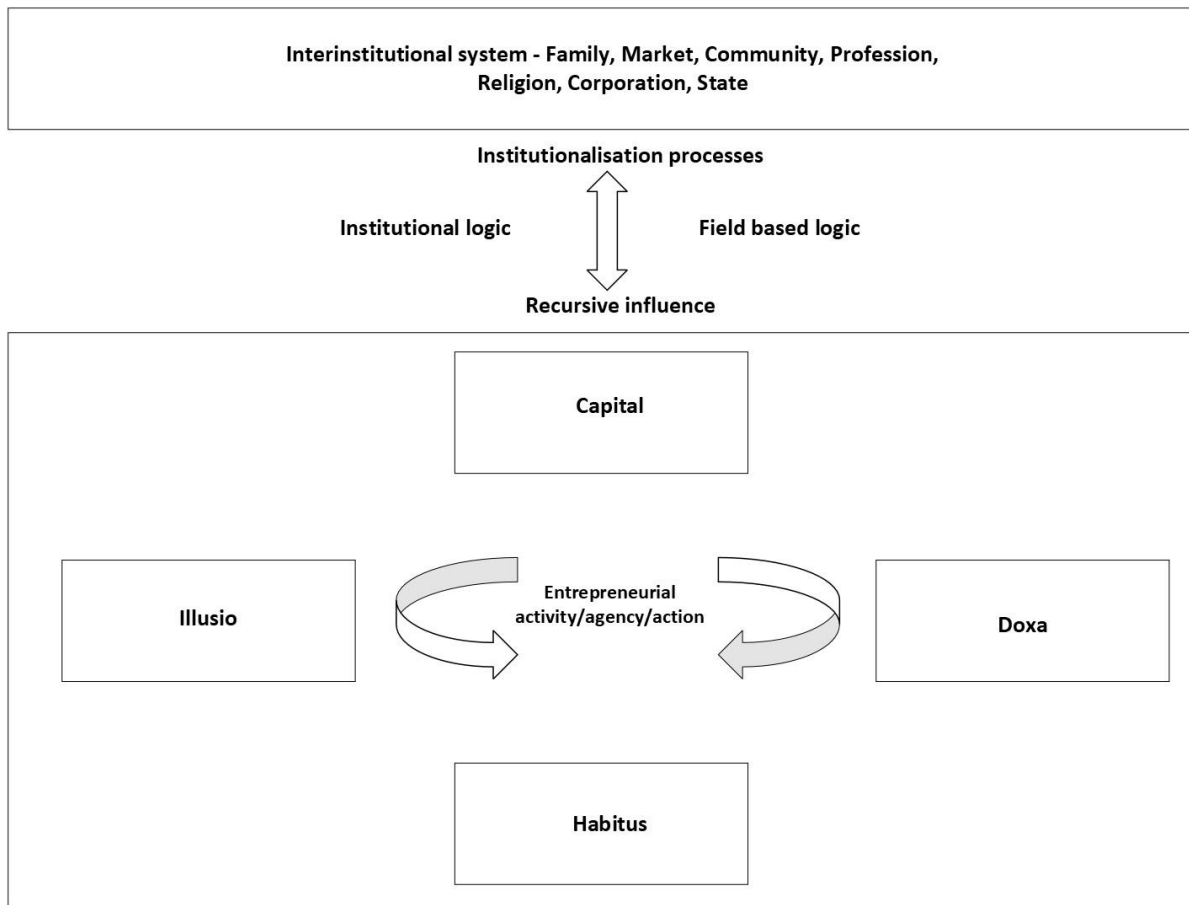
When attempting to understand the omnibus context of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011), various layers of context must be contemplated, from micro to meso and macro perspectives, although considering these layers simultaneously is not an easy task (Gray et al., 2015). The concept of the field is useful, as it sits partly in the meso layer, and allows overlaps with micro and macro conceptualisations of context (Kenis and Knoke, 2002). However, it must be noted that recursive influence may be present throughout all three of these layers (Alexander, 1987; Fligstein and McAdam, 2015; Gray et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2001; Smets et al., 2012). The field of entrepreneurship encompasses layers of context from the scale of the entrepreneur, the small business, and the organisation-based levels (micro) to the consideration of the effects of the wider environment at the meso and macro levels on entrepreneurial activity. Neo-institutional theoretical conceptualisations of the field aligned with the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al., 2012), can help the researcher to more fully understand the structure and makeup of the field of entrepreneurship and the institutionalisation processes that have taken place to establish the field in its most recent form. Equally, the

institutional logics perspective can help to uncover macro-level influences on the field-based logic through analysis of the interinstitutional system-based influences of family, market, profession, religion, state, corporation and community. Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1990, 1977) views of the field help to explain how agents or actors within the field of entrepreneurship take up positions through access to capital (Hill, 2020), form dispositions or habitus (Bourdieu, 2010, 1990, 1977; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993), respond to the orthodox way that entrepreneurial activity takes place in the field through the doxa, (Golsorkhi et al., 2009), or feel that entrepreneurial activities are a worthwhile pastime and are achievable through illusion (Bourdieu, 2010; Tatli et al., 2014). The make-up of the field of entrepreneurship can be analysed in relation to the institutional processes that have caused the field to be formed in its current state (Battilana, 2006), across both combined perspectives. Thus, a combined analysis of the field of entrepreneurship and linked field dynamics tells the researcher more about the relationship between the field and entrepreneurial activity, than any singular approach or theoretical lens. From an empirical perspective, this suggested multi-perspective combined analysis of the field helps the researcher to understand further the relationship between agency and structure in entrepreneurial endeavours. For example, the perception of a lack of habitus, or disposition, linked to entrepreneurial activity may prompt agents within the field to engage in institutional entrepreneurship (Leca et al., 2008) in order to strengthen the entrepreneurial field-based activity.

Taking into account the theoretical and empirical challenges in researching entrepreneurial contexts (Baker and Welter, 2020; Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023; Welter et al., 2019; Welter and Baker, 2021), this article offers contributions through the suggestion that the operationalised field of entrepreneurship concept, viewed from multiple perspectives and with combined analysis, can be used as a useful unit of analysis when conducting research on the context of entrepreneurship. In particular, the introduction and understanding of field

dynamics in the context of entrepreneurship offers novel ways to illustrate entrepreneurial activity. This allows, through the theorisation of a field of entrepreneurship linked to different approaches, the development of understanding of relational and recursive influences and layers of context, from micro to meso and macro (Özbilgin et al., 2005), and how these are connected. The utilisation of the field concept in this research area can help to generate balance between simplicity, accuracy and generalisability (Baker and Welter, 2020), with a particular focus on introducing a perspective that can be used in an abductive way to understand entrepreneurial contexts in a useful, uncomplicated, practical based way that makes contexts generalisable and comparable to other contexts (Fann, 2012; Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Timmermans and Tavory, 2022). The multi-perspective combined analysis of the field concept, as set out here, can ultimately be used to help further understand what is working well in an entrepreneurial context to facilitate entrepreneurial activity, and what is not working well, or what is missing from an entrepreneurial context (see Figure 1 for a diagram based overview of this perspective).

Fig 1. A multi-perspective combined analysis of context and entrepreneurship



2. *Theoretical position: Using the field concept and uncovering field dynamics, when researching the context of entrepreneurship*

Recently there have been calls to further understand entrepreneurial contexts in a way that shows how entrepreneurs interact with context, rather than just describing the environmental conditions around entrepreneurial practice (Welter and Baker, 2021). Ever since the seminal papers by Welter, and Zahra (2011; 2011), calling for research that could further shape understanding of contexts in entrepreneurship, researchers have approached the concept of context in a myriad of different ways (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023; Welter and Baker, 2021). It is acknowledged that research into context in entrepreneurship has the potential to be incredibly complex, with the who, what, where, when and why (Welter et al.,

2019) connected to entrepreneurial activity all being potentially fertile areas of investigation. Thus, the 'field' concept is introduced as a way to help further understand the context. The term 'context' is defined as the spatial, social, economic, temporal and institutional setting for entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011), whilst the 'field' is positioned as part of the context, embedded within it, and participating with it, which leads to the evolution of context itself. The terms, although similar in common language, are not interchangeable. Field dynamics can be found in the movement associated with the positions available in the entrepreneurial field of practice (Bourdieu, 1977), for example, field positions are available through harvesting of available social capital (for an applied example, see figure 2), and the structural logic associated with the interinstitutional influence in the field (Thornton et al., 2012), thus, the institutional order of Community (again see figure 2) may have pronounced influence in the field, and forms the basis of the institutional logic of the field. The investigation of field dynamics builds an understanding of agent-based actions in a field of practice. Utilising the field concept with combined analysis allows the investigation of field-based dynamics that go further than just a description of context, but actually illustrate what is happening in relation to entrepreneurial activity linked to a particular context and can explain why and how these things are happening.

The field as a unit of analysis encompasses layers of context that include the wider environment, descending to the agent, which may help develop a rich understanding of entrepreneurial context. Taking the institutional view, overarching institutions can be said to be operating at the macro level (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). Indeed, Thornton et al. (2012) utilise the concept of the interinstitutional system, which suggests that society comprises the institutional orders of family, market, community, religion, corporation and state, and a combination of the influence of these overarching institutions form the logic of a specific field. Therefore, an increased understanding of the context of entrepreneurship can be developed

through an analysis of the macro-level institutional influences, such as the interinstitutional system, that are associated with a particular field. The field, as conceptualised through a neo-institutional lens, resides principally at the meso layer of context (Wooten and Hoffman, 2016), which is affected by, and affects, the macro layer of context in a recursive relationship. Within the Bourdieusian conceptualisation of the field, the field resides at the intersection of social structure, influence and agent-based action linked to the activity that emanates from the field (Bourdieu, 1984; Drakopoulou-Dodd et al., 2014) in this case, entrepreneurship. The field comprises actors and agents that are affected by the arrangement and activity that emanates from the field, but the actors also affect and influence the field through their own activity and action.

In relation to the empirical application of this approach, the field should be treated as a unit of analysis (Babbie, 2015). The analysis would be concerned with, firstly, uncovering the makeup of the field from Bourdieusian and neo-institutional perspectives, and secondly, highlighting the field dynamics associated with the positions available in the field (Bourdieu, 1990, 1977) and the influence of the interinstitutional system on the structural logic of the field (Thornton et al., 2012). The unit of observation would be the agents within the field that are taking part in entrepreneurial activities, so any empirical approach must focus on gathering data around the agents and their interactions. However, agents within the field will hold certain positions in the field and will have a certain field-based disposition (Bourdieu, 1977), the researcher should capture this information and view it holistically applied in an abductive way when analysing field properties, structure and dynamics, rather than focusing on the case of an individual entrepreneur's circumstances (Fann, 2012; Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Timmermans and Tavory, 2022). Using the applied example as discussed later in this article, if empirical evidence suggests that there is an overarching community-based logic, or that there is plentiful social capital in the field, the particular

circumstances of one agent could be very different from another in relation to these factors, but all evidence should be reviewed and analysed holistically to help understand the field, as opposed to the individual agent. Empirical methods that focus on uncovering the day-to-day lived experiences of agents in the field, their experiences and interactions with the field, along with their thoughts and feelings around the accessibility of the field and their future intentions around field-based interactions, should be used in this approach. Using field analysis in this way allows researchers to focus more on how entrepreneurs interact with their environments and reconstruct the context in which they are operating through uncovering recursive influences between themselves and the field (Welter and Baker, 2021). A Critical Process Approach (Baker and Welter, 2020), in which there are calls for an expansion of empirical methods to research entrepreneurship and context, aligns with the pragmatic approach proposed because the abductive (Timmermans and Tavory, 2022) application of the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ can lend itself to many different research methods. For example, a realist approach that suggests fields can be illustrated through the uncovering of organisations, mechanisms, social structures and institutions (Fleetwood, 2017; Vincent and Pagan, 2019).

It is important when thinking about the field concept that a field is not necessarily a stand-alone or individual entity but may be embedded in and/or connected to many other fields through strong or weak connections (Fligstein and McAdam, 2015, p. 80). The ‘field of entrepreneurship’ may be embedded in like a “Russian doll” (Fligstein and McAdam, 2015, p. 59), or connected to, other fields. These exterior fields may have some influence on the entrepreneurial outcomes seen e.g. there may be a prevalent industrial field with many well developed or successful tech-companies (Feldman et al., 2005; Saxenian, 1991), or there may be an educational field within which there are present a number of educational establishments (De Jorge-Moreno et al., 2012; Duval-Couetil, 2013) that support entrepreneurial training,

these overlapping fields should be acknowledged within empirical research, but the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ itself should be the main unit of analysis.

2.1 Bourdieusian Field theory and links to entrepreneurial context

Bourdieu suggests that fields are systems of social positions within which agents or actors compete and interact with each other to access the capital available in the field (Oakes et al., 1998, p. 260). He uses the language of sport in which the field influences ‘a feel for the game’, the game, in this case, being a start-up or entrepreneurial activity (Bourdieu, 1990). The ‘feel for the game’ of a start-up or entrepreneurial activity in a region is that it may be easy or hard to start a business, or that you do it in a certain way, in a certain sector, getting a certain type of advice for example, and this is influenced by the conditions or perceived conditions present in a particular context. An individual can emanate from a field, e.g. they only exist because the field exists (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 107). This can be linked to context-based entrepreneurship research, since if much entrepreneurial activity is happening in a certain region, this may lead to an increase in individuals emanating from this field to carry out business start-up activities, so a recursive relationship is enacted, which strengthens the field of entrepreneurship through increasing the amount of agents or actors that are involved in entrepreneurship. There is a space of play (field) (De Clercq and Honig, 2011) in which agents may decide to pursue and utilise the capital (Dodd et al., 2021; Hill, 2018, 2020; Light and Dana, 2013; Vershinina et al., 2011) (economic - financial, social - connections, symbolic - status or cultural – industry knowledge, qualifications) available to perform entrepreneurial activities. The space of play (field) is a relationally constructed space (Tatli et al., 2014) in which the feel (illusio) (Meliou and Ozbilgin, 2023) for the activity of entrepreneurship that occurs within it, and whether this activity is worth pursuing, is influenced by multi-level influences and the actions of other agents in the field. The field is a relationally constructed space in which agents are influenced by each other and by micro,

meso and macro-level influences, and it is also a contested space in which agents are competing for capital and resources (Bourdieu, 1990). In a field of entrepreneurship, this capital could be a range of things, varying from status, kudos and respect within a business networking group to material goods and economic gain. The distribution of this capital defines the structure of the field (Bourdieu, 2010), therefore, there are links between this distribution of capital in the field (meso level) and influence. Thus, macro-level influence on a field of entrepreneurship can be produced and reproduced through institutions such as a well-established or dominant industrial sector, or networks of successful entrepreneurs or educational establishments that promote positive attitudes towards entrepreneurial activities in a region (Spigel, 2013, p. 813). The actual practices (Champenois et al., 2020; Johannisson, 2011) of agents operating in the field are embodied in the micro layer (Karataş-Özkan and Chell, 2010) of context in which shared practical understandings of the field, and recursive and relational influence between field and agent can be further understood (Chalmers and Shaw, 2015; Thompson et al., 2020). In effect further understanding of how entrepreneurs ‘do contexts’ (Baker and Welter, 2020) is developed.

Individual agents or actors operate within the context-based bounded social space which they are in, and they make sense of the context and act accordingly (Lockett et al., 2014). They become unconsciously familiar and acquainted with the “doxa”, or unchallenged assumptions, of the field or the presupposition of doing things a certain way (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). Indeed, agents or actors become accustomed to the “structural logic of the field” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 235), and a “doxa” (Drakopoulou-Dodd et al., 2014; Salmon, 2016; Spigel, 2013) is established in the field. These agent-based influences, in addition to micro, meso and macro-based influences, combine to form the makeup of the space of play (field). The disposition (habitus) (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009a; Drori et al., 2006; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015; Özbilgin et al., 2005; Patel and Conklin, 2009; Tatli et al., 2014) which agents

perceive the positions available in the space of play (field), and how it may feel (illusio) (Drakopoulou-Dodd et al., 2014; Pret et al., 2015; Tatli et al., 2014) to take part in the activity in question e.g. entrepreneurial activity, determines how agents will act in relation to this activity (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 2010; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This may result in more or less agents engaging in entrepreneurial activity that strengthens entrepreneurial practice. The disposition to become an entrepreneur is linked to, or has a relationship with, how established that position is within a field (Pret and Carter, 2017), and the perceived legitimacy of the position of entrepreneur in the field by incumbents and newcomers (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009a), thus there is a field-specific habitus connected to a field of practice (Hill, 2018). The more that the position of entrepreneur becomes established or commonplace or is perceived to be associated with the accumulation of different forms of capital within a field, then the more that the position influences the disposition of agents within the field, and an “autonomizing process” (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993, p. 63) linked to the position and the attached activity advances, further influencing the disposition, and strengthening the field. From an empirical perspective, research focused on uncovering a field of entrepreneurship and connected elements such as habitus, capital, doxa and illusio should focus upon agent-based action and perceptions linked to taking part in entrepreneurial activities. For example, are agents able to harvest capital readily in the field to assist their entrepreneurial activities, do they feel that it was easy to join the field, do they feel that entrepreneurship is an achievable and worthwhile activity, do they notice other agents taking part in the activity, do they feel that they can easily align with institutional and social norms in the field. This is broadly aligned with an analytic method to assess the field suggested by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 104).

The Bourdieusian conceptualisation of the field has been under-utilised in entrepreneurship based research (Vincent and Pagan, 2019, p. 194), and concepts that make

up Bourdieu's perspective are often forgotten about or treated in a disconnected way (Sklaveniti and Steyaert, 2020), for example *illusio* is rarely operationalised. This may be because the most obviously observable element within the theoretical framework is availability of capital, and the way that the field is embodied in capital. The conceptualisation and related concepts, have already been utilised to investigate: entrepreneurial cultures (Spigel, 2013), a particular geographically based industrial field or industrial context acting as proxy for a field (Dodd et al., 2021; Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2018; Shaw et al., 2017), industry and location (Hill, 2018, 2020), business based fields (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009b), as a field of practice linked to a movement (Otsios and Kittler, 2018), disadvantaged persons entering an entrepreneurial field (De Clercq and Honig, 2011), as a particular field of economic activity (Terjesen and Elam, 2009), or through a critical realist analysis of self-employed HR consultants (Vincent and Pagan, 2019). The operationalisation of Bourdieu's theory of practice to investigate entrepreneurial contexts is challenging, but if different empirical methods and an abductive approach are employed as discussed earlier, the 'field of entrepreneurship' described in this article builds upon the extant literature, as the practice of taking part in entrepreneurial activity itself makes up the dynamics of the field in the view presented, irrespective of specific context based detail such as industrial sector, or particular kinds of agents, or activity.

2.2 The institutional logics perspective, and entrepreneurial context

Taking the institutional view, overarching institutions can be said to be operating at the macro level (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995), indeed Thornton et al. (2012) utilise the concept of the interinstitutional system which suggests that society comprises of institutional orders, and a combination of the influence of these overarching orders form the logic of a specific field. The field as conceptualised through a neo-institutional lens resides principally at

the meso layer of context (Wooten and Hoffman, 2016), which is affected by, and affects, the macro and micro layers of context in a recursive relationship. Actors or agents within a field taking part in entrepreneurial activity, or a start-up, are embedded within an institutional context, and will be undertaking sense-making processes linked to the field that they are in; this sense making can be described as the institutional logic (Thornton et al., 2012) of the field. Through further understanding of the influences of the interinstitutional system, which consists of the institutional orders of Family, Market, Community, Profession, Religion, Corporation and State (Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), on the institutional logic attached to a field of entrepreneurship, more can be understood about the entrepreneurial activity that is taking place.

The institutional orders (Friedland and Alford, 1991) do not simply cause isomorphism, but can create heterogeneous outcomes linked to the activities or culture that is attached to a context, as these may be shaped by different compositions or combinations of the institutional orders that are prevalent within a certain context. Activities or outcomes can be heterogeneously linked to the way that agents within a field interpret or have certain values attached to the societal level institutional orders, agents have “transrational view[s] of reality and define rationality depending on the root metaphors, values, and practices of their dominant or home institutional orders” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 45). In relation to this, linked to business start-up activity, in a particular context, the institutional order of family (Randerson et al., 2015) for example, may be very strong and prevalent, and may have a strong influence on the institutional logic of entrepreneurship in that context (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003). Utilising this approach, the institutional orders combine in a particular way within a particular context in which a particular activity is taking place, and an institutional logic forms in relation to the activity in question. Applying this to research concerned with entrepreneurship and context, within a certain region or context there is present a certain

combination of institutional orders (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p. 259), which will give the institutional logic that is present around the activity of entrepreneurship a certain flavour or demeanour. This institutional logic is constructed from the particulars attributed to the influence of the interinstitutional system within that context; for example, the institutional logic linked to entrepreneurship may have a heavy religious influence in a region, or country (Zelekha et al., 2014), and this could affect entrepreneurial outcomes. In another example, if there is a strong institutional order “Community” based influence and logic, this may translate into more social entrepreneurship activity, or more entrepreneurial action around a community-based focus. Linked to entrepreneurship, it has been suggested that a community can develop an entrepreneurial culture (Marti et al., 2013), that agents may engage with place and community to enable entrepreneurship (McKeever et al., 2015), that business practice in a depleted community may align with community goals (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004), that entrepreneurs can benefit the community and can benefit from it (Fortunato and Alter, 2015), and that community-based institutional logics can guide firms’ behaviour (Reay et al., 2015). Another interesting example can be seen in which residents of small towns are enacting economic and community based strategies to promote entrepreneurship in the area, actively working to strengthen community connections which in turn strengthened the community interinstitutional order focus of the institutional logic in the field (Roundy, 2019).

The institutional logics perspective has been utilised in relation to entrepreneurship based research in a number of ways, which include; investigating the cultural embeddedness of institutional logics linked to everyday entrepreneurial activity (Greenman, 2013), institutional entrepreneurship and the creation of new organisations utilising hybrid logics (Tracey et al., 2011), understanding green entrepreneurship in the sharing economy through institutional logics (Grinevich et al., 2019), social entrepreneurship (Zhao and Lounsbury, 2016), hybrid institutional logics and influence on entrepreneurial ecosystems (Roundy,

2017), research calls around entrepreneurship, digital sustainability and competing logics (George et al., 2021), national institutional logics shaping entrepreneurial belief patterns (Valliere, 2017), investigation into entrepreneurship in small towns linked to market and community logics (Roundy, 2019), stakeholder, resource provider and audience based institutional logics linked to new venture legitimacy and success (Fisher et al., 2017; Pahnke et al., 2015), looking at the underpinning logic of entrepreneurial action (Watson, 2013), and small and medium enterprise adaptation to institutional logics when networking (Leppäaho and Pajunen, 2018). A particularly interesting example of this research involved a review of family business activities in Italy, in which it was found that a strong combined influence of family and market institutional logics resulted in stronger governance of family firms, as the market logic countered some of the negative outcomes linked with a family logic, such as over-reliance on weak family talent (Miller et al., 2017).

From an empirical perspective, again, the calls from the entrepreneurship and context literature to utilise innovative research approaches (Welter and Baker, 2021; Welter and Gartner, 2016) can be drawn upon, as well as building upon techniques used in the extant institutional logics literature for example surveys, ethnographic analysis, archival document analysis, interviews and case studies applied to do ideal type analysis, or triangulation of data and methods of analysis (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 184).

2.3 How can the Institutional Logics perspective and Bourdieusian field theory be used, using a multi-perspective combined analysis of the field concept, to help understand entrepreneurial contexts?

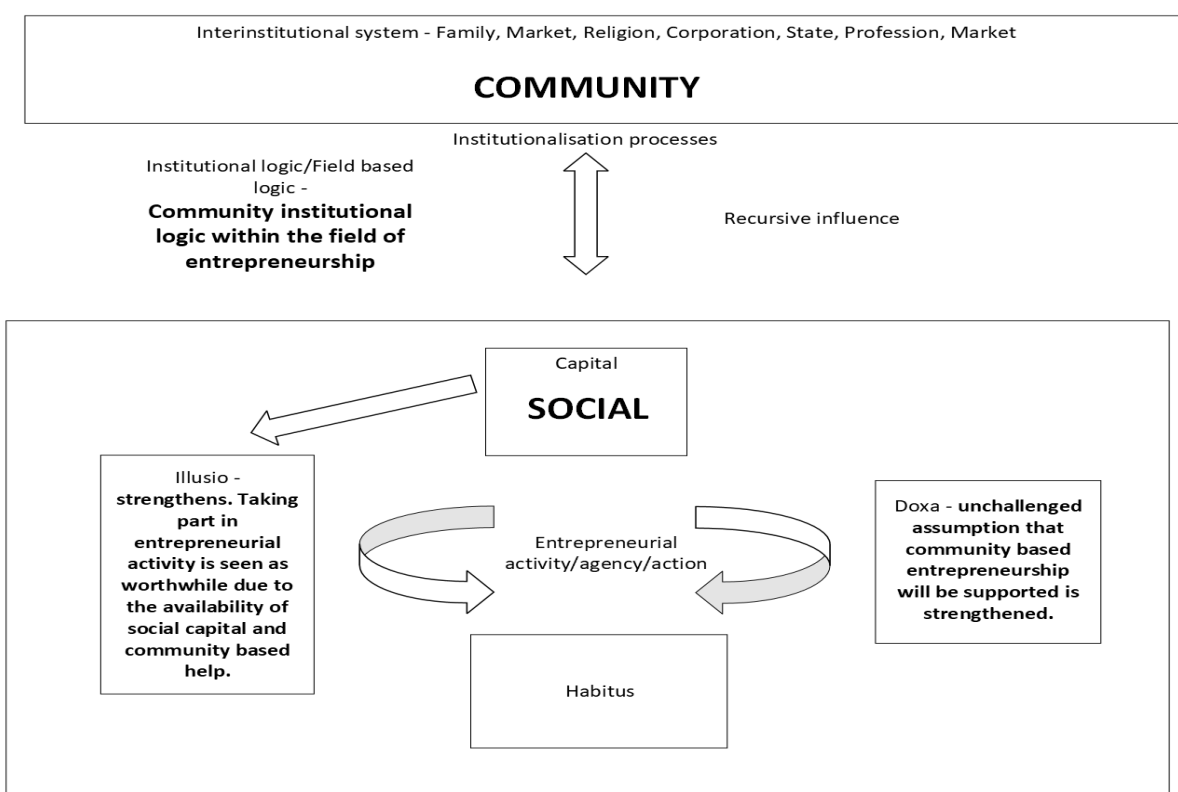
Utilising a theoretical cross over of the neo-institutional view and Bourdieusian views of the field, and multi-perspective combined analysis, the institutionalisation (Zucker, 1977) of the structure of the field, the dynamics and makeup of the field, the interplay of field based

elements such as habitus, doxa, illusio and capital (Bourdieu, 2010), and the institutional logic prevalent in the field, form a kind of frame of reference for the agents and actors within the field, and this can be investigated by researchers. This does not mean that all agents or actors in a particular field of entrepreneurship will act in the same way, as they have different views of, and hold different positions, within that field, and so will act accordingly based on individual position and disposition even though they are influenced by the same institutional logic or frame of reference. From an empirical perspective this means entrepreneurial context can be understood in a relational way, through an understanding of not only the institutional structures that are present, but an understanding which can be developed linked to the way that the actors interacting with each other are influencing entrepreneurial activity. For example, if it is perceived to be relatively easy to join entrepreneurial networks (Lefebvre et al., 2015) within a context, there is plentiful social capital (Malecki, 2012) available, and agents that are already taking part in these activities are welcoming, and ready to give help and support, then this can result in positive entrepreneurial outcomes; this can be seen in collectivistic organisational cultural settings in developing countries where entrepreneurs actively help other entrepreneurs (Rooks et al., 2016). This perspective helps to develop understanding of the multiplicity of context and influence on entrepreneurial activity, as a field of entrepreneurship can be present across industry, geographical, issue and practice-based boundaries, and all of these can combine to form shared influence on entrepreneurial context. There are few articles that combine entrepreneurial field based analysis across institutional logics and Bourdieusian conceptualisations or utilise this perspective to specifically highlight issues linked to entrepreneurship and context; a notable exception to this is the paper by De Clerq and Voronov (2011) in which field based legitimacy derived from institutional logics is analysed linked to the notions of habitus and doxa. To note, the theoretical perspectives employed in this pragmatic approach are not necessarily directly commensurable with each other but provide

different lenses that can be used in a combined and complimentary way to help further understanding of entrepreneurship and context.

In order to illustrate how the pragmatic framework encompassed in the field of entrepreneurship concept viewed from multiple perspectives with combined analysis of field dynamics can be operationalised, it will be helpful to discuss an applied example familiar to the research team.

Fig. 2 Field dynamics as context example



Whilst investigating an entrepreneurial context (see Fig.2), if it is found that the institutional order from the interinstitutional system of “Community” has a particularly strong influence on the field, agents may be very aware of community (Huggins and Thompson, 2015) based institutional influence and logic, and its importance in facilitating entrepreneurship within that context. Ideas of community and helping one another, may be found and embodied in the plentiful availability of social capital (Birch and Whittam, 2008) in the field. This would lead to a strong sense that the activity of entrepreneurship is a worthwhile thing to do, due to the

help available from others which may result in the reinforcement of *illusio* (Tatli et al., 2014) linked to the activity, and the strengthening of a community focused entrepreneurial *doxa*. It is understood that there are many recursive relationships in a field, and so the availability of social capital is also strengthening the “Community” institutional order, prompting the development of a community entrepreneurship institutional logic, through institutionalisation processes connected with the harvesting of this capital by agents. Thus, the dynamics of the field linked to uncovering institutionalisation processes and community logics, and the influence of this connected to the reinforcement of *illusio* around entrepreneurial activity are illustrated using the combined analysis discussed in this article.

3. *Conclusion*

This article aimed at answering the research question: *How can the field concept, and linked illustration of field dynamics, help to develop understanding of context in entrepreneurship research?* Using the field concept in this way, with a focus on uncovering field dynamics, allows the actual practice of entrepreneurship itself to come to the very front of the analysis of the context of entrepreneurship, rather than focusing solely on understanding the context from pre-assumed particular perspectives such as industry, business, social or institutional context-based perspectives. Indeed, the development of an understanding of field-based dynamics and recursive macro, meso and micro-based influences on the practice of entrepreneurship can help to encapsulate a rich and useful illustration of what is working and what is causing issues around entrepreneurial activity in a particular context. For example, *habitus* may be built through an “institutional frame” (Karataş-Özkan and Chell, 2015, p. 112), or formal agent-based activities may be enacted by agents carrying out a form of institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, 2006; Leca et al., 2008; Sieweke, 2014; Wang, 2016), or prevalent institutional logics can influence and

strengthen the “doxa” (Bourdieu, 2010) or structural logic of a field of entrepreneurship, show useful applications of this combined analysis.

In summary, using the field concept allows the researcher to describe the context of entrepreneurship but also to go further than just description, as the context of entrepreneurship can be further understood when analysed against field dynamics from different theoretical perspectives (Baker and Welter, 2020). Indeed, using the field concept in this way could be useful as a proxy for related context-based entrepreneurship research concepts, such as the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Roundy et al., 2017; Wurth et al., 2022), and can be used to facilitate research themed calls in the entrepreneurial ecosystems literature around context. The field construct can illustrate how different localised conditions affect entrepreneurial ecosystems or can uncover the structure of these ecosystems by mapping out relational connections that contribute to positive entrepreneurial outcomes (Wurth et al., 2022, p. 751). For example if it is found that there is plentiful social capital being exchanged in a ‘field of entrepreneurship’, this capital could be used by practitioners and policy makers to develop and formalise entrepreneurial mentoring programmes in the region (Light and Dana, 2013), or if research uncovers a dominant logic in a field, nascent entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs and practitioners can adapt so that their activities align with this logic and become more legitimate (Fisher et al., 2017). Utilising this perspective can help counter some of the challenges that are present when researching entrepreneurship and context, such as developing the understanding of the multiplicity of context and influence, developing an understanding of layers of context, developing an understanding of an agent-based entrepreneurial practice linked to context, and utilising a multiple variable omnibus view of context. The field concept with combined analysis of field dynamics can ultimately be used as a device to help further understand what is working well in an entrepreneurial context to

facilitate start-ups or entrepreneurial activity, what is not working well, or what is missing from an entrepreneurial context.

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