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Abstract

Purpose

The heterotopia is frequently portrayed as a third space in organization studies, characterized by its flexibility and receptivity to innovation. Rural entrepreneurship, embodied in the heterotopic space of community-based enterprises (CBEs), is a key concept in emerging economies. Understanding the CBE's economic and social dynamics is vital for the genesis of entrepreneurship in these spaces, for regional development and for national economies. This paper aims to deep dive into the group dynamics of Villa Ahumada (VA), a well-known subspace located close to the Mexico–USA border, which, despite its market potential, has not been able to support the collectivization required of a CBE.

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Failed entrepreneurship in a heterotopia: the story of Villa Ahumada

The story of
Villa
Ahumada

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Abstract

Purpose – The heterotopia is frequently perceived as a third space in organization studies, characterized by its flexibility and receptivity to innovation. Rural entrepreneurship, embodied in the heterotopic space of community-based enterprises (CBEs), is a key concept in emerging economies. Understanding the CBE's economic and social dynamics is vital for the genesis of entrepreneurship in these spaces, for regional development and for national economies. This paper aims to deep dive into the group dynamics of Villa Ahumada (VA), a well-known subspace located close to the Mexico–USA border, which, despite its market potential, has not been able to support the collectivization required of a CBE.

Design/methodology/approach – Under a case study design, four deep interviews were conducted, which explore the stories of entrepreneurship in VA and analyze the rich narrative accounts of the participants. Narratives offer opportunities for extending the current conceptualizations of entrepreneurship and its processes.

Findings – This paper opens a conversation about the negative aspects of heterotopias, especially with regards to entrepreneurship. Much literature has been devoted to the power of rural communities and peasant villages as fertile places for entrepreneurship. They emphasize the role of entrepreneurial culture and governmental support as almost guarantors of entrepreneurial success. This narrative provides one reason for entrepreneurial failure: the deviant heterotopia. Despite government policy that favored collective entrepreneurial efforts, and despite a vibrant underground entrepreneurship culture combined with a valuable brand, entrepreneurship in VA was dead before it started.

Originality/value – Rural entrepreneurship should be a multidimensional phenomenon focusing upon entrepreneurship, context, group dynamics and social capital; but it has not been interpreted from the perspective of a heterotopia or paratopia.

Keywords Emerging economies, Business failure, Entrepreneurial ecosystem, Regional development, Entrepreneurial behavior, Entrepreneurial culture

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The heterotopia is a separate space (Topinka, 2010), or an area where other ideas can be discussed that foster innovation (Hjorth, 2005). An overlooked aspect of Foucault's concept of the heterotopia is that it can also be a space for deviance – a region where almost everything can go wrong (Topinka, 2010). With some notable exceptions of nostalgic displays in a museum (Winkler, 2014) and of the post-apocalyptic city of Chernobyl (Stone, 2013) the “guts” of these negative heterotopias, alternatively called paratopias (Verdujin *et al.*, 2014), are underexplored.

This is especially true with regards to the interpersonal relations within these spaces. How do these deviant relations look? What are the causes and results of these alternative patterns of behavior? This paper will explore these questions from the lens of entrepreneurship and its

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failures inside of heterotopias. More specifically, the purpose of this narrative is to explore how a heterotopia can foster an environment where a collective entrepreneurial spirit is not possible – even when all the circumstances seem to favor the creation of new ventures and subsequent economic well-being.

This work will proceed with a discussion comparing the group dynamics of the community-based enterprises (CBEs) (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Pelly and Zhang, 2018) with the concept of heterotopia and paratopia. It will revisit Foucault's original ideas (1967) and relate them to our empirical setting – entrepreneurial initiatives in Villa Ahumada (VA). The literature review will emphasize six concepts of heterotopias – meaning across time and space, gestures across meanings, combined representation, heterochronicity, borders and relationships to remaining places (Topinka, 2010; Winkler, 2014) and foreshadow how these concepts will be illustrated in the case of VA.

Following the literature review, we will introduce the methodology used to analyze our interviews, with an explanation of the importance of the researcher's reflexivity (Miles *et al.*, 2014; Whiteman and Cooper, 2016; Grodal *et al.*, 2020). The textual analysis followed four processes to evaluate the specific problem addressed by our investigation (Weiss, 1994). Narrative research focuses on peoples' texts in place of *a priori* theories (Gartner, 2010; Weick, 2012; Whiteman and Cooper, 2011), and it can uncover the models used to talk about entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2007; Bazin and Naccache, 2016)

After the methodology section, our ethnographic narrative proceeds in the structure of a layered account (Pelly, 2016, 2017a). In this format, the narrative is told in a series of interweaving vignettes. The penultimate section will include our discussion and conclusion.

Literature review – the idea of a heterotopia in rural entrepreneurship

This paper builds upon Foucault's concept of heterotopia, one which he briefly sketched, and has since been misunderstood and liberally reinterpreted (Johnson, 2006; Beckett *et al.*, 2017). In medical terminology, a heterotopia is a tissue that is not diseased, but is dislocated and is not necessarily pathological (Johnson, 2006).

For our purposes, a heterotopia is a separate space and a separate discourse (Winkler, 2014; Foucault, 1967). It is described as another zone, or a region apart from normal space. It is distinct from the utopia (the perfect place) and the dystopia (the most imperfect place) because the heterotopia is neither good nor bad – it is only different (Beckett *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, whereas utopias and dystopias are imagined, heterotopias are real and linked to specific geography (Foucault, 1998; Beckett *et al.*, 2017). A heterotopia could be compared to a mirror image that reflects outside values and is internally homogenous but is somehow different from the surrounding environment (Winkler, 2014; Johnson, 2006). As such, they have been labeled as small islands of coherence that make order legible (Topinka, 2010). Therefore, a heterotopia can be restored as the ideal type or it can be the anti-ideal type (Foucault, 1967; Winkler, 2014).

Heterotopias are embedded within the dominant culture and region, but they contest the dominant narrative and therefore have different values (Foucault, 1967). This means they are counter spaces (Foucault, 1998) where individuals can behave in significantly different ways than an expected norm (Johnson, 2006). What is interesting within the heterotopia is that norms are relatively uniform in the opposition to the “outside” world – in other words, it is a bubble within which there is a dramatically different set of values (Johnson, 2006; Winkler, 2014). This bubble evolves into a point of view (Johnson, 2006), an iron cage (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and a series of routines (Gioia, 1992) that socializes (Checkel, 2005) individuals into a preprogrammed way of thinking – even when it is not in the individual's best interest.

Heterotopias that arise out of various circumstances. Stone (2013) cites Chernobyl as a dystopia or a heterotopia that went wrong in the worst possible way. The events that led up to the scientific disaster were conducted in a bubble, and the post-apocalyptic space that exists that echoes the nightmares of the past in an atemporal fashion. Additionally, Winkler (2014) describes an assemblage of artifacts (like de Certeau's notion of place [Hjorth, 2005; de Certeau, 1984]) that can create an alternative, and possibly a warped sense of the past, present and future (like de Certeau's space [de Certeau, 1984; Hjorth, 2005]). Pelly (2020) and Pelly and Boje (2019b) furthermore describe how isolated heterotopias can awaken latent evil in individuals when they are hidden from society and the all-seeing eye of God. Heterotopias are also omnipresent in literary studies, especially in studies of the sublime (Parker, 2005).

The relationship between heterotopias and entrepreneurship is not new. Hjorth (2005) identified organizational entrepreneurship as the process of encouraging the growth of heterotopias within an established organization. He explains the discrepancies between strategy and tactics can result in a type of playfulness and creativity that fosters innovation. Pelly (2016, 2017a) indicates that heterotopias are the result of underlying entrepreneurial processes, including the co-construction of entrepreneurial narratives. Johannisson and Olaison (2007) and Peredo and Chrisman (2006) describe heterotopias that foster entrepreneurship owing to exogenous circumstances. These heterotopias thrive owing to endogenous and auto-reinforcing social capital that grows with each interaction.

Rural entrepreneurship, as defined by Kalantaridis and Bika (2011), is a type of entrepreneurship that takes place in areas characterized by large open spaces with small population settlements relative to the national context. We draw on Korsgaard and Müller's (2015) proposal on how the entrepreneurial processes engage with place and space, where "rural" is seen as a socio-spatial concept in rural entrepreneurship that distinguishes between ideal types. These include entrepreneurship in rural areas with limited embeddedness, a profit orientation and a mobile logic of space, the leveraging of local resources to re-connect place to space, holding the potential for optimized use of the resources in the rural area, and low likelihood of relocation – even in the face of economic rationality.

Studies of rural development have generally devoted little attention to the details of entrepreneurial activities (Korsgaard and Müller, 2015) or have a restricted view of entrepreneurship to a profit-oriented, short-sighted opportunistic behavior (Van Der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000; Tucker, 2010). In line with Korsgaard and Müller (2015), research on space and place in rural entrepreneurship is important to elaborate upon through in-depth analysis. Understanding of this kind of entrepreneurship can create or improve public policies that positively impact communities.

Heterotopias have six principle components. First, heterotopias have an existence across time and space. VA, the focal point of this ethnography, has a specific location and has been established for more than a century. The second principle of heterotopia is that it generates gestures toward meanings. In the case of VA, sensemaking became geared toward ensuring that others were not successful in lieu of supporting an entrepreneurial ecosystem. The third principle of heterotopias is that they are a combined representation where all ideas converge, only to be appropriated. In the case of VA, the heterotopia exists because of simultaneous convergence and divergence between the grand political strategy of economic development and the antisocial capital that characterizes the reality of the citizens of VA. The fourth principle of heterotopia is its heterochronicity. VA is very much like Foucault's depiction of a vacation village (Winkler, 2014). The city has changed little in the past 100 years, despite federal and provincial cultural growth and changes.

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The fifth principle is that heterotopias have borders that impose a degree of site-specific knowledge. This knowledge has resulted in ataraxia and antisocial capital in VA and necessitates the use of narrative analysis (Goodall, 2018; Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012) to acquire the “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 2008) to understand the inner workings of VA. The final principle of the heterotopia to this paper is its relation to remaining spaces. In other words, a heterotopia is never in complete isolation. In the case of VA, burritos and asadero cheese enjoy international popularity, and hence the products are copied by the outside world, even if their internal culture is less desirable. By identifying the specificity of rural entrepreneurial culture (Rădulescu *et al.*, 2014), we can understand the current situation in the entrepreneurial environment of VA and draw up strategies for its development.

The present paper contributes and weaves space and place under a heterotopia/paratopia lens to show the importance of context for entrepreneurship, responding to recent calls for contextualizing entrepreneurship research and theories (Welker and Gardner, 2017). Specifically, these calls include focusing upon rural entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019) and shedding light upon the agricultural dimension of entrepreneurship on account of overwhelming evidence of the exclusion of agriculture (and related activities) from entrepreneurship studies (Alsos *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, rural entrepreneurship is predominately focused upon the developed world (Pato and Teixeira, 2014), so recent calls have been made to expand rural entrepreneurship theory in the developing world (Newbery *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, we examine rural entrepreneurship as a multidimensional phenomenon as suggested by Korsgaard *et al.* (2015a; rural entrepreneurship as a spatial phenomenon); Anderson *et al.* (2016; as a cultural phenomenon), Rooks *et al.* (2016; as a social phenomenon) and Anderson and Obeng (2017; as an economic phenomenon). Therefore, we have enriched our study of rural entrepreneurship by paying tribute to these aforementioned perspectives, while also adding a perspective from a heterotopia or paratopia lens.

We also respond to Müller and Korsgaard’s (2018) call for the need for further studies to explore other mechanisms that might be in play (like group dynamics and social capital), which are more visible in other spatial contexts, such as in developed countries. We also support the call made by Pato (2020) to explore how the political and institutional support given to rural entrepreneurship is embedded in context and influences entrepreneurial dynamics (in our case study, group dynamics and social capital). In this way, we respond to the call made by Gaddefors and Anderson (2019, p. 1): “Rural entrepreneurship is about engagements with context, rather than simply within a context.”

Therefore, a multidimensional view can shed light for further research and serve as a platform to develop more efficient rural policies for emergent and transitional economies, both of which are present in Latin America.

Method

Under a narrative case study design (Yin, 2003; Etherington and Bridges, 2011; Whiteman and Cooper, 2011, 2016), four deep open structured interviews were made at the beginning of 2019. In a case study, Yin (2003) states that a case study does not represent a sample, and the goal in conducting it is to expand and abstract theories (analytical generalization) and not list frequencies (statistical generalization) (Hitchin, 2014; Izak *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, Gummesson (2000) states that the opposite of generalization is particularization, or particular interpretation of the facts (Leblanc and Gillies, 2005).

The recruitment of sources was direct as the interviewer knew three of them, and the fourth was a recommendation from one of the interviewees [1]. Three (“Maria, Jose and Carlo”) have a higher education, one (“Mario”) is a businessman living in VA, and the rest live in Juarez (“Maria” was born in VA but migrated to the city searching for better

opportunities), “Jose” and “Carlo” are well-respected professionals in the city. The interviews lasted between 60 and 150 min.

The present study explores their stories of entrepreneurship in VA, their interpretation of the events they experienced and their expectations of the future (Cobley, 2001). We collected and analyzed rich narrative accounts of the participants, as in Gill (2015); Whiteman and Cooper (2011, 2016); and Larty and Hamilton (2011). We interpreted entrepreneurship within a heterotopia (Hjorth, 2005) or a paratopia, its negative equivalent (Verduijn *et al.*, 2014). Narratives offer opportunities for extending the current conceptualizations of entrepreneurship and its processes (Johansson, 2004; Hitchin, 2014; Izak *et al.*, 2014).

Simons (2009), sees researcher reflexivity as an instrument for gathering, interpreting and representing the “data” (i.e. stories) and views knowledge and knower as interdependent and embedded within history, context, culture, language, experience and understandings (Etherington, 2004). This concept of reflexivity is reinforced in Miles *et al.* (2014), Whiteman and Cooper (2016); and Grodal *et al.* (2020), because it helps the reader understand how researchers move from data points to theorizing.

Following Etherington and Bridges (2011), the interviews focused upon questions to help the storyteller address cultural context, feelings; thoughts, attitudes and ideas; the significance of other people; their choices and actions: values, beliefs and how people make meanings of their experiences.

The interviews were all audio-recorded conversations conducted with the four participants, meeting at different venues most convenient for the participants. We initiated a conversation as friends to achieve a free flow (Boje and Rosile, 2020), focusing upon the respondent’s own experiences, allowing the questions to “flow from the course of the dialogue” (Larty and Hamilton, 2011, p. 225). We focused upon subsequent dialogical processes, co-construction of knowledge and an iterative process of meaning-making.

The text analysis followed four processes as demonstrated by (Weiss, 1994): coding (resulting from the same statements with basis on grounded theory, open, axial and selective) according to context, social capital, group dynamics and entrepreneurship (variables), selection of the fragments in terms of narrative archetypes (Sanders and van Krieken, 2018) that can give valuable information regarding our main and emerging themes (selecting those that more accurately reflect the different codes), using a preservationist approach (without modifications in its wording to adequately represent the meanings and being of the interviewees, Weiss, 1994) and integration of these by variables and categories, reflected in the propose model.

Narrative research enables a focus on peoples’ texts in place of *a priori* theories (Gartner, 2010; Christianson and Whiteman, 2018); therefore; it can uncover the models used to talk about entrepreneurship, giving new ways to talk about the phenomenon (Gartner, 2007) and can be a source for entrepreneurial learning (Rae and Carswell, 2000; Pelly and Fayolle, 2020). Vignette titles in *italics* are storytelling vignettes, based upon fieldwork that tells the story of the innermost workings of VA’s heterotopia. Vignette titles in bold indicate *post hoc* theoretical analyses that link the narrative of VA to our development of deviant heterotopias.

Short history of Villa Ahumada

In 1882, the Mexico City-Ciudad Juarez railroad route selected VA for the construction of a station, in the hope of supporting economic growth. Local entrepreneurs began offering food to travelers. One of the dishes was the burrito, which enjoys today’s worldwide recognition (originally made in Ciudad Juarez, c. 1910). VA grew into a small town and became well known.

Despite the initial successes, very little has changed since the railroad boom. According to official data, the city has not grown (the population was 8,753 in 2005, and 8,575 in 2010,

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the last year of the last census), and its economy remains stagnant. The municipality suffers from high financial dependence upon federal contributions, with very little organic entrepreneurship and regional development. Violence broke out in 2008 affecting all social and economic areas (Ciudad Juarez became the most violent city in the world in 2010). Migration to Ciudad Juarez (population near 1,400,000 in 2020) has been constant, causing numerous problems in the social sphere, such as fewer young people becoming involved in family businesses.

Today, VA's economy is based upon agriculture, cattle raising, asaderos (fresh cheese) and burrito manufacturing (both are estimated to support directly or indirectly half of VA's population). However, its cultural dynamics are seen as entrepreneurial ataraxia. One of the specific results that stems from the unique combination of the six factors of the heterotopia in VA is that of the Greek term, ataraxia, or imperturbability. The serenity of the soul, the domain of the passions or their removal is related to apathy or indifference (Ezcurdia and Chávez, 2007). A century ago, Chihuahua's Corrido, the song of the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, mentioned the famous asadero cheese from VA (78 miles from Ciudad Juarez, on the Mexico–USA border). But its binational regional fame has not been reflected in an economic improvement for their families. Everything remains the same. Or worse. This is the epitome of entrepreneurial ataraxia.

The heterotopia of VA seems to have gotten worse because it created a Lord of the Flies (Golding, 1987) type of situation, emphasizing the dystopian aspects of heterotopias or separate spaces. Despite its potential, virtually all businesses remain in the informal economy (some of them engage in illegal behaviors such as tax evasion), and there are no entrepreneurial group dynamics (every effort to develop the city has failed). Despite the strong state and municipal initiatives that support a growing and innovative business environment, negative social elements (e.g. people distrust each other, so group efforts are very difficult to achieve) permeate the population; therefore, the entrepreneurial consciousness is limited to the individual, never in the collective.

As Rădulescu *et al.* (2014) mention, like in Romanian villages (a transitional economy), or as Tucker (2010) discusses in Turkish villages, it might be that VA suffers from a prolonged transitional process from a subsistence economy (a characteristic of pre-modern societies) to a market economy. VA's problems could be characterized by some habits from the former period, which are superimposed upon modern and even post-modern behaviors and motivations.

Diverse efforts and business mechanisms have been tried to encourage the population to modify their vision and start an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the city and municipality (e.g. management training to small businesses, cheese exportation to the USA, establishing credit or producer unions, VA as a collective trademark, even appellation of origin for the asadero cheese). But everything has been in vain. Ironically, the inhabitants say the city is growing.

Findings

Part 1

Heterotopia: an established place. A necessary component for heterotopias is a dichotomy between space and place (Hjorth, 2005). Alternatively, this could be described as the heterotopia as a carrefour, a place where multiple values collide and conflict (Topinka, 2010). In this example, VA fits de Certeau's definition of place (1984), yet it is reminiscent of the tactical levels of an organization (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). VA is an established city with a long history. Everything seems concrete – even the population remains almost stagnant, which implies that nothing ever changes, indicative of heterochronicity (Foucault, 1967;

Winkler, 2014). This stagnation is reminiscent of Parmenides' description of the world as a rock (Pelly, 2017a) – solid and never moving.

A closer examination reveals a tremendous amount of activity beneath the surface. Rapid movement is occurring. The population is not stagnant – people are migrating to Juarez. Additionally, there is tremendous underground economic activity. People seem to be defying the government's open strategic plans and laws that support entrepreneurship, and there is a lone wolf kind of business environment characterized by mutual mistrust so intense that individuals focus exclusively upon themselves for entrepreneurship activities. It appears they have no loyalty to the city or to each other, mirroring the makings of a *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1987) type of situation.

What becomes evident is that this heterotopia is a small island of coherence (Topinka, 2010) based upon deviance or disorder (Stebbins, 1996; Rojek, 1999), otherwise known as a paratopia (Verduijn *et al.*, 2014). VA is the type of heterotopia where the state has been suspended and order ceases to exist (Dehaene and De Caeter, 2008). The result is a dead zone (Stone, 2013) of long-term entrepreneurship and innovation.

The VA situation hardly seems unique. It is reminiscent of blat networks found in the Soviet Union (Ventsel, 2019; Pelly, 2017b). These networks were stereotypically found in rural Russia, where individuals found ways to augment their meager standard of living through under the table exchanges. Much like in the Soviet Union, these rapid-fire networks are based on one-off exchanges that are mostly transactional and do not necessarily result in the accumulation of social capital. For this reason, trust never builds. In other words, there is entrepreneurship, but it is not enduring; it is the fast-moving flow and reality that contrasts with the federal government's vision. It is this dichotomy that is the source of a heterotopia.

Brand as a strategy. Some of those who migrate to Ciudad Juarez, either because of self-preservation or tradition, open small burrito carts. Others bring asadero and locally produced products like chorizo (sausage) to sell. In both cases, almost all peddlers fail to maintain quality control (they say their burritos are from VA, but they do not use any local products – it is just a marketing strategy. To be clear, this is not a problem of Mexican culture or even that of the province – it is unique to VA. Others take advantage of asadero's fame, without any consideration of the municipal authorities or people from VA who try to defend its history. These imitators have installed small factories where they produce low-quality goods with no respect for traditional processes.

No one (i.e. federal, state, municipal, businesspeople or a civil initiative) takes leadership to innovate and establish a vision. The local entrepreneurs lack a business model and do not advocate for a positive impact on the community.

VA has a privileged geography – it is the largest agricultural city in the state. There is a growing demand for milk, asadero, pecans, dry meat and eggs. Previously, there was an asadero producer that exported cheese to the USA, but it went bankrupt owing to import restrictions on the asaderos, apparently because of quality control issues.

The VA name, its culture and its products have a monetary and cultural value that attracts imitators. Imitation is usually seen as an indication of a valuable strategy or asset (Shenkar, 2010). The brand value is clearly there – as shown by the fake asadero cheese and omnipresent burritos. This image is reinforced by VA's prime geographical location. The value of this brand and its imitation reinforces the idea that heterotopias do not exist in isolation – they must have a relationship to the rest of society (Winkler, 2014).

The name of VA and its products are an aspiration with a degree of stability, or heterochronicity (Foucault, 1967; Winkler, 2014) – think about how burritos and asadero cheese have been popular for the past 100 years. With this name and image, it appears that VA has everything it needs to be a hub of industry and culture. Strategy and aspirations are

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the higher-level components of the heterotopia (Topinka, 2010). They establish the absolute best possible visions for the future, as well as the one that is the most stable.

Reality of the heterotopia. Carlo began the interview by explaining “I remember they said to me that the most difficult thing in Mexico was to convince those who are thinking about launching a new venture was to associate with an integrator company [2]. Most Mexicans do not wish to associate with such companies, because it is labor-intensive and has a limited payoff. Unfortunately, sometimes the worst enemy of a Mexican is the Mexican himself because he fears spending his social capital.”

Carlo described the situation as such: “Yes, the experience you mentioned is very true, it is a cultural experience. Our region has a differentiated culture. . .”

Carlo added: “The people are not used to following a leader, because the leaders are not consistent with the attitudes of the people.” This same point continues to surface in VA, against the idea of collectivism. “Instead, they prefer transactions favoring personal and short-term benefit.”

Divergence of rules within the heterotopia. The place of VA has the potential to be entrepreneurial – people work in the underground economy despite the risks, there is a lot of movement in and out of VA with travel, and there is a potentially supportive ecosystem of entrepreneurship, especially with food production because of the farming community and with a supportive government.

This fluidity is reminiscent of the concept of place (de Certeau, 1984) or the rapidly moving tactical level of an organization. The place is akin to Heraclitus’ concept of the world being composed of fire or water that is always changing, flowing and moving (Pelly, 2017a). The rapid flow implies that nothing is ever solidified – and there is nothing upon which to build. It is an example of the pitfalls of the relational process ontology in action (Pelly and Boje 2019a, 2019b).

One of the key tenets of the relational process ontology is that objects coalesce for an infinitesimally small moment to achieve a goal and conduct a transaction or a spontaneous interaction. After this moment, the temporary organizing fades and will never reform in an identical configuration (Pelly, 2016).

Normally, underlying processes reflect the macro culture and strategy (Hjorth, 2005). But when strategy and tactics do not align, this creates a heterotopia – a space apart with its own rules and a counter-narrative (Topinka, 2010; Beckett *et al.*, 2017). Somehow, despite the fact that it has everything needed to be successful, VA lacks the entrepreneurial culture. The people cite a dearth of leadership, no collective culture, government obstacles and a desire to be comfortable that holds back the people of VA. It appears that many would prefer a short-term transaction and then return to their homes. The result is individual entrepreneurship without cohesion and deviant anarchy within the heterotopia (Stebbins, 1996; Rojek, 1999). This heterotopia has a different culture from the surrounding areas (Topinka, 2010). This deviant behavior challenges the works cited in the literature review that proffer heterotopias as a space for harnessing positive change. Here, the heterotopia defies both tactics and strategy to the detriment of the members of the heterotopia – and the people of VA. The heterotopia’s ability to harness creativity and innovation is linked to the ability to raise social capital (Johanisson and Olaison, 2007; Pelly, 2016, 2019a). In this case, there was not a lack of social capital – instead, it appears that there is almost a negative or antisocial capital.

An attempt to capitalize on the Villa Ahumada heterotopia. Mario summarized the desire to launch the milk producer’s union as such: “Look at the people who are dedicated to the production of asadero cheese and milk. We have not grown, because alone it is very difficult, we need to make a group, a group of producers of asadero, or milk to be able to

grow. We need a group to advise us well, give us training courses, and to make people aware that there is no malice in our business.”

Carlo added, “Our idea was that VA had the economic strength to increase its asadero production among several entrepreneurs by removing the barriers of entry for perishable producing companies, i.e. vacuum packaging, safety certifications, trademarks, and demonstrated shelf life.”

A group of veterinary doctors advised that all the producers decrease the acidification of the milk to increase the production of cattle, to improve the quality of the milk and that cows that had been treated with antibiotics be banned from the collection center. The goal was to deliver quality goods to asadero artisans.”

Carlo elaborated, “The purpose of the milk producer’s union was to provide output and regulate the milk that was produced. The dynamics of the asadero business is seasonal and depends on the flow of people passing through VA, (and at peak time, such as during vacation periods). Production has been based on the artisan system, and asadero does not have a uniform taste, because it is not standardized and not regulated.”

Part 2

Making of a community-based enterprise. The impetus to launch the milk creator’s union is identical to launching a heterotopia. It is a process of adapting the strategy (or VA brand) and appropriating it for the needs of the entrepreneur. It is an attempt to move away from the free-flowing, individualistic rules of the VA culture to solidify cooperation (think of Mario’s quote of “we need to change our purpose from excelling in VA to supporting VA”). The result would be products that differed from those provided in the open market – ones with higher quality and that rewarded producers for honoring the brand name of VA. This is an entrepreneurial view that should propel change for the community and alleviate its accompanying anxiety, as proposed by [Dashtipour and Rumens \(2018\)](#).

The reasons for the collectivization of the milk producer’s union share remarkable similarities with CBEs ([Peredo and Chrisman, 2006](#); [Pelly and Zhang, 2018](#)), because both formalize the unofficial entrepreneurial impetus in such a way that profits from VA’s valuable brand name.

The desire is to create a heterotopia – one where normal market rules do not apply, and where social capital is enhanced in the face of an undesirable future state. Similar heterotopias such as adhocracies ([Pelly, 2016](#); [Mintzberg and McHugh, 1985](#)) and CBEs ([Peredo and Chrisman, 2006](#); [Pelly and Zhang, 2018](#)) have been created. It involves the creation of entrepreneurial communities, a cultural change of rural areas and people to accept their entrepreneurial potential ([Rădulescu et al., 2014](#); [Tucker, 2010](#)). VA’s milk producer’s union is remarkable because it represents a desire to move from an undesirable heterotopia to one this is beneficial to all, or a heterotopia of deviance to one with a therapeutic benefit ([Stebbins, 2007](#); [Stone, 2013](#)).

Arguably, the CBE that is most analogous to the milk producer’s cooperative is that of Home Boy Industries ([Pelly and Zhang, 2018](#)). Like VA, Home Boy Industries’ most valuable asset is its brand.

Milk producer’s history version 1.0. This story was recounted by one interviewee, Carlo: “The milk producers’ union was born out of the need to regulate the market. There was an initial agreement in the union. But after launch, the union instituted rules so those producers were removed from voting, including the milk and asadero producers. If they had cows, they had to meet a quota to enter the collection center[. . .] it was a cost center, its goal was not to make money, it was to regulate a market.”

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For the asadero producers, it was not convenient that the market was regulated because they wanted to buy milk cheaply. The asadero producers were forced to buy the milk, even if they did not want it or if it was of poor quality. There was no shared vision for the products they processed, and the value chain was disjointed.

The idea was to regulate the payment of the milk to the producers and provide consistent delivery. But it was stalled on average for a week because the milk had to be stored a week in the union, after which the union recovered it to pay the producers.

The same happened to the farmers. An attempt was made to make a collection center so that the cattle produced in the region could be concentrated. Yes, it was a project to make collection pens that could collect the cattle from the region. But the union began to interfere with the interests of people who already had established businesses. Members of the union began operating outside of the value chain – some paid the producers at different rates and times than that promised by the union. This would cause the organizational culture, and eventually the union, to collapse. No one wanted to see the other members of the value chain succeed, even if it meant they would not succeed as well.

“Others have tried to absorb the links of the value chain, such as those who produce asadero, milk, and animal feed. This is done to spread risk, but that implies each component is isolated, and that that the value chain is not unified. The asaderos do not care where they get the milk. They just go and get it, but because the union had a single sale price, they could no longer purchase milk if they did not pay the union – even if they bought the milk elsewhere at a ten-cent discount. Therefore, the producer no longer takes his milk to the union because he prefers to sell it directly to the asadero producer. This means the union no longer has the opportunity to collect, leading to the end of the union because its members pursued individual opportunity.”

First round failure of the milk producers collective. This first attempt to establish entrepreneurship this CBE was outside the main heterotopia of VA and from its stakeholders in the community because the members did not see themselves as part of the value chain. An essential component of a CBE's success is that individuals see their success as tied to that of the collective (Peredo and McLean, 2006). This attempt at collectivization had all the characteristics of the dystopia as a heterotopia – because the people did not understand that a heterotopia without an internal market would fail. Without a fixed border, without a sense of commitment to the higher-level strategy of the collective and VA, the CBE collapsed.

The milk producers' cooperative did not establish a border with the external culture, individual interests took precedent over group needs and the situation quickly evolved into “business as usual.” This failure hints that the coherent value internal to the heterotopia is a form of ataraxia, the anti-ideal type of heterotopia (Foucault, 1967; Winkler, 2014) or paratopia (Verduijn, 2014), where the results suggest that heterotopic and heteronomic spaces (Wieners and Weber, 2020) are juxtaposed.

Part 3

Sources of the failed antipreneurial culture. This vignette groups subthemes across the interviews as to why entrepreneurship failed at VA.

Lack of entrepreneurial culture. Carlo: “There is no entrepreneurial culture, there is no motivation in VA. I say that this is the main reason that the VA has not developed. VA is in the middle of the desert. The people seek to change the dynamics and do everything possible to survive. I agree that there is no entrepreneurial culture, rather I think the entrepreneurial culture has worn out, here people do not organize, they only are entrepreneurs for themselves.”

Family business. Mario: “Most of the cases I see that young people stay with parents, they stayed in the monotony of their father, they have lost a little of that spirit to push themselves and to continue growing into owning their own business. They need support. Without it, they will not grow anymore.”

Maria: “Our people are very conformist. When they go to Juarez with that mentality they say they cannot make it in VA, because entrepreneurship is not welcome in VA.”

Maria: “There are several factors that lead people away from entrepreneurship. The first is the mentality, for example, if you ask people here about a relative who wanted to open a business, they say that that here in VA it will not work, because everyone is already involved in a system, in a mentality, where you cannot move beyond your current station. If your mentality is very small, then you will not pursue your own business.”

The research shows that there is a great interest to start a business among the young, even if it is difficult to promote the entrepreneurial culture and to create the environment required for a new rural business to blossom (Rădulescu *et al.*, 2014).

Entrepreneurial ataraxia. Mario: “It is necessary to form a group culture; we dream of taking a position in the municipal presidency. We need a different group, a solid group of merchants, to focus on the improvements of VA, so when a president comes, we can voice our concerns and hold the president and his representatives accountable.”

Carlo: “The federal economic department was supporting a program of integrators companies, but no local business entered the program.”

Jose: “Due to migration, many people have left. No one has any pride in their work. The burritos’ restaurants are not clean. The bathrooms are filthy, and they are charging for their use. The business they have is very profitable, so they should have something at least. But they prefer to live like that, they are used to it. They have no vision and no business model. I cannot tell you why not. There are no entrepreneurial things and no entrepreneurial leadership.”

Part 4

Explanation of Villa Ahumada’s culture: antisocial capital. The culture within the heterotopia is different from that of the surrounding areas. The failure of the CBE seems to imply that the valuable brand of VA and the underlying entrepreneurial culture is an illusion; however, this is not the case.

The reason the CBE failed despite having the means and ends to be successful is the occurrence of antisocial capital. This contrasts with other CBEs such as the community-based response that occurred during an unexpected hurricane (Johannisson and Olaison, 2007). In this case, members of the community banded together to launch an emergency relief effort when services and government support were not available. Rules were broken in favor of cooperation, and the result was the growth of social capital that facilitated follow-on interactions long after the hurricane disaster relief was completed.

Much like Sartre claimed that hell is other people (Sartre, 1989) the cooperative failed because the more that the producers worked together, the greater the mistrust, isolation and lack of productivity. There are heterotopias within the main heterotopia, each one being a mirror, a source of deviance that continues to convolute the more people connect. It is almost like an anti-stakeholder model.

But the people of VA are entrepreneurs, and this first time may have been an isolated case. Surely, they learned from the first time, so they made a second go of it, as will be described in the following vignettes.

Version 2.0: the second attempt at a milk producer’s association. The second try at collectivization was formed by 24 milk producers. The decision was made to form another

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organization. They learned from the first time because in the union there were 100 partners, but only 20 of them were milk and cheese producers. Their concerns were with the milk and how it was collected. The strong second start was hindered by new arrivals who had nothing to do with production and made decisions that modified the issues and disrupted meetings.

Carlo began by explaining: "I had to be in several meetings in which I told them they know they were being destructive. These disputes eventually broke up the union a second time. I saw how people conformed, even to their detriment. This hurt their businesses because milk and asadero prices and quality were no longer regulated. This lack of a coherent value chain led to a loss of customers."

Carlo: "We even started to give financing to each producer to raise its installed capacity, and to buy more cows. The objective was to reach a point where the union could sell locally to the producers of asadero, but also the surpluses. When the idea of the union producing asadero was mentioned with a shelf life of 20 days in lieu of three days due to reduced acidity, the asadero people objected. The milk union began planning to get more money. Maybe because some of the milk producers were also asadero producers."

Carlo continued that, "I spoke with one of the most important asadero producers in the region and asked him why we don't try to unionize again, but this time the unions will be one that protects you, that looks out for producers' interests. The organization could even buy milk or other inputs. The products could be sold outside of VA because many producers of asadero or milk have tried to sell outside of the region; but they have run into market barriers such as no license to operate, no ingredients and nutritional label, or not registering as a taxpayer. They want to bring the asadero in trucks to Juarez and distribute informally."

Carlo further clarified: "We wanted to make a trademark of VA. But the livestock organization and the milk organization broke down because within the union there were people who produced asadero and saw it as competition, instead of as an opportunity. When I talked to producers, I told them we can support them through their brands, market research, building their facilities better, and delivering equipment. But they could never agree as a group."

Mario agreed: "We need everyone's support, and I am very aware of that. But I tell you if you lived here you would realize that it is already very difficult to trust people because we already lost that habit of supporting ourselves, and it is the individual who achieves what they can for themselves. That is why they are making us claw ourselves to the top because there isn't a representative power group that can raise their voice for Villa Ahumada."

Envy. Carlo: "We offer a loan of 2 million pesos for animal feed. We needed the signature of the union so that the credit came out with the endorsement of all the producers, that the other partners knew about it, so they began sabotaging everything from our previous work, even to the degree of insulting our existing milk producers and impeding the flow of milk and money. They envied that these producers were growing that way. We also tried to standardize the production process, but we could not achieve it, because one small group found it outside their interest."

Discussion

Why this story is the classic case of deviant heterotopias

As discussed above, this is the second time that a collectivization effort failed. Exactly as in the first attempt to collectivize, the antisocial capital temptations became too great to resist for the workers in VA. This was a case of a heterotopia of deviance (Stebbins, 1996; Rojek, 1999) or paratopia (Verduijn, 2014). The fact that this was more of a disaster than the first time is indicative that heterotopias can accumulate time (Winkler, 2014) or the missteps of the past can cause a wound to fester.

Workers sabotaged each other, and there was pervasive freeloading. Much like conventional social capital that can be awakened during crises and then accumulated post-crisis, so too can antisocial capital. The second attempt at collectivization only garnered more mistrust, more jealousy and more envy. A third attempt at collectivization would be even more catastrophic. We see that antisocial capital became an institution.

For this reason, the story of VA is one of limited good (Tucker, 2010) in a heterotopia. It is a story of a drive to be better, a story of having the resources to achieve more, but of a culture and an attitude within this discrepancy of aspiration and reality inside a heterotopia that makes this impossible. The desire to enforce “limited good” might override opportunities for personal and economic growth.

The case study brings rich insights into sociological entrepreneurship theory and the social context, where the level of analysis is traditionally the society (Landstrom, 1998). Reynolds (1991) has identified four social contexts that relate to entrepreneurial opportunity. The first one is social networks or building social relationships and bonds for trust and not for opportunism. In VA, individuals took undue advantage of people to be successful; success is not seen as a result of keeping faith with the people. The second is the life course stage context which involves analyzing the life situations and characteristics of entrepreneurs. Mario talks about endless stories of betrayals, and those experiences influence thought and action. The third context (Nkansah, 2011) is ethnic identification, a “push” factor to become an entrepreneur. In VA, the youngest dream of going out of the town, or, if they stay, most of them pursue careers in organized crime. The fourth (Nkansah, 2011), social context, is called population ecology, where environmental factors play an important role in the survival of businesses. The high inefficiency of the local political system and government has an impact on the survival of new ventures or the success of the entrepreneur.

F1 There is no virtuous cycle between space and place in rural entrepreneurship in VA. The cycle should consist of a dual and complementary dynamic, not only on space and place but also within the community, its group dynamics and the social capital that should exist (Figure 1). On the one hand, entrepreneurs extract value from the place by recombining local resources, involving a process of codification, which makes the resource combinations transferable and comprehensible in nonlocal markets and/or settings. VA’s products are well known and recognized throughout the state (Mexico’s biggest), and in New Mexico, parts of Arizona and Texas. Hence, a place is reconnected to space (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004). The recombination and codification increase the re-valorization of place, understood as a process of using the local potential and qualities of a place (Stathopoulou *et al.*, 2004) to create new rural products and services, adding value to them and positively feeding back into VA.

The Korsgaard *et al.* (2015a, 2015b) model was not the case for VA because it does not consider VA’s group dynamics and other variables (Figure 1, in blue with our adaptation). The findings and model show that positive group dynamics are decisive in an entrepreneurial ecosystem and its accompanying social capital. Following Putnam (1995), social capital is a feature of social life networks, norms and trust that enable actors to work together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Thus, it relates to the resources available within communities because of these networks having mutual support, reciprocity, trust and obligation. None of these factors were present in VA, which instead had a type of antisocial capital. Antisocial capital contrasts with social capital, which can help bind society together and transform individuals into a community (also influencing family businesses and the entrepreneurial culture) with shared interests.

There is an urgent need to strengthen rural communities to achieve a virtuous circle of trust, norms, networks and reciprocity. Again, this was not VA’s case. There was no

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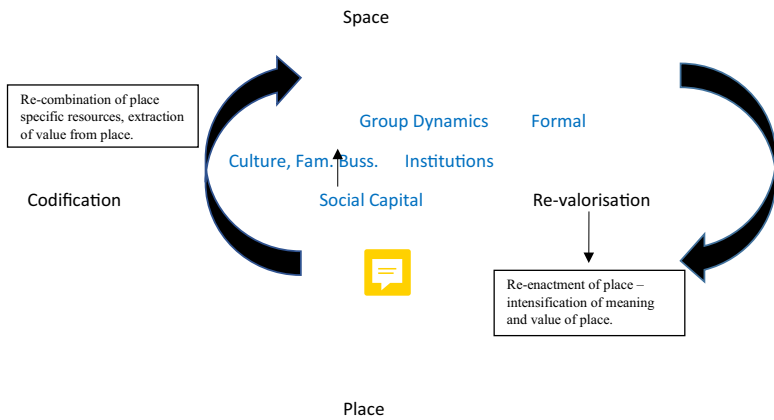


Figure 1.
A multidimensional, heterotopian, virtuous cycle of rural entrepreneurship

Source: Own elaboration, adapted from Korsgaard *et al.* (2015b)

cohesiveness in the CBE, i.e. where members are attracted to each other and are motivated to stay in the group. As group cohesiveness has been noted to be linked to productivity and depend upon the performance-related norms established by the group, the VA CBE's story shows their failure.

As there is not a strong institution (or leader), in the VA community, and as the population has a bad opinion and perception of the local government, it is a difficult context for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs rely upon social capital in emerging economies to a greater extent than in developed ones as a substitute for weak formal institutions, although culture also plays a role (Estrin *et al.*, 2019). This leads entrepreneurs to rely upon informal social structures to enable exchange based upon mutual trust and enforceable social norms of cooperation (Tucker, 2010; Tan *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, more work is needed to understand the potential role of social capital in substituting for absent institutions in emerging markets (Estrin *et al.*, 2019).

This study's multidimensional approach contributes to the analysis of the micro-level group dynamics, social capital, localized processes of unvalued creation, and how these processes are enabled, constrained, and intertwined with the spatial context (Hindle, 2010) on rural entrepreneurship in an emergent economy. Also, it contributes to the call made by Korsgaard *et al.* (2015b), in understanding two central issues with insufficient theoretical and empirical attention: the influence of immediate spatial context or "place" in entrepreneurial processes (Welter, 2011), and the impact of entrepreneurial activities on local (entrepreneurial and social) development and resilience (Hudson, 2010). Also, this manuscript contributes to the current body of knowledge of context by weaving space and place under a heterotopia that should have fostered entrepreneurship. Our study answers the recent calls for contextualizing entrepreneurship research and theories (Welter, 2011; Welter and Gardner, 2017) as it captures the multidimensionality of entrepreneurial activity and supporting the understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Zahra, 2007), especially in local and regional settings (Soliva, 2007).

Conclusion

This paper has opened a conversation about the negative aspects of heterotopias, especially with regards to entrepreneurship. Much literature has been devoted to the power of rural

communities (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Tucker, 2010) and peasant villages as fertile places for entrepreneurship. However, these aforementioned bodies of literature emphasize the role of entrepreneurial culture and governmental support as almost guarantors of entrepreneurial success. Sadly, entrepreneurship is the study of outliers (Pelly, 2017a), and there is not a guaranteed path to success, or even solid antecedents to entrepreneurship, as illustrated in VA. This narrative provides one reason for entrepreneurial failure: the deviant heterotopia originated by the factors shown in Figure 1.

Despite a governmental policy that favored collective entrepreneurial efforts, and despite a vibrant underground entrepreneurship culture combined with a valuable brand, that “spark” to launch, or engage in some type of effectuation (Sarvasvathy, 2001) did not occur. The values in this heterotopia fostered an alternative set of values, ones that were different from the desires of the government, from the Mennonite community who lived among the people of VA and from the neighboring areas within the state. In lieu of this giving the people some sort of competitive advantage, the deviance of this heterotopia fostered an entirely different set of values. Instead of exploiting opportunities as found in conventional entrepreneurship (Sarvasvathy, 2001), the people of VA began exploiting each other. The result was a lack of identification with a value chain, a two-time failure of a milk and cheese producer’s cooperative owing to the presence of antisocial capital, the revelation that entrepreneurial individuals left the heterotopia and the culture of those that remained in VA seeking the protection of limited good and a reduced quality of life.

This work is limited by the fact that it has a sample size of one. Nonetheless, the depth with which we examined VA, and its attempts to form a milk and cheese producer’s cooperative, is illustrative of the negative effects of isolation in a heterotopia. This example is so extreme that it can serve as an ordering mechanism (Topinka, 2010) – or a sensemaking device that can aid government officers and policymakers in understanding the social context in rural entrepreneurship and its corresponding impact.

On the implications, the model suggests future rural entrepreneurship research address the psycho-sociological aspects of context and how they are intertwined within the entrepreneurial processes. Clearly, the findings show it is not enough to have federal sponsorship, training or entrepreneurial programs to achieve economic development. In line with Gaddefors and Anderson (2019), the VA case should help to better understand the nature and practices of groups within rural entrepreneurship.

The heterotopia of VA is the source of this other set of values. While this work has illustrated the pitfalls of these alternative spaces, future research would require ethnographies to further derive the actual source of such heterotopias. Do they have a beginning or an end? What is the trigger point that launches them? Is there a way to dissipate heterotopias or is it even necessary or a good idea to do so?

Furthermore, in line with Kurtege Sefer (2020), researchers might conduct in-depth interviews with state authorities, development agents and other local actors to identify the different political perspectives on rural development. More qualitative studies should elaborate on the implementation processes of these policies at the cooperative level and its impacts on rural entrepreneurship. New multidimensional studies will reveal local implementation processes regarding the national strategy.

AQ: 5



Notes

1. Because of the drug cartel presence in VA, the anonymity of the participants was strongly requested.

2. The integrating company is a form of business organization that associates formally constituted individuals or companies of a micro, small and medium scale (SMEs). Its purpose is to provide specialized services to its partners, such as managing financing, buying raw materials and supplies together and selling the production in a consolidated way. Through these association schemes, SMEs increase their competitiveness. They are tax-exempt for ten years.

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