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Contextualization of entrepreneurship research: Methodologies of the trend

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Max Paschke and Anna Müller

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Contextualization of Entrepreneurship Research – Methodologies of the Trend

Max Paschke¹, Anna Müller²

Abstract

In the last decade, contextualization has matured into an important topic of entrepreneurship research and continues to attract great interest. However, from a methodological point of view, contextualization still seems to pose significant challenges. In order to reflect the current trends and challenges of methods used in entrepreneurship context research, we analyze articles published in leading scientific journals of the field against the background of context methodologies of Welter and Baker (who, where, when). We deductively coded our final sample (131 articles) regarding type of method, used Data, unit of analysis and context typologies of Welter and Baker. Our results show the following 4 most important findings: 1. Case studies in particular show methodological strengths with regard to the depth of contextual observation. 2. The contextualization show clear differences in the methods required and used regarding the different typologies. 3. Methodological processing of contextualization depends on aspects such as data availability, data type and generalizability. 4. Individuality and depth represent the greatest challenges for a qualitatively appropriate contextualization of entrepreneurship research.

Keywords: Context; Research Method; Entrepreneurship Research

JEL: I23, M21

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Introduction

In the last decade, contextualization has matured into an important topic of entrepreneurship research (Baker & Welter, 2018; Welter & Baker, 2020) and continues to attract great interest (Welter & Baker, 2020). The contextualization of entrepreneurship research contributes to taking into account the individuality of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2017). It acknowledges the '[. . .] diversity in organizational forms, innovation, motivations, places, people, funding, development paths, and contributions to economy and society' (Welter, Baker, & Wirsching, 2019, p. 8). Taking into account the individuality and the diversity, contextualization is seen as great opportunity to gain new insights in entrepreneurship research (Aldrich, 2009). In addition, the contextualization of research can help to facilitate the transfer of research findings to different groups of addressees through an easier knowledge transfer of contextualized knowledge and thus increase the relevance of research (Paschke, 2020).

Contextualizing entrepreneurship means understanding when, how and why entrepreneurship happens (Welter, 2011). Context is more than just the environment. Welter (2011) discusses the where and the when typologies of context and distinguishes between business, social, spatial and institutional contexts (where) and historical and time contexts (when) as influential on entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship does not take place in a vacuum, it is influenced by its surrounding, its context. Political systems, geographical conditions, social cultures and customs, networks, as well as the time in which entrepreneurship takes place, but also the past influence entrepreneurship. In line with Whetten (1989), the who typology represents the third contextual typology and stands for the entrepreneur or the venture itself. This diversity and multiplicity of different contexts, which usually cannot/should not be considered in isolation (Welter & Baker, 2020), means that the contextualization of entrepreneurship is certainly associated with challenges.

In particular from a methodological point of view, contextualization still seems to pose significant challenges. While Welter (Welter, 2011) already noted in her 2011 article that contextualization challenges the dominance of quantitative methods, Weigel and Soost (Weigel & Soost, 2020) also argue that the methods currently used – especially classical regression models – are not suitable for presenting the current perspectives of contextual research. Qualitative research represents the preferred research method since this type of research questions about the specificity of a phenomenon – and therefore questions about the context of entrepreneurship (Aljarodi et al., 2020). In this article we examine the current state of methodological development and trends in entrepreneurship context research. To do so, we analyze articles published in scientific journals of entrepreneurship research. On the one hand, the results reflect the current state of research and, at the same time, provide indications of how contextualization can be advanced in terms of methodology. In the following we describe our method followed by our first results and the discussion. Finally, we summarize and give an outlook for future research.

Approach

In order to reflect the current trend of methods used in entrepreneurship context research, we analyze articles published in leading scientific journals of the field, more precisely articles published in special issues (SI's), because we assume that these represent current trends in entrepreneurship research best. In detail, we look at the context discussion in SI's of leading entrepreneurship journals over the period from 2011 to June 2019 and analyze them in terms of methodology. All articles of the final sample were coded with regard to methodological and contextual properties. We use the 3 typologies context model of Welter and Baker (2020) to gain deeper insights into methodological differences regarding the contextualization of entrepreneurship research.

Sample

For the period 2011 to June 2019, we first looked through special issues of the journals "Entrepreneurship & Regional Development", "Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice", "The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation", "International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship", "International Small Business Journal", "International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research", "Journal of Business Venturing", "Journal of Small Business Management", "Journal of Social Entrepreneurship", "Organization Studies" and "Small Business Economics". We could identify 151 SI's (SI Total) in the respective journals and time period. In the next step, we checked whether a special issue contributes or aims to contribute to the contextualization of entrepreneurship research on the basis of the abstracts or introducing articles. This contribution could either consist of analyzing the impact/interaction between context and entrepreneurship, examining entrepreneurship in very specific contexts (e.g. gender, emerging markets, etc.) or conceptually advancing the contextualization of entrepreneurship. This selection results in 29 special issues (SI "Context") with 192 articles (Articles in SI "Context"). For the final analysis of the articles, the introducing articles (29) were removed from the sample, as they would distort the analysis in terms of methodology because they mainly introduce the chapters and rarely come up with their own research methodology. Furthermore, we excluded articles that did not have a methodological section (32) in order to allow for the most subjective interpretation of the methodology. The final sample therefore contains 131 articles. The following table illustrates the selection.

Journal	SI Total	SI "Context"	Articles "Context"	SI	Final Sample
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	15	5	31		20
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	21	3	21		13
The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation	6*	4	24		17
International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	8	2	12		8
International Small Business Journal	15	4	19		14
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research	11	0	0		0
Journal of Business Venturing	7	1	10		9
Journal of Small Business Management	12	2	17		12
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	4	1	5		4
Organization Studies	28	1	7		6
Small Business Economics	24	6**	46		28
Total	151	29	192		131

*For IJIEI we only identified SI for the years 2017-19th June 2019.

**We added an online only SI here, which was not included in the original sample.

Table 1: Sample formation on 19th June 2019

Coding

Starting our analysis, we preliminary deductively coded the content for surface data on bibliographies (Journal, Year, Author), type of method (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-

methods), the type of used Data (e.g. interviews, surveys, secondary data), and the unit of analysis (e.g. women entrepreneurs, start-ups, networks etc.). In addition, for qualitative and mixed-methods articles we coded if the article follows a case study approach and for quantitative and mixed-methods articles using secondary data, we coded which and how many databases they used (Krippendorff, 2004). In order to gain deeper insights into the methods used, the articles were also coded with regard to the context typologies of Welter and Baker (Welter & Baker, 2020), who added the who typology to the original model of Welter (2011), so that their model includes the three typologies who, where and when.

First results

As predicted by the literature (Aljarodi et al., 2020; Weigel & Soost, 2020; Welter, 2011), the proportion of articles with qualitative analysis is relatively high in articles dealing with the contextualization of entrepreneurship research. Our sample, which has a clear focus on "contextualization", supports this prediction. While only a small number of the articles follows a mixed-method approach, the majority is divided almost equally into qualitative (61) and quantitative (63) articles. This stands in stark contrast to a representative sample of entrepreneurship research articles in general, which, according to McDonald et al. (2015), is expected to have a significantly higher proportion of quantitative articles. McDonald et al. (2015) found that in entrepreneurship research about 90 % of the articles are based on quantitative methods.

In the following, quantitative and qualitative methods are first described separately on a superior level, before we then go deeper into the methodology of the individual context typologies (who, where, when)

Quantitative Methods

Although articles with a quantitative methodology are significantly less frequent in our contextualization-oriented sample than in entrepreneurship research in general, most articles, albeit briefly, still follow a quantitative approach. According to the literature (Aljarodi et al., 2020; Weigel & Soost, 2020), it can be assumed that articles that use quantitative methods face the greatest challenges in terms of contextualization.

	Number of Articles
Total	63
Survey	20
Secondary data	35
Other sources	8

Table 2: Overview quantitative methods and their data sources

Regarding the articles using a quantitative methodology in our sample, it is noticeable that almost one third (20/63) conducted their own surveys, 35 articles referred to secondary data and 8 articles used interviews or other resources such as archive data, posts or experimental data. In addition, of the articles relating to secondary data, more than one third (15/35) referred to more than one database. Vice versa, this means that only almost 1/3 of the articles refer to databases that are available in this way. These numbers indicate that the need for individual data in the contextualization process is very high. Furthermore, the analysis of the articles referring to secondary data shows that the database Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) was used quite often (15 times). GEM offers data on the individual level of entrepreneurs as well as at the national context level of entrepreneurship. The GEM conducts around 200,000 interviews per year, covering 115 countries over all continents and have been doing so for 22 years, allowing longitudinal analysis in and across geographies on multiple levels. On the web page, they use the words "Not all entrepreneurs are alike" and "Entrepreneurship does not

take place in a vacuum” to describe their samples at the individual and national level (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2020). This implied individuality in combination with the surroundings represents the basic principles of contextualization in entrepreneurship research, which is why it is not surprising that this database is so frequently used in contextualization.

Qualitative Methods

While only slowly gaining importance in entrepreneurship research in general, almost half of our contextualization-oriented sample uses a qualitative methodology. Quantitative methods ask for the specifics of phenomena and are therefore excellently suited for the contextualization of entrepreneurship research (Aljarodi et al., 2020).

	Number of articles*
Total	61
Own data	48
Secondary data	13
Interviews	44
Case Studies	38

* several denominations possible

*Table 3: Overview qualitative methods and their data sources; *several denominations possible*

The trend towards individual data, which we have already seen in the quantitative articles, is also clearly evident in the qualitative papers. More than half of the qualitative papers use more than one data source for data collection. Nearly 4 out of 5 articles generated own data for their analysis, the others rely on archive data (4), literature (5) or other documents (4). Most articles generating own data used interviews, others used other forms of conversations and observations. While coding, we noticed many articles following a case study approach. After checking it out, we found that this impression was correct. We identified 38 articles claimed to follow a case study approach. In addition, many articles propose in their future research recommendation section to foster case study research (e.g. Orr, Kickul, Gundry, & Griffiths, 2018; Radaelli, Dell’Era, Frattini, & Messeni Petruzzelli, 2018). To work with single or multiple case studies offers the opportunity to focus on details and to be very specific (Yin, 2014). In addition to the increased need for individual data, the increased representation of case studies, as well as the high number of interviews in qualitative papers, underpins the need for detailed and in-depth observation of phenomena in the context of contextualizing entrepreneurship research.

Context typologies and their methods

In the following a deeper insight into the methods of contextualization will be given. We use the context typologies of Welter and Baker (2020) to look in detail at the methodological differences in contextualization. This division in these three context typologies is well established in entrepreneurship research. At the same time it represents a great framework to have a deeper look at the different methodologies used for different aspects of the contextualization of entrepreneurship research. We thus take into account the diversity of contexts.

According to Welter and Baker (2020), the contextualization of entrepreneurship research addresses the different typologies with varying degrees of intensity. While the “where” is very often discussed, aspects of “who” and “when” are much less frequently found in articles. This is also the case in our sample. Thus, very often it is examined how the social or institutional or spatial context interacts with entrepreneurship (all represented in the where typology of context). Personal aspects, apart from the gender aspect, as well as historical or temporal aspects are rather rare. In our sample, we also found that all the articles used the where typology for the investigation, so it did not happen that an article was exclusively dedicated to the who or when typology. This seems to be logical, as temporal or personal aspects are

difficult to discuss without the space in which these aspects occur. The following Table illustrates this.

	Qualitative			Quantitative			Mixed-Method	Total	
	Total	Own Data	Case Studies	Total	Own Data	Case Studies	Total	Case Studies	
Where	23	19	15	31	14	1	4	1	57
Who, Where	24	22	13	27	14	1	3	0	54
Where, When	4	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	8
Who, Where, When	10	5	8	2	0	0	0	0	12
Total	61	48	38	63	28	2	7	1	131

Table 4: Context typologies and their methods used

The table shows clear differences in the methodology used with regard to the different context typologies. While the proportion between quantitative and qualitative methods used in articles dealing with the where typology or the combination of who and where typologies seem to be relatively balanced, the share of qualitative methods clearly predominates in articles dealing with the when typology. It is also noticeable that the mixed-method approaches also tend to occur in articles dealing not with the when typology. In the following we want to discuss and interpret the calculated numbers in a meaningful way. In doing so, we will look deeper into the texts to verify our interpretations.

Discussion

Shepherd et al. (2019) stated that contextualizing entrepreneurship needs the “manifestation of multiple variables that fully capture the breadth and depth, the richness and complexity, of the phenomena”(Shepherd et al., 2019, p. 182). Our data show that exactly this need is reflected in the methods. For example, the high proportion of qualitative papers already points to a detailed and in-depth consideration of phenomena. This is underpinned by the high level of individual demand for data, demonstrated by the high proportion of own surveys and individual data in qualitative and quantitative papers. In addition, the high proportion of case studies which illuminate phenomena in detail and depth shows that the choice of appropriate methods takes account of the contextualization in methodological terms in general.

Regarding the context typologies, the results indicate methodological differences. The result, that especially the when typology is mainly qualitatively treated, indicates at first glance that it is particularly difficult to research the when typology with quantitative methods. Against the background of panel data and long-term data collections, this seems rather surprising. All 5 quantitative studies dealing with the when typology in our sample are based on such longitudinal data collections (see Carreira & Teixeira, 2016; Das & Das, 2014; Simmons, Wiklund, Levie, Bradley, & Sunny, 2018; Sperber & Linder, 2018; Yousafzai, Saeed, & Muffatto, 2015). All 5 are also based on secondary databases, so the lack of quantitative studies regarding the when typology is not simply related to missing data.

A closer analysis of the qualitative articles dealing with the when typology reveals that 10 of the 14 articles are based on a case study methodology (e.g. Auerswald & Dani, 2017; Basque & Langley, 2018; Blagoev, Felten, & Kahn, 2018; Cailluet, Gorge, & Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2018; Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015; Lubinski, 2018; Maclean, Harvey, Sillince, & Golant, 2018; Markowska & Lopez-Vega, 2018; Oertel & Thommes, 2018; Waldron, Fisher, & Navis, 2015). Case studies are ideal for conducting an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon in order to obtain a holistic picture (Yin, 2014). A low number of quantitative studies based on secondary data on the one hand and a high number of in-depth qualitative studies on the other leads us to the conclusion that the when typology tends to be more involved when a phenomenon is really considered in depth. It is possible that the influences of temporal components on

entrepreneurship turn out to be too complex and too individual for large-scale quantitative studies to produce a reliable statement that can be implemented in a scientific article. One possible cause may be that temporal influences are rarely generalizable. For example, the Corona crisis in 2020, as a temporal context component, shows that influences of this contemporary event have very different consequences for different industries, countries and professions. While jobs are being lost in sectors such as the gastronomy or tourism industry, business is booming in DIY stores and garden centres, and the medical sector is challenged as rarely before. Different regions are also affected to different degrees, and formal and informal institutions also have a significant impact on the effect of the time components on entrepreneurship. This high degree of individuality makes it very difficult to investigate this temporal context typology in a quantitative way with regard to its influence on entrepreneurship. Even if the data are available, it is much more practical to conduct this research in a qualitative form.

This in turn leads us to the question why the when typology is researched less quantitatively because of its complexity and individuality, but this does not seem to apply to the who typology. When looking at the quantitative studies that use the who typology in their analyses, it is noticeable that these are mostly included in the analyses on a very superficial level. Often only distinctive characteristics such as gender (e.g. Bogren, von Friedrichs, Rennemo, & Widding, 2013; Liu, Schøtt, & Zhang, 2019; Mahmood, 2011; Orser, Riding, & Weeks, 2018), type of company (new venture, SME, family firms)(e.g. Gomez–Mejia et al., 2014; McKelvie, Wiklund, & Brattström, 2018; Yu, Lumpkin, Praveen Parboteeah, & Stambaugh, 2019) or the function of individuals (students, academics)(e.g. Costa, Santos, Wach, & Caetano, 2018; Ejerme & Källström, 2016; Shneor, Metin Camgöz, & Bayhan Karapinar, 2013; Turner & Gianiodis, 2018) are relevant for the analysis. In addition, it is noticeable that in articles dealing with the who typology in quantitative surveys the proportion of own surveys is relatively high compared to the other typologies. It is particularly noticeable that often the distinguishing features of the who typology also represent the characteristics of the object of investigation (women entrepreneurs, cross-border entrepreneurs, farmers in the Netherlands, etc.). This explains the high proportion of own surveys and the relatively superficial consideration of the who typology in quantitative studies. In studies with a large number of cases, clear and rather superficial criteria must be used to define the object of investigation, which at the same time provide the framework for the analysis of the who typology in the corresponding studies. When secondary data are used, these clear and rather superficial criteria are derived from the available data, in the case of own surveys from the goal of defining the largest possible target group for the data collection.

Qualitative analyses tend to be more detailed. In addition to the studies on women entrepreneurs and student entrepreneurs, there are also studies on specific companies (P&G, Seafood company, watchmaking enterprises, winepreneurs) (e.g. Alvarez, Young, & Woolley, 2015; Maclean et al., 2018; Markowska & Lopez-Vega, 2018; Oertel & Thommes, 2018), in which the individual characteristics are dealt with in greater detail. This becomes clear when looking at the case study share. Around 60 percent of the qualitative studies that examine the who typology are case studies. Thus, the proportion of case studies is not quite as high as in the when typology (approx. 70 percent), but it is still considerable. This very two-sided picture of the who typology shows that, on the one hand, the who typology is often already considered in an appropriate depth and quality through qualitative studies, and that, on the other hand, the sometimes rather superficial and possibly even incidental consideration of the typology in quantitative studies results from the described demands on an object of investigation. The high numbers with which the who typology is researched should therefore be treated with caution; the simple quantity should not be interpreted as high quality research in the who category.

If we now look at the where typology individually, it is striking that this is the only typology in which the quantitative articles clearly predominate with more than 53 percent. At the same time, the total share of case studies is quite high at over 29 percent, higher than in the joint consideration of where and when contexts (28.5 percent) or who and where contexts (26 percent). This draws a heterogeneous research picture of the where typology. Taking into account the division of the where typology into social, spatial and institutional aspects (Welter, 2011), this heterogeneity can be well explained. On the one hand, aspects such as local conditions, countries, borders, legislation, etc. can be more or less easily quantified. On the other hand, it is often not possible to quantitatively measure aspects such as informal institutions, cultures or social networks, which is why qualitative studies and case studies are needed. With regard to the methodological processing of the where typology, it can therefore be assumed that the diverse picture of the methodological processing already results from the collectable data.

Sum up

All in all, we have thus obtained a very diverse picture of the methodological treatment of contexts. While, as already suspected by the literature, qualitative methods seem to be the method of choice to advance contextualization with the required depth, case studies in particular prove to be the appropriate method because of their even deeper and more detailed approach. In detail, the contextualization shows clear differences in the methods required and used. While temporal components, which seem difficult to generalize, are generally only used for in-depth analyses, the other typologies show diverse pictures. While in the who typology the numbers hide the real quality of the contextualization and often only a superficial processing takes place, the where typology depends on the concrete aspect of the investigation. And so the realization remains that the methodological processing of contextualization depends on aspects such as data availability, data type and generalizability. Individuality and depth represent the greatest challenges for a qualitatively appropriate contextualization of entrepreneurship research.

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