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Field dynamics and fields of entrepreneurial practice: Autonomizing process, self-help doxa, and homological action

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship research increasingly advocates for diverse methodological approaches to explore entrepreneurial activity within various contexts. Responding to this call, this paper employs Bourdieu's theory of practice to investigate entrepreneurship in two UK cities: Liverpool and Kingston upon Hull (Hull). By adopting an abductive approach, we shed light on shared practical understandings and multi-practitioner entrepreneurial activities. Using the concept of a 'field of entrepreneurship' to elucidate entrepreneurial contexts, our study reveals the dynamics within these settings that encourage agents to engage in entrepreneurial endeavours. In Liverpool, an autonomizing process is observed, wherein agents are drawn into entrepreneurship due to factors such as perceived social capital, ease of access, and adherence to a self-help doxa or ethos. Conversely, in Hull, perceived low entrepreneurial activity prompts agents to form formal alliances and initiatives to bolster the entrepreneurial landscape, leading to a distinct form of homological alliance-building. This research brings a unique empirical application of practice theory to the study of entrepreneurship and context, offering insights into the interplay between agency and structure. By uncovering shared practices facilitating entrepreneurial activities across different contexts, our findings enrich our understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics and inform strategies for fostering entrepreneurship.

1. Introduction

Contextualization in entrepreneurship research has gained popularity over recent years (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023), with scholars highlighting non-standard models of entrepreneurship and developing understandings of the interplay between structure and agency in entrepreneurial practice (Melin et al., 2022; Sadeghiani et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2020). Far from being static (Welter et al., 2019; Welter & Baker, 2021; Welter & Gartner, 2016), context can be viewed as a relational space in which entrepreneurs are embedded (Harima, 2022; Hong & Spigel, 2024; Korsgaard et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs are influenced by context, and they influence it through their social practices (Champenois et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2020). There have been calls for the expansion of context-based entrepreneurship research that adopts more diverse theoretical and empirical approaches (Welter et al., 2019; Welter & Baker, 2021). This study answers these calls, using a field-based theoretical lens, Bourdieu's theory of practice, the Bourdieusian conceptualisation of the field construct, and field dynamics

(Alterskye et al., 2023; Bourdieu, 1977; Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020; Tatli et al., 2014), to examine entrepreneurial contexts and outcomes in two settings: Hull and Liverpool. The theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020; Tatli et al., 2014) supports our understanding of entrepreneurial contexts, as it provides explanations of fields and dynamics. Hence, the main research question for this study is: *How do fields of entrepreneurship and linked field dynamics differ across contexts?*

This study reveals that the field of entrepreneurship in Liverpool is increasing and growing stronger, as more actors and nascent entrepreneurs join as a result of an "autonomizing process" (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p. 63). This process occurs when the activity that takes place in a field is relatively autonomous, due to the structures and institutions present. This autonomy can reify field-based positions, making entrepreneurial roles more attainable and increasing the size of the field and the number of entrepreneurs. This process makes the position of 'entrepreneur' more attainable, due to the perceived availability of social capital and the presence of a self-help doxa. This doxa represents accepted norms and assumptions (Bourdieu, 2010), shaping and reifying

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practices (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014) towards entrepreneurial endeavours. The ‘field of entrepreneurship’ in Hull is growing as a result of agent-based, formal, homological action (Bourdieu, 2010, 1984; Wang, 2016). Alliances have formed between those focused on changing the established order (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014, p. 15), after incumbents in the field noticed a lack of activity.

This study makes several contributions. Firstly, utilising the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ and field dynamics (Alterskye et al., 2023) as a unit of analysis, from an empirical Bourdieusian perspective, it operationalises under-utilised elements, such as doxa and *illusio*, from the theory of practice (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020). This approach highlights field dynamics, field-based mechanisms, and conditions (Harrison et al., 2024) that contribute to entrepreneurial outcomes in certain contexts, allowing issues around the dual (Champenois et al., 2020) and relational (Chalmers & Shaw, 2015) nature of the structure to be further understood. Secondly, the paper demonstrates that field properties are changing and becoming an entrepreneur is more possible (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014) in Liverpool because of an “autonomizing process” (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p. 63). Thirdly, we reveal that agents occupying important positions in Hull create formal homological alliances (Bourdieu, 2010, 1984; Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Wang, 2016), working together to enact change and strengthen their position. Fourthly, we demonstrate the effects of overlapping fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2015, p. 80) and connected presuppositions, or doxa (Bourdieu, 2010) – in this case, a “self-help” doxa in Liverpool – as a field-strengthening dynamic.

The article is structured as follows. An overview of existing literature is presented, and the conceptual framework is discussed. Research methods are then outlined. Empirical findings are then analysed, and the paper concludes with considerations and implications for theory and practice.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Context in entrepreneurship

According to Welter (2011), the pillars of context are business, institutional, social, and spatial. However, from an ‘entrepreneurship as practice’ perspective, a context is the place in which practice occurs. Contexts influence practice, and practice recursively influences context. The who, what, where, and why (Welter et al., 2019) of entrepreneurial practices are connected to context. Entrepreneurial practice forms part of the social life and social order of agents (Thompson et al., 2022, p. 82), and are “shaped by culture or field and shape them in turn” (Teague et al., 2021, p. 570). Practice can be connected to an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Champenois et al., 2020, p. 302), with key players in the ecosystem influenced by context (Teague et al., 2021). Practice theories move away from the individual entrepreneur and towards a focus on joint ventures (Thompson et al., 2022, p. 108). An entrepreneurial group can endorse practices (Gartner et al., 2016, p. 814) in which the organising context dictates the outcomes (Thompson et al., 2022, p. 61). When viewing entrepreneurship through a practice theory lens, shared phronesis – or knowhow linked to practical action – can be seen (Kamineni, 2021). ‘Entrepreneurship as practice’ approaches study activities in context, bridging the agent structure duality (Sadeghiani et al., 2023) by explaining a nexus of practices, illustrating the mutual dependency and symbiotic interaction (Melin et al., 2022) between agency and structure.

2.2. The field of entrepreneurship

The field may be interpreted as weaker or stronger in certain contexts in comparison to others, due to prevalent conditions. Nascent entrepreneurs are influenced by the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ and the accompanying habitus (Bourdieu, 2010, 1990, 1977; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993), or have a disposition towards practices present in their

region. This influence and alignment of the habitus enacts the perceived legitimacy (Reid, 2021) of being entrepreneurial in that region (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; McAdam et al., 2019). The specific field is a critical mediator between the practices of those who partake in it and the surrounding social and economic conditions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.105). A field is a space of play within which agents carry out activities (Bourdieu, 2010, 1977). Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the field adopts a relational perspective (Emirbayer, 1997; Fletcher & Selden, 2016, 2013; Tatli et al., 2014), in which the practice and social phenomena of entrepreneurship is situated within a complex web of relationships linked to context. This perspective helps researchers understand entrepreneurship on micro and macro levels, from individual entrepreneurs or small businesses to organisations, considering the effects of the wider environment on entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurship is a source of change and a mechanism through which temporal/spatial inefficiencies are mitigated (Kirzner, 1985; Schumpeter, 1934). Wooten and Hoffman (2016) argue that a field is a mechanism that produces an outcome. Business start-up rates are the outcome, whilst the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ is the mechanism. Thus, it can be hypothesised that the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ (Alterskye et al., 2023) is ever-present in society, as agents constantly try to improve their relative positions through the acquisition of capital. This process uncovers temporal and spatial inefficiencies.

Interactions between individuals and their contexts leads to competition for economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, as they seek to gain favourable field-based outcomes (Pret et al., 2015). Thus, Bourdieu’s concept of capital (Bourdieu, 1977) is important. Capital has different levels of importance in different fields. Types of capital define a field, and the field gives validity to the capital present (Allan, 2013, p.186). The availability or the perception of the availability of different forms of capital – be it economic, cultural, social, or symbolic – may differ for start-ups in different regions, affecting the field or ‘feel of the game’ and accompanying *illusio* and habitus. This leads to feelings of “powerlessness... turned into a tool for resistance... and enacted through the building of alternative interlocking entrepreneurial structures” (Dodd, 2014, p.192) that can be seen in a music-based field of activity, or a practice-based view of entrepreneurial legitimacy, which is encapsulated as habitus (Reid, 2021). Practices are investigated within their contexts (Chalmers & Shaw, 2015), and entrepreneurial practice is no different (Thompson et al., 2022, p.144). Entrepreneurial legitimacy (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009) is linked to business start-up rates, because this influences whether or not agents believe that starting a business is a worthwhile thing to do. The ‘field of entrepreneurship’ contains capital that can be recovered by agents, and the actors in that region are involved in a sub-conscious (Chia, 2006) attempt to earn capital by influencing the habitus of the field (Pret et al., 2015). The existence of a field is linked to the construct of “*illusio*” (Bourdieu, 1990), which determines whether agents feel they belong to a field, and whether taking part is worthwhile (Tatli et al., 2014, p.624). The ‘field of entrepreneurship’ could be strong in a certain region, with agent perceptions of *illusio* aligned with practices that enable entrepreneurial activity. Alternatively, the field could be perceived as weak or an overlapping field could displace a region’s ‘field of entrepreneurship’, which could curb entrepreneurial activity. Individuals operate within their context-based social space to make sense of this (Lockett et al., 2014). They become unconsciously familiar with the “doxa” of the field, its presuppositions (Golsorkhi et al., 2009), or “guidelines, and rules that orient (but do not determine) the course of activity” (Champenois et al., 2020, p.283). Developing an understanding of the doxa and *illusio* connected to a field, along with its habitus and capital, helps researchers engage with reflexivity (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020), as the social and intellectual foundations of agent-based activity can be illustrated through predispositions or collective unconscious agreements.

2.3. Field dynamics

Focusing research on the presence of habitus, illusio, doxa, and capital in a field helps develop insights into shared and practice-based understandings (Schatzki et al., 2001; Tsoukas, 2011). Agents assume accepted or dominant social positions of a relational nature (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020), depending on the social capital available (Anderson et al., 2007; Audretsch et al., 2011; Cordero & Lewis, 2023), and these social positions may be linked to the availability of other forms of capital. In a ‘field of entrepreneurship’, this capital (Hill, 2018; Reid, 2021) could be anything from status, kudos, and respect within a networking group, to material goods and economic gain. Having an appreciation of the dynamics linked to entrepreneurial and start-up activities in a region helps develop an understanding of entrepreneurial context, the practices of the field (Thompson et al., 2020), and the organisation of these practices (Johannisson, 2011). By understanding field dynamics (Alterskye et al., 2023), we can uncover shared practices. For example, the availability of capital and the way that it is harvested is linked to practices such as mentoring and networking (Lefebvre et al., 2015).

2.4. Autonomizing process and homology

Field-based positions and dispositions may prompt agents to practice activities that strengthen their field and their position, such as cooptation (Bouncken et al., 2018; Darbi & Knott, 2023) amongst entrepreneurs. A field has certain rules and functions that define the positions available and the relationships between agents (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). These rules are embodied in the habitus, doxa, illusio, and capital available. Activities that take place in a field can be relatively autonomous, due to the structures and institutions present. This autonomy reifies field-based positions and strengthens the field, as “the field is produced by and produces agents who master and possess an area of specific competence” (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014, p.7), such as entrepreneurial competence. If a specific form of capital is readily available, or if field conditions within the habitus, illusio, or doxa are favourable,

agents may become more active in pursuing capital and engaging in entrepreneurial endeavours. An “autonomizing process” (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63) therefore strengthens the field.

Homology refers to a similarity of positions within fields of practice (Bourdieu, 2010). Agents’ positions are influenced by habitus, doxa, illusio, and capital availability. If an agent is in a dominant position, they will uphold the status-quo and align with agents in other fields that have similarly dominant positions (Wang, 2016). The same occurs in reverse, with those in less dominant positions forming alliances to work together to change the established order (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014, p.15). If the entrepreneur is not well-established in a context, agents may enact homological action (Wang, 2016), becoming gatekeepers by forming alliances and helping new agents to join. See Fig. 1 for an overview of the field, including autonomizing effects and homological actions.

2.5. Theoretical position and research gap

A gap has been identified in entrepreneurship and context literature. This gap could broaden the utilisation of theoretical constructs (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023) and develop our understanding of contextual entrepreneurship, developing perspectives that could illustrate omnibus contexts (Welter et al., 2019) across layers of analysis. Developing an understanding of how entrepreneurs interact with – or “do contexts” (Baker & Welter, 2020, p.41) through activities – fills this gap, evolving our understanding of the duality of structure, practice, and agency. This increases our understanding of multiple practitioner perspectives within contexts (Champenois et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2022). There are also calls to develop knowledge on generalisability, simplicity, and accuracy (Baker & Welter, 2020). Another research gap exists pertaining to how concepts linked to Bourdieu’s field of practice have been operationalised. Combinations of concepts, such as habitus and capital, are often examined (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020), but are not applied holistically. Scholars have also neglected to consider how field mechanisms and conditions (Harrison et al., 2024) affect outcomes and influence

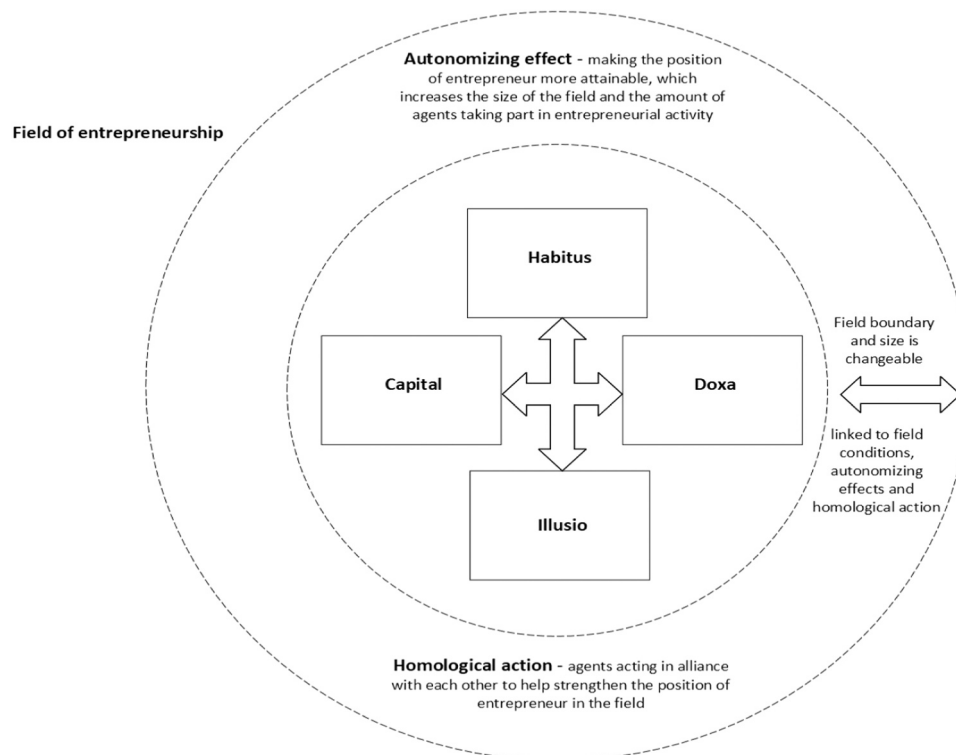


Fig. 1. The field of entrepreneurship, including autonomizing effect and homological action, adapted from Bourdieu (2010, 1984, 1977, 1993).

dynamics (Alterskye et al., 2023), such as homological action and autonomizing processes.

Responding to these calls, the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ construct (see Fig. 1), along with agent-based interactions and field dynamics, can be used to understand shared phronesis (Flyvbjerg, 2001) or shared understandings of relevant practical action, relational practices, the nexus of practices that are connected to entrepreneurial phenomenon (Champanois et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2020), and organisational contexts (Johannisson, 2011). This construct acts as a unit of analysis within a research setting, providing a way of understanding entrepreneurial practice-based activities at various levels (Welter, 2011; Welter & Gartner, 2016). Utilising the ‘field of entrepreneurship’, as a unit of analysis linked to field dynamics (Alterskye et al., 2023) helps to explain the nexus of practices by “zooming out” (Nicolini, 2009) and examining a collection of practices/interactions that shape entrepreneurial outcomes. See Table 1 for a Glossary of terms.

3. Data and method

3.1. Research design

Field concepts help to explain important issues, such as agency and structure, organising contexts, multiple agent-based activity, and shared understandings, which are linked to understanding entrepreneurial practices and outcomes. An abductive process (Fann, 2012; Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Timmermans & Tavory, 2022) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. This allowed gaps to be filled and helped develop a fuller picture of entrepreneurial practice.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and case material was collected from 30 entrepreneurs from Hull and 30 from Liverpool. The interviews adopted an open-ended format (Silverman, 2016). Respondents were asked to recount their business start-up journey from initial ideas through to opening the business and beyond. Respondents were then questioned in a semi-structured interview style in relation to some of the influences and activities that occurred in their formative years and whilst running their business.

3.2. Unit of analysis

Clarification must be made between the unit of analysis and the unit of observation within this research (Babbie, 2015, p.98). The unit of analysis is the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ within Hull and Liverpool, and the linked illustration of field dynamics. The unit of observation was the individual entrepreneur and their practices, situated within the field of entrepreneurship in either Hull or Liverpool. Hull was chosen as it is a context of interest due to its start-up rates, a rich industrial heritage, and was UK City of Culture 2017. A similar comparison city was chosen – Liverpool. Liverpool is situated in a similar geographical position to Hull, but on the West Coast rather than the East. It has high business start-up rates and a similar industrial heritage. It was also recently the European City of Culture.

3.3. Participant selection

Purposeful sampling methods were used to cultivate an in-depth understanding of specific cases (Patton & Patton, 2015, p.53). A criterion-based selection that represents a typical purposeful sample (Merriam & Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015) of entrepreneurs from the regions in question was used. The participant needed to be from the region/city, live in the region/city, or self-identify a connection to the region/city. The participant also must have started a business there. Linked to the issue of field boundary, a realist approach was taken if the participant self-identified as being from the city/region, and a nominalist approach was taken if the research team identified them as being associated with the city/region. This did not need to be time bound, e.g.,

Table 1
Glossary of terms.

Autonomizing process	The activity that takes place in a field of entrepreneurship can be relatively autonomous due to the structures and institutions present, and this autonomy can serve to reify field-based positions. This reification makes the position of entrepreneur more attainable, which increases entrepreneurial activity in the field, and the number of agents taking part in it.	Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993
Homology/ Homological action	A similarity of available positions within, and across, entrepreneurial fields of practice. If an entrepreneur or agent is in a dominant position, they will seek to uphold the status-quo. Conversely, entrepreneurial agents that are in less dominant positions in a field, or if the position of entrepreneur is less well established, they may act in alliance with each other to strengthen the position of entrepreneur in the field.	Bourdieu, 2010; Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Wang, 2016
Field of entrepreneurship	Individual agents that take part in entrepreneurial activity in a bounded social space are influenced by entrepreneurial practices taking place around them.	Alterskye et al., 2023; Bowman, 2007; Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Pret & Carter, 2017; Tatli et al., 2014;
Habitus	Entrepreneurial action is shaped by agents’ disposition and responses to past, present and anticipated future events. Agents in an entrepreneurial field of practice are influenced by frames of reference through their exposure to the field.	Hill, 2018; Patel & Conklin, 2009; Pret & Carter, 2017; Tatli et al., 2014
Doxa	The norms that things should be done in a certain way, or the unchallenged assumptions, in a field of practice. In a field of entrepreneurship this could be the type of entrepreneurial activity taking place, or the accepted norms linked to starting a business. Normal practice or presuppositions from overlapping fields may also influence an entrepreneurial field of practice.	Harrison et al., 2024; Sklaventiti & Steyaert, 2020
Illusio	If positive entrepreneurial illusio is felt by agents, they may be more likely to be interested in taking part in entrepreneurial activity as it is seen as achievable and attainable.	Drakopoulou Dodd et al. 2014; Harrison et al., 2024; Meliou & Ozbilgin, 2023; Sklaventiti & Steyaert, 2020

in the last two years. Care was taken to obtain participants running businesses of varying ages. Each participant was interviewed once. Tables 2 and 3 provide sample details. Credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Tracy, 2010) was achieved through the sample size. Activities/resources mentioned by participants in relation to start-ups were investigated through secondary sources, such as websites linked to professional networks.

Table 2
Hull participants.

Gender	Age	Business type	Business age	Business size	Length of interview
F	53	Events planner	Under 2 years	Micro business with 1 staff member	34 m
M	Not disclosed	Online publishing house	Under 2 years	Micro business with business partner	31 m
M	44	Photographer	12 years	Micro business, no other employees	43 m
F	50	Promotional merchandise and Printing company	12 years	Small/Medium with employees	45 m
F	28	Property development and rental company	5 years	Micro business, no other employees	28 m
M	42	Media production company	4 years	Small/Medium with employees	37 m
M	49	Business Training	Under 2 years	Small/Medium with employees	32 m
M	24	Photographer	7 years	Micro business, no other employees	49 m
M	39	Building contracts management	7 years	Small/Medium with employees	40 m
M	35	Fashion/clothing retail	8 years	Small/Medium with employees	45 m
F	26	Training company	Under 1 year	Micro business with business partner	25 m
M	39	Auto mechanic and car sales	7 years	Small/Medium with employees	48 m
F	35	Catering/Hospitality business	4.5 years	Small/Medium with employees	40 m
F	25	Marketing agency	Under 1 year	Micro business with business partner	32 m
M	37	Training company	8 years	Small/Medium with employees	39 m
M	22	Vending machine supplier	Under 2 years	Micro business with business partner	32 m
M	68	Software company	Over 30 years	Small/Medium with employees	48 m

Table 2 (continued)

Gender	Age	Business type	Business age	Business size	Length of interview
M	27	Bid writing/management consultancy	Under 1 year	Micro business, no other employees	28 m
M	53	Sales Consultancy	Under 1 year	Small/Medium with employees	31 m
M	33	Business Consultancy	Under 1 year	Micro business, no other employees	37 m
M	Not disclosed	Internet marketing agency	Under 2 years	Small/Medium with employees	38 m
F	27	Photographer	Under 2 years	Micro business, no other employees	38 m
M	41	Engineering/electronics	6 years	Small/Medium with employees	64 m
M	29	Training company	8 years	Micro business, no other employees	27 m
M	53	Brewery	Under 1 year	Micro business with business partner	48 m
F	42	Internet marketing agency	Under 1 year	Micro business, no other employees	27 m
M	35	Digital marketing agency	3 years	Small/Medium with employees	49 m
M	26	Digital video production	3 years	Small/Medium with employees	34 m
M	43	Telecoms	18 months	Small/Medium with employees	57 m
M	42	Construction technology	3 years	Small/Medium with employees	76 m

3.4. Interview and abductive data analysis

Nvivo was used to analyse the transcribed data. We followed the abductive (Fann, 2012; Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Timmermans & Tavory, 2022) process, in which a set of theories, frameworks, and concepts were used as data analysis guidelines (Guest et al., 2011; Merriam & Merriam, 2009). Abduction is a “mode of inference drawing from surprise” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022, p.1). We then analysed the data to develop an understanding of entrepreneurship and context (Muñoz et al., 2023). Theoretical frameworks, such as Bourdieu’s theory of practice, do not explain what a field is like, but they do offer categories that set expectations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022, p.9). The theoretical framework used represents a compass theory (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022, p.43), in which concepts linked to a phenomenon are highlighted. A common view of highlighting entrepreneurial practice in a context is utilised, but surprises can still be uncovered.

Table 3
Liverpool participants.

Gender	Age	Business type	Business age	Business size	Length of interview
M	44	Technology consultancy	14 years	Micro business, no other employees	55 m
M	24	Media Company	3 years	Micro business with business partner	40 m
M	52	Architects	10 years	Small/Medium with employees	25 m
M	37	Technology company	7 years	Micro business with business partners	57 m
F	43	HR consultancy	2 years	Micro business, no other employees	27 m
M	46	Social enterprise	17 years	Small/Medium with employees	24 m
F	27	Technology company	5 years	Small/Medium with employees	46 m
F	51	Property company	1 year	Micro business with business partners	51 m
M	30	Technology hardware development	Under 1 year	Micro business with business partner	33 m
F	31	Digital marketing	Under 2 years	Micro business, no other employees	55 m
M	41	Digital agency	21 years	Small/Medium with employees	24 m
F	60	Financial consultancy	18 years	Micro business, no other employees	59 m
F	35	Product design	7 years	Small/Medium with employees	57 m
F	36	Cleaning company	Not disclosed	Small/Medium with employees	49 m
F	57	Care service company	24 years	Medium with employees	34 m
M	39	Design technology company	6 years	Small/Medium with employees	54 m
M	53	Online rental services company	Under 2 years	Small/Medium with employees	57 m
M	50	Digital/ICT consultancy	8 years	Small/Medium	40 m

Table 3 (continued)

Gender	Age	Business type	Business age	Business size	Length of interview
F	38	Media Company	Not disclosed	with employees Micro business, no other employees	36 m
M	44	Social Enterprise	12 years	Small/Medium with employees	45 m
M	61	Transport technology company	Under 2 years	Micro business, no other employees	60 m
M	36	Hospitality services company	Under 2 years	Small/Medium with employees	43 m
M	Not disclosed	Financial services company	5 years	Small/Medium with employees	44 m
F	36	Lifestyle website/motivational speaker	4 years	Micro business, no other employees	49 m
F	48	Social enterprise/Events	4 years	Small/Medium with employees	58 m
F	49	Manager of a property company which has a business start-up centre	10 years	Medium with employees	33 m
M	41	Brewery	Under 1 year	Small/Medium with employees	29 m
F	37	Art products	10 years	Micro business, no other employees	34 m
M	35	Wood products	Under 1 year	Small/Medium with employees	32 m
F	38	Photography/Art products	5 years	Micro business, no other employees	57 m

Firstly, open coding (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022) was used. The data was reviewed in an inductive way, keeping various theoretical possibilities open for as long as possible. Open coding draws on the theory of practice framework, where overarching elements, such as field, capital, habitus, doxa, illusio, and pre-existing knowledge of the theoretical compass and framework, as proposed by Bourdieu, are used to assess patterns of action (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initially, participants were asked to describe their start-up journey, from initial ideas through to resource accumulation and start-up, and then through to the present day. We then asked semi-structured questions regarding the start-up journey and participants' interactions with their field. This enabled open coding, identifying who the important players were, what the important actions/incidents were, and what the main outcomes were. In the second stage, the data from individual participants was analysed alongside other participants to obtain an idea of the field of entrepreneurship. Codes presented as second order themes that were connected to theoretical constructs, such as Field - "Presence of field of entrepreneurship", Illusio - "Entrepreneurial confidence", Doxa -

“Entrepreneurial presupposition”, Capital – “Economic”, and Habitus – “Field/Environment influence”, were used. We discovered differences in the agent-based awareness of the field of entrepreneurship, and differences in the dispositions and shared understandings of agents in relation to the practices they were engaged in. We then explored the patterns uncovered when employing focused coding strategies (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022, p.92). Promising themes were coded within, entering a deductive stage where findings and patterns were examined alongside existing literature. We discovered connections between the availability of social capital and helpful entrepreneurial communities, and the presence of non-entrepreneurial presuppositions, which resulted in agent-based activity, strengthening the positions of entrepreneurs through homological action and alliances. We observed field dynamics, combining our insights with theory to form a picture of the ‘field of entrepreneurship’, uncovering surprising insights (see Fig. 2). This facilitated established links between theoretical constructs, second order themes, and first order research insights (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) was achieved through the provision of a “theoretical audit trail” (Shenton, 2004, p.72). This improved our understanding of the theoretical basis of the research through a “data orientated audit trail” (Shenton, 2004, p.72). All transcriptions were analysed, but not all text was coded. Coding reliability was established through a constant verbatim transcription protocol, through the utilisation of a descriptive and precise codebook, and through external and peer review checks on samples of coding.

4. Findings

The abductive nature of the research supported the development of five theoretical dimensions, second order themes, and relevant codes connected to first order research insights (see Fig. 2). This uncovered

findings related to entrepreneurship perceptions, the perceived structure/strength of the field, the availability of capital, presuppositions of agents, and ideas regarding whether taking part in entrepreneurial activities was worthwhile (see Fig. 3 for an overview of entrepreneurship and field dynamics in Hull, and Fig. 4 for Liverpool).

4.1. Presence of a field of entrepreneurship

Participants from both cities acknowledged a field of activity linked to entrepreneurship (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2016, p.120). This was a distinct field, separate to other fields, which were also acknowledged by participants. Agents acknowledged an entrepreneurial field of practice influenced by other agents taking part in similar activities. Agent-based perceptions of the accessibility and strength of the field were influenced by the perceived amount (and type) of entrepreneurial activity taking place.

In Hull, agents felt there was a field of activity linked to entrepreneurship and that there were other people in Hull engaged in similar activities to themselves. They were aware of these other agents.

“I think that the entrepreneurial spirit has grown tremendously, certainly in the last five years” Participant Hull3.

“So I think in Hull because it’s quite intrinsic, everybody knows everybody, I would say it’s a very friendly business community amongst business owners, entrepreneurs” Participant Hull13.

There was a perception that access to more established agents in the community was achievable.

“So you look at [Local Entrepreneur A] as a business mentor, Christ what would you pay for that, do you know what I mean and this guy’s coming to see us for free” Participant Hull12.

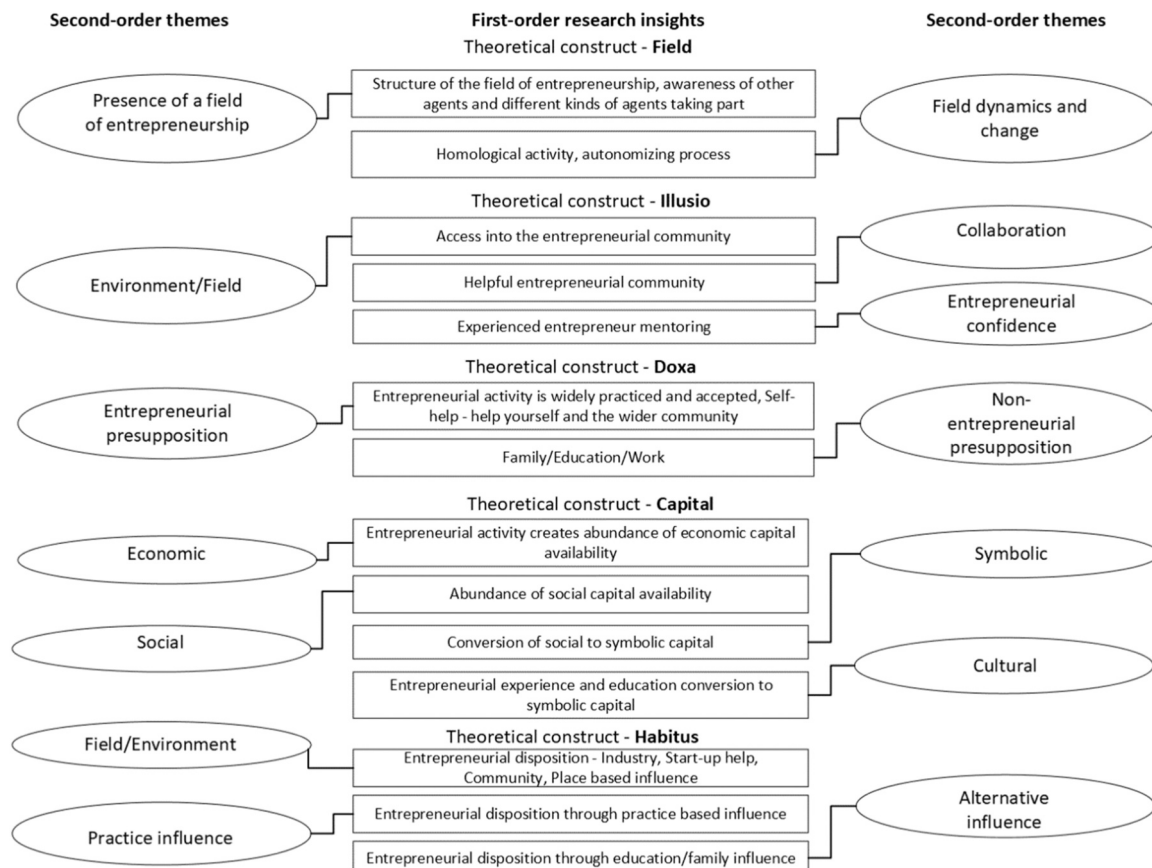


Fig. 2. Theoretical constructs, first-order research insights, second-order themes.

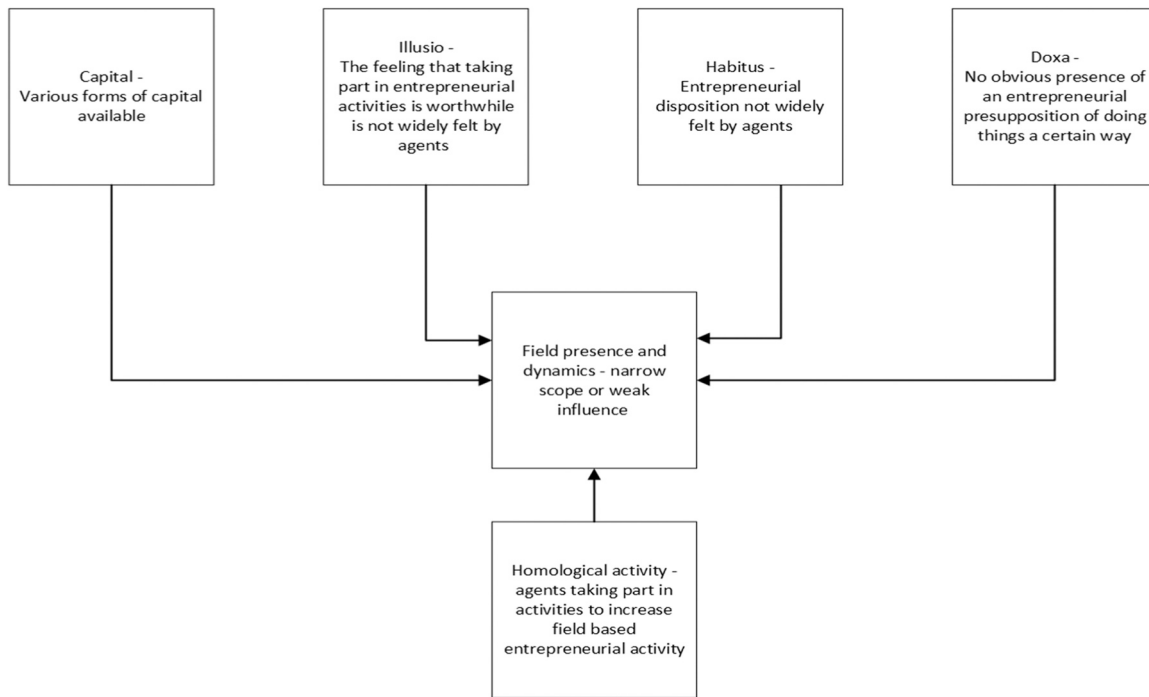


Fig. 3. The field of entrepreneurship and field dynamics in Hull.

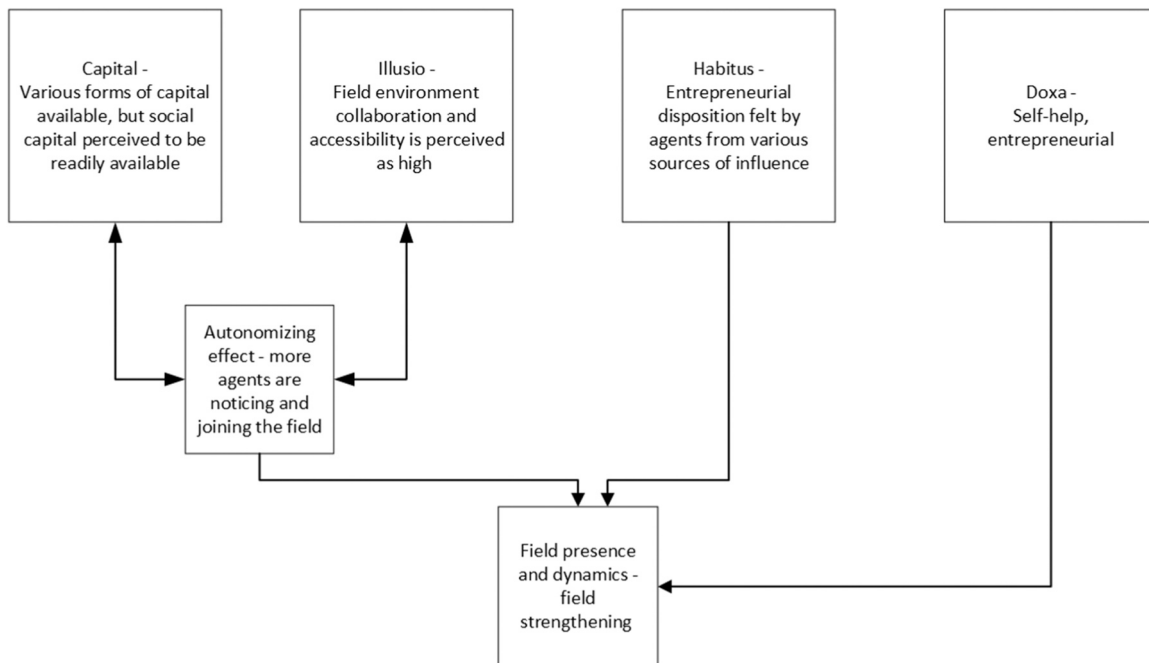


Fig. 4. The field of entrepreneurship and field dynamics in Liverpool.

“there’s this community around here that you learn from other people” Participant Hull21.

[Discussing networking] “So you know now people are going in with you into this and I’m saying you need to speak with these guys” Participant Hull18.

[Discussing networking with experienced entrepreneurs] “it’s real people who have actually done it, who have took the bullet, took the pain, know what I mean” Participant Hull19.

[Discussing networking] “Like if someone’s doing something totally different to you, they can say something and you go “actually I could implement something like that in my business, and that could work really well” Participant Hull22.

In Liverpool, the helpful atmosphere linked to entrepreneurial activity was commented on.

“there’s like little pockets of kind of support network around the City, you know, there’s the Baltic Triangle, there’s North Docks, there’s a lot of kind of co-working spaces, making spaces in all manner of stuff that you

know are more than kind of... there's a lot of kind of really good networking and facilitators in Liverpool I think. So yeah I would say it is a good place to start up" Participant Liverpool2.

"lots of people seem really happy to collaborate on various different projects and various different, various different events, projects, ways, they seem to be able to get involved with things really quickly. And everything is quite open" Participant Liverpool13.

[Discussing networking with other entrepreneurs] "You put yourself in an environment where people are just getting on and you just get like that. That's what I think mainly. But those little conversations help as well and little pointers" Participant Liverpool22.

"I think that's a really good thing with a history of poor combined with fairly low accommodation. Three Universities and you know decent infrastructure, you've got the right environment for start-ups. I think, I've always said as well that Liverpool is Britain's young nation of shopkeepers, Liverpool is like a nation of market traders, probably one the great market traders. If anything, you know, Liverpool has got an incredible start-up culture" Participant Liverpool11.

Certain areas that fostered entrepreneurial activity, providing easy access to the field, were commented on. Liverpool has certain industrial fields, such as creative or technology-based industries, that agents can access when performing entrepreneurial activities.

[Discussing an area of Liverpool] "The Baltic has been really great to attract a lot of attention and give a lot of support in really simple ways for new businesses" Participant Liverpool4.

"the Baltic area, is our equivalent of London's Shoreditch" Participant Liverpool23

"I got my first tech job here around 2013 and it was only just really beginning then, and now it's just flourished in to this beautiful, quite cool start up feel area, where there is a lot of digital and creative businesses here" Participant Liverpool7

"so that's been a big thing and we have stayed in the Baltic Triangle, we are still here, we've bobbed around a few places here but I think there's quite a good kind of collection of businesses here and we have won a lot of work just by being here to be honest, you know, so yeah, I think place, is definitely a big factor for us, in fact a huge factor actually to be honest" Participant Liverpool2.

"So there's stuff going on directly in the City centre but it's definitely starting to spread outside all over the City which is great so no it's totally the place to be for like up and coming businesses, I think" Participant Liverpool10.

The fact there is a field of practice perceived to be present by participants is positive, as it shows that the "game" of entrepreneurship is being played, and there is a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990) in both cities.

4.2. Availability of capital

Within both cities, participants perceived quick and easy access to useful social capital. In Hull, the perception was that this would become more available once an agent was immersed in the field.

[Discussing a networking group in Hull] "I was grateful to get the advice and not be charged for it and to get an honest opinion because you can have almost like an off the record chat and names and things might be said in that conversation but as far, its confidential, so no one gets bad mouthed but you will be kind of given advice based on their experiences and what they have gone through" Participant Hull9.

"[Local entrepreneur c] who became my business mentor and he's like you are an entrepreneur, I'm like what, I don't even know what it means.

And now I do, I like the fact that I have got, actually, I have got a label now whereas before I didn't" ParticipantHull12.

In Liverpool, it was perceived that this was widely available to agents in the field – even in the periphery.

"what I find in Liverpool from the year and a half that I've lived here, is that the business community is... you get to know a lot of the people really quickly and there's lots of other opportunities. I've lived in various places in the UK and I think definitely, in Liverpool, there's a really good entrepreneurial community, from the point of what you see in Liverpool today. There's so many small, independent businesses starting up all over the place" ParticipantLiverpool5.

"it was like this really exciting collaborative feeling in Liverpool which I really loved, it's not like it was a very closed shop in Liverpool and didn't want to work with everybody else. It feels like there's a lot more positivity around working together and so there has been a lot of networking and business support being generated" Participant Liverpool4.

"we are going in to business with a guy called [Local entrepreneur]. He's now our mentor. So, he advertised that he was looking for mentees. We stalked him a little bit. Everywhere he was, we were, every talk he did, we were there. We just made ourselves known to him really and we had a meeting with him. He's a really good Liverpool guy. He wanted to help the people of Liverpool, offered everybody half an hour of his time and we took him up on that. We had about an hour with him. He liked what we were doing" Participant Liverpool8.

In Liverpool, social capital is in plentiful supply. The field of activity is wider in scope and emanates from a number of influences, with large numbers of agents taking part in activities in the field, rather than in fields that are narrow in scope with less sources of influence. There were mentions of social capital related to the rewarding feeling of not only being helped by others, but helping others in the field and the wider community.

"it's about how you can help other people, because obviously sometimes you'll spot opportunities or be able to make introductions and I always think that specially in business, you kind of... the more you put in to it, the more you get back" Participant Liverpool5.

"I made loads of contacts. And having that personal relationship with people really helps people with businesses. And now, I've got friends, good friends" Participant Liverpool20.

"I'm just able and gather people, that's my world. And that's - so I don't necessarily have all the expertise, but I have - I try and create the glue that brings people together or signpost people to go, "Come on, we could talk about this, or we can just crack on." I'm a hub really" Participant Liverpool25.

Agent-based perceptions of the availability of social capital in a 'field of entrepreneurship' can influence the perception of field accessibility and can prompt entrepreneurial activity if this capital is perceived to be widely available. This can strengthen the field, prompting more agents to join it and having an autonomizing effect (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63).

4.3. Doxa – presuppositions linked to the fields of entrepreneurship

Doxa refers to the unchallenged assumptions of a field. Individual agents operate within a context-bound social space. This links to unchallenged assumptions concerning how to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Bourdieu, 2010; Golsorkhi et al., 2009; Lockett et al., 2014). Competing presuppositions could coexist, along with doxa-based influences from overlapping fields. The empirical data shows that the doxa or presuppositions toward entrepreneurship affect agent-based dispositions towards entrepreneurial activities. In Liverpool, some sort of "doxic knowledge" (Fowler, 1996, p.2) influence, linked to

entrepreneurial activity, emanates from the field. It causes agents to join the field, which strengthens it further.

“I think coming from like a poverty-stricken area, you are all a bit like a wheeler and dealer, and you know you have to fight to survive so I think that’s where the entrepreneurial streak comes in” Participant Liverpool15.

“Everyone is so naturally entrepreneurial, and you know, they’re from a painter and decorator family or they’re sole trader or a contractor or we’ve got a little business here and there’s 2 or 3 of us and we’re tight” Participant Liverpool11.

Agents in Hull do not perceive a doxic knowledge-based influence linked to entrepreneurship. Due to a lack of prevalence of entrepreneurial doxa, agents have to work particularly hard to strengthen the breadth and influence of the field, as this does not occur through actions that have natural entrepreneurial presuppositions.

[Discussing the idea of business start-up] “It really wasn’t something that was part and parcel of – I would have said 90 %, well more than 90 %, you know the huge majority of the adults in other families that you one interacted with, were, you know to one degree or another working for somebody else, you know mostly larger organisations” Participant Hull17.

“It was about grafting, it wasn’t about self-made millionaires or entrepreneurs. You didn’t hear of that type of thing where I grew up... I don’t know anybody [people that they grew up with who have started a business]” Participant Hull15.

In both cities, presuppositions around agents pursuing education and employment opportunities were prevalent, with friends and family cited as influential. A strong doxa linked to employment or education could be acting to exclude doxa linked to entrepreneurship.

[Discussing the idea of business start-up] “one of them did say you are going to give up this really great job to go sell bacon sandwiches and I was just like well that’s you think but that’s not what’s in my head” Participant Hull13.

[Discussing career advice and personal decisions] “self-employment, setting up a business, all that kind of thing, was never ever, ever mentioned, never on the radar” Participant Hull7.

“Why don’t you get a proper job, my dad said” Participant Liverpool6.

In Liverpool, there was a presupposition to the idea that, to succeed, an agent had to do all they could to help themselves.

“And I think that’s an influence for me, coming from nothing and having no money, to suddenly, I want to succeed. And having no parents, and having a really rough childhood, it kind of gives me the impetus to sit there and be someone, and not fail at it, and work harder than everybody else to do that” Participant Liverpool20.

“I think no else is going to help us but myself” Participant Liverpool11.

“the ethos was always get up out of bed, go to work and earn a crust and pay your way” Participant Liverpool12.

“[Discussing starting a business] I think it would be one of the best places in the country. I tell you why. I have never, ever met so many people with strength and tenacity and resilience as I have Liverpool people” Participant Liverpool26.

This could be considered a “self-help” doxa, in which agents must do whatever they can to be successful. Doxa or presuppositions that are not directly related to the field of entrepreneurship can indirectly influence entrepreneurial activities, such as self-help doxa that increase activity, or career-based doxa that decrease activity. In Liverpool, there was evidence of an exclusively entrepreneurial doxa, but also a self-help doxa that contributes to positive entrepreneurial outcomes, and could be contributing to a shared practical understanding (Champanois et al.,

2020; Schatzki et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 2020) of entrepreneurial activity.

4.4. Illusio – do agents feel invested in fields of entrepreneurship?

Illusio determines whether agents feel as if they belong to a field of practice; specifically whether an agents’ belief that taking part in entrepreneurial activity is valuable, meaningful, and worth pursuing (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Tatli et al., 2014). In Liverpool, there is evidence of a strong and positive illusio (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.117), and much of this is generated through agent-based interactions with the ‘field of entrepreneurship’. Questions arise as to whether positive field-based illusio is developed by agents before they enter the field, or if this is mostly developed once they are immersed in it. When discussing their start-up journeys, agents from Hull often discussed an initial absence of entrepreneurial influence.

“People that I grew up with, I don’t think any of them have started businesses. No one from school” Participant Hull14.

“I actually didn’t tell my family up until, it was 8 weeks ago, believe it or not because it was a bit – I don’t know I didn’t really want any negative opinions” Participant Hull11.

“It’s mainly like relatives, maybe relatives of your partner, mother-in-law, father-in-law, people like that, saying why would you want to start a business” Participant Hull7.

[Discussing starting a business] “They’ll just kind of go “oh no, I can’t. I’ve got a mortgage to pay or...” which that’s the scary part” Participant Hull22.

However, when they discovered one of the strong influences in the field, such as a business start-up help organisation or a community of entrepreneurs, they were quickly subsumed into a very active, but narrow, field of activity. Thus, we found that, when an agent enters a field of entrepreneurial practice, the perception that they will be able to successfully take part in entrepreneurial activities increases. The key issue here is that, if positive entrepreneurial illusio is developed only once agents become immersed into the field of activity in Hull, then this illusio will not cause new agents to join.

In Liverpool, a similar effect occurs. When agents are immersed into the field, a positive entrepreneurial illusio builds quickly, but there seems to be a wider and more far-reaching perception of entrepreneurial illusio in Liverpool, which can be felt through many sources of influence.

“it’s just part of our makeup. I’m surrounded, I’m literally surrounded by entrepreneurs” Participant Liverpool26.

“I see entrepreneurship as a viable option. I think it maybe is a bit of the culture, which I’ve grown up with” Participant Liverpool16.

“Because we work with Manchester quite a lot, although there seems to be quite a lot of conversation there, and there’s definitely a lot more bigger organisations in Manchester, we don’t feel that they’re on the same level when it comes down to not being competitive and working together. It seems a little bit more competitive there, whereas I think Liverpool isn’t as much. I think people do want to work together and help each other out” Participant Liverpool7.

Participants discussed positive illusio linked to entrepreneurship. This positive sentiment was linked to the awareness of a field of entrepreneurship and other helpful agents and entrepreneurs.

“the thing that really inspires me about Liverpool is this fun, humour, positivity of being by the water, in a shared building, where everybody is on each others case in a really fun way, similar to Glasgow and Newcastle actually” Participant Liverpool4.

[Discussing help and support from other entrepreneurs] “You can’t brainstorm and stuff, but it’s easy to find those people, and there’s loads

of independent coffee shops and food places around in Liverpool, which I think helps and I think has contributed to this digital creative... all the businesses, just because they all love independent places. So, you find that when you go and sit in there, you're networking, you're seeing people that you might know and that's helped" ParticipantLiverpool7.

"I've just lost that client, where am I going to find the next one, it's like well I will find the next one because there's plenty of stuff going on in the City, and then I'll look on like events like what's coming on this week and someone is doing a gin and cocktail night on a Thursday and I'm like right I'm there and I'll go and I'll smooth the arse off everyone there!" ParticipantLiverpool10.

Access to the field of entrepreneurial activity was seen as relatively achievable, and it was easy to access other entrepreneurs who were often far more established. This entrepreneurial illisio in Liverpool also affected agents on the periphery of the field and influenced new agents to join the field, thus strengthening it. This suggests the presence of a suffusing (Hui et al., 2017) phenomena, in which the practice must be seen as worthwhile. Positive illisio (Meliou & Ozbilgin, 2023) linked to the field of entrepreneurship in Liverpool, along with social capital accessible to agents in the field (see Section 4.2), strengthens the position of the entrepreneur and attracts more agents to the field. This autonomizing process (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993), in which the field of entrepreneurship reifies itself through agent-based perceptions, reveals that, when entry into entrepreneurial practice is achievable and social capital is readily accessible, more agents will be attracted to the field.

4.5. Evidence of homological activity to support the field of entrepreneurship

Participants from Liverpool acknowledged a strong influence and disposition linked to entrepreneurial activity. The breadth of influence of the habitus (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.5) connected to the fields of entrepreneurship in both cities, along with issues concerning size, scope, and influences, thus comes back into focus. The prevalence of either an entrepreneurial doxa, or a doxa that links to positive presuppositions, may lead agents to influence others, suggesting that entrepreneurial practice is a worthwhile pursuit. This strengthens the field as more agents join, resulting in positive entrepreneurial outcomes. In both cities, there was strong evidence of homological activity, as many participants not only reported that other agents were trying to shape the field, but also that they themselves were working to strengthen it, illustrating a shared understanding (Champenois et al., 2020; Schatzki et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 2020). In Hull, agents took part in entrepreneurial activities, but also encouraged others to take part too, acting as institutional entrepreneurs (Leca et al., 2008) and building positive illisio and perceptions through educational or mentoring programmes for nascent entrepreneurs.

[Discussing helping other businesses] "There's an element, which is probably the main motivation to be honest, of just simply putting something back" Participant Hull17.

"so you know somebody like [Local Entrepreneur B] and again locally he gives back a lot, you know. He puts a lot in out of his own pocket into the community to help do things and I suppose when you sit back and look at Hull on an entrepreneurial level we have got some absolutely huge entrepreneurs you know" Participant Hull15.

"well as I say my girlfriend, the good thing with her is like I've managed to like get her onto that [local entrepreneurship] initiative which I'm part of. So she is getting funding support and business support through that" ParticipantHull8.

[Discussing helping other business as part of a formal support group] "We are pretty much more about giving back. It's about helping people" ParticipantHull7.

Participants in Liverpool reported informal homological alliances not specifically connected to formal/structured supportive activities.

"I have done a lot of travelling over the world as well and there's nothing like the City, everyone is just so supportive and willing to sort of go out of their own comfort zone to reach out and offer you a helping hand whether that's in you know the professional sector or personal sector as well, we are just scousers" Participant Liverpool10.

"I said my ethos is to help as many of them as I possibly can because keeping local people in work and everything else, that is like the driver behind my business" ParticipantLiverpool12.

[Discussing informal mentoring] "I was supporting, mentoring some guy. He wanted to do – it was like a music type business. Something to do with a studio, and teaching kids" ParticipantLiverpool16.

[Discussing informal mentoring] "I said, "Look, you know, just – if I can be of any help at all, just..." And they're wanting to start, like, a kind of nutrition business" ParticipantLiverpool17.

"I thought that there might be a different way of helping these companies, and sort of applying my skill set into helping them with things" ParticipantLiverpool23.

Informal homological alliance-building strengthened the field of entrepreneurship in Liverpool more than in Hull. Thus, further positive and benefitting outcomes may be linked to entrepreneurial activity in Liverpool, demonstrative of a nexus (Hui et al., 2017) of practices. Homological (Bourdieu, 2010, 1984; Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Wang, 2016) activity takes place wherever there is an identified field of practice, such as a field of entrepreneurship, either to strengthen or maintain the position of the entrepreneur. If the field/position is weak or under threat, agents will actively try to strengthen it, and homological activity and alliance building will occur. In Hull, this is illustrated through formal homological alliance-building amongst entrepreneurs trying to strengthen their position. In Liverpool, the position of the entrepreneur is more established. Therefore, although homological alliance-building is reinforcing entrepreneurs' positions, the process is more ad-hoc and informal.

4.6. Composition of the field of entrepreneurship – Hull analysis

In Hull (see Fig. 3), the influence of the field of entrepreneurship is vitally important in developing positive entrepreneurial outcomes. The data shows that entrepreneurial illisio, doxa, or habitus are not naturally developing through alternative or overlapping fields. Although the 'field of entrepreneurship' is strong in Hull, particularly if agents have been influenced by it and feel immersed in it, it seems to emanate from only a few places, such as pro-active business support groups. According to Bourdieu, there is a correspondence between goods production and taste production within a field (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63), and it could be that the "taste" for entrepreneurship is successfully developed in agents influenced by the field in Hull, but that the field only emanates from a few places, so it has less of a reach.

[Discussing local business support and networks] "No, I don't think it's widely known, because people, a lot of people have that fear of, you know, starting up, because they're not aware of that. I believe if they did know about that more there would be a quicker transaction for those to actually take the plunge and to move into that" ParticipantHull20.

[Discussing local business support] "That really helped, in that somebody would come down. Even if it was just a chat, it was just still somebody to talk to when you were isolated" Participant Hull1.

[Discussing starting the business and getting help from other entrepreneurs] "We actually say this all the time, we kick ourselves because we are like why didn't we do it 4 years ago, like why didn't we" ParticipantHull11.

The field can be viewed as a bounded social space, comprising of individuals and the relationships between them (Bourdieu, 2010). In Hull, the boundary of this space is quite narrow, due to agents' perception that field-based practice is only emanating from a few places. The pro-activeness of those within the field, and the relative ease of accessibility once the influence of the field is felt, will strengthen and widen the field, leading to more entrepreneurial activity. The robust homological alliance-building, and the activities of agents trying to strengthen the field, will act as a catalyst. Agent based habitus will influence other agents' habitus, increasing positive perceptions of entrepreneurial-based *illusio* and attracting others to the field.

4.7. Composition of the field of entrepreneurship – Liverpool analysis

In Liverpool (see Fig. 4), the perceived *illusio* linked to field-based activities is positive, which attracts other agents to the field. There is a strong entrepreneurial habitus, which strengthens entrepreneurial *illusio* and *doxa* in a recursive fashion. The field is constantly recreating itself. As more agents join and more incumbents gain capital within the field, more agents display entrepreneurial habitus or dispositions, and the perceived *illusio* linked to entrepreneurship becomes more positive. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion that agents can emanate from a field, e.g., they exist because the field exists (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.107). Indeed, an "autonomizing process" (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63) is occurring, and the habitus linked to the field of entrepreneurship has become embedded within an "institutional frame" (Karataş-Özkan & Chell, 2015, p.112).

"I think the people of Liverpool and the positive vibe of the city, rather than necessarily any of the support structure or the encouragement to start businesses or anything around entrepreneurship is very much about... I like making this cool stuff, you like making this cool stuff, let's make this cool stuff in the city together" ParticipantLiverpool4.

"It's always been a good City so that type of stuff, it's a good nightlife City, it's a good, you know type of trading type City. So I think it's got its own vibe I think. Yeah I would say it's a good place to start up. I would encourage people to start up business in Liverpool" Participant Liverpool2.

"I've talked to quite a few people in Liverpool and a lot of people tell me that people are willing to help them and people are willing to sort of almost help for free and things like that and people are – because everyone wants to help each other" Participant Liverpool14.

Field-based activities and practices stem from many sources, so there are theoretically no points of critical weakness in the field. If they fail, the field and those within it will suffer irreparable negative outcomes. As this emanates from different sources, and many agents are involved, routinised interactions that hold symbolic significance are reinforced (Lawrence, 2004, p.118).

For a comparison of the field of entrepreneurship in Hull and Liverpool, utilising theoretical constructs from Bourdieu's theory of practice, see Table 4.

5. Discussion

The calls for context-based entrepreneurship research (Ben-Hafaiedh et al., 2023; Welter & Baker, 2021), assessing context as a place in which practices linked to entrepreneurship occur (Thompson et al., 2022) through innovative and diverse theoretical and empirical approaches, are addressed in this paper. This aids our understanding of how entrepreneurs "do contexts" (Baker & Welter, 2020). The way that entrepreneurship is enacted in a certain context either strengthens or weakens the field and the position of entrepreneur. Empirical findings linked to this are derived from Bourdieu's concepts around fields of cultural production (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993), in which the presence of a field of activity attracts agents to take part, strengthening the field.

Table 4

A comparison of the field of entrepreneurship in Hull and Liverpool.

Theoretical construct	Hull	Liverpool
Field	Field emanating from a narrow range of sources. Agents in the field are working to strengthen the field through homological alliance building and associated activity.	Field emanating from a wide range of sources.
<i>Illusio</i>	Agents in the field see positive entrepreneurial activity around them, but the influence of the field is not wide in scope and is not as noticeable at the periphery of the field.	Positive linked to entrepreneurship, as agents can see many others successfully conducting entrepreneurial activities around them.
<i>Doxa</i>	Absence of entrepreneurial <i>doxa</i> , starting a business is not the norm.	Self-help <i>doxa</i> , not necessarily linked to entrepreneurship, but a by-product of this is entrepreneurial activity.
Capital	Once agents have entered the field, a lot of social capital is available, and this is being turned into entrepreneurship focused cultural capital.	Plentiful social capital, and perception of availability of social and economic capital even at the periphery of the field.
Habitus	Lack of naturally occurring entrepreneurial influence on disposition, positive for those in the field but the field is narrow in influence.	Entrepreneurial disposition comes naturally as the habitus is experienced widely by agents in the field or agents influenced by the field.

Bourdieu's theoretical construct is used to demonstrate the empirical importance of this influence, answering calls to utilise constructs that have been underused in extant literature (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020), such as *illusio*, *doxa*, autonomizing processes, and homological activity (Wang, 2016).

Our research question was: *How do fields of entrepreneurship and linked field dynamics differ across contexts?*

Using interview data, we found that the structure, make-up, and dynamics of the field of entrepreneurship had notable differences in each context. In Liverpool, the availability and harvesting of social capital, and the influence of an overlapping self-help *doxa*, caused a positive autonomizing process (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63) which strengthened the position of entrepreneur. In Hull, agents enacted homological alliances (Bourdieu, 2010, 1984; Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Wang, 2016) to strengthen their position.

5.1. Contributions

This study makes four contributions. Firstly, the use of the field of entrepreneurship, with a focus on field dynamics, provides empirical insights into individual and group-based practices by entrepreneurs within a context. This approach uncovers field dynamics (Alterskye et al., 2023) and field-based mechanisms and conditions (Harrison et al., 2024) that contribute to entrepreneurial outcomes by applying under-utilised (Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020) Bourdieusian theoretical constructs. The field-based approach aids our understanding of the layers of context, with micro-level practices and aggregated meso-level field-based practices (Wooten & Hoffman, 2016) explaining entrepreneurial outcomes. For example, the autonomizing process (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63), in which agents join the field in Liverpool due to the availability of social capital, reveals a bottom-up and top-down view of context, in which recursive (Ortiz-Walters et al., 2015; Welter et al., 2014) influence and omnibus context (Johns, 2006; Welter, 2011) is illustrated. This field-based approach exposes the interconnectedness of entrepreneurial contexts, the influence of entrepreneurial practice on a region or ecosystem, and the Russian doll (Fligstein & McAdam, 2015; Wurth et al., 2022) phenomena with regards to context. This is illustrated empirically through the influence of field-based *doxa* from an

aligned field in Liverpool, which prompts agents to enact self-help activities, resulting in entrepreneurial practice.

Our understanding of the ‘fields of entrepreneurship’ discovered within this article has been developed using a framework that simply and accurately illustrates the relationships and practice-based duality (Champenois et al., 2020) present in entrepreneurial contexts. This has also allowed the findings linked to these fields of activity to be generalisable to other contexts (Baker & Welter, 2020, p.80). The duality of agency and structure can be seen through the highlighting of field and agent-based symbiotic practices (Melin et al., 2022, p.770), such as agents noticing that entrepreneurs can be reified through homological alliance-building (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014) and institutional entrepreneurship (Leca et al., 2008). This strengthens the field, prompting more agents to engage in it. Our approach aligns with calls to investigate context, structure, microfoundations, and complex systems to develop our understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems (Wurth et al., 2022). Field-based interdependencies and outcomes can be uncovered through the illustration of field structures and dynamics. The discovery of homological alliance-building in Hull (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Wang, 2016) could suggest a tipping point, wherein agents feel further action is needed. This shows micro-level practices, revealing agent-based positions and hierarchies. Links can be found in findings connected to the development of entrepreneurial legitimacy associated with relational influences from micro, meso, and macro environments, and ideas from the entrepreneurial ecosystem literature (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; McAdam et al., 2019; Spigel, 2015; Stam & Van De Ven, 2021; Wurth et al., 2022). This shows that a sociologically-based field of activity around entrepreneurship is an important constituent of the ecosystem.

The use of the theorised ‘field of entrepreneurship’ construct allows us to understand “bundles of practices” (Champenois et al., 2020, p.301) that help shape entrepreneurial activity and outcomes in particular contexts. For example, bundles of practices could refer to the habitual sharing of social capital across a field of entrepreneurship, as discovered empirically in Liverpool, which influences agents to join the field. This approach allows the investigation of multiple practitioner perspectives (Champenois et al., 2020), highlighting collective entrepreneurial practices and shared understandings (Johannisson, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002).

Secondly, we uncovered empirical evidence of a context in which the position of the entrepreneur was strengthened, and agents in the field wanted to take part in entrepreneurial activities and were becoming more confident due to shared practices adopted by multiple practitioners (Champenois et al., 2020, p.302). Here, entrepreneurs readily offered social capital (Rooks et al., 2016) to nascent entrepreneurs and others in the field. In Liverpool, an autonomizing process (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p.63) attracted agents to the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ through certain characteristics. Social capital was perceived to be available from a wide range of sources, and taking part in entrepreneurial activities was perceived to be worthwhile, leading to positive entrepreneurial illisio (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This shows that a field can be strengthened through a suffusing (Hui et al., 2017) phenomena linked to a shared intangible understanding that something is worthwhile. The conditions were conducive to increasing positive entrepreneurial outcomes, thus strengthening the field autonomously.

Thirdly, we uncovered evidence of a context in which agents observed a lack of entrepreneurial activity and absence of field-based habitus. Agents worked to strengthen the position of the entrepreneur, building alliances with agents in similar positions (Roundy, 2019) and helping nascent entrepreneurs through formal and informal support. In Hull, field-based agents enact practice-based activities and take homological (Bourdieu, 2010, p.240) actions to strengthen the field, increasing agent participation and reifying the position of the entrepreneur. Due to field-based dynamics, agents are noticing a perceived lack of entrepreneurial presupposition, or doxa (Reid, 2021; Sklaveniti & Steyaert, 2020), and entrepreneurial disposition or habitus (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2018). This affects perceptions as to whether

or not taking part in entrepreneurial activity is a worthwhile endeavour. The field-based illisio (Meliou & Ozbilgin, 2023; Nölleke et al., 2020) is not pronounced. Thus, incumbent agents are enacting practice-based activity to make entrepreneurship in Hull a more attractive proposition. Agents in the field have a shared practical understanding of the actions and activities needed to strengthen the entrepreneurs’ positions, which prompts shared phronesis (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Kamineni, 2021) based action. These homological activities are dual practices (Champenois et al., 2020), in which the interaction between structure, agent, and practice is connected and recursive. This helps uncover important actor/role relationships within an ecosystem (Hong & Spigel, 2024).

Fourthly, we found evidence of the effects of overlapping fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2015, p.80) and connected presuppositions, or doxa (Bourdieu, 2010), suggesting a certain way of doing things in a particular context could positively affect entrepreneurial activity. We found evidence of a self-help doxa in Liverpool. There was a pre-determined way of doing things and connected habitus (Bourdieu, 2010) and illisio (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993; Meliou & Ozbilgin, 2023; Sharp & Threadgold, 2020), which was linked to the idea that you must do everything to help yourself and not rely on others, prompting entrepreneurial activity. These findings support discussions around “entrepreneurial resourcefulness” (Welter, 2019, p.159) within challenging contexts. These insights develop our understanding of how entrepreneurial contexts may benefit from the influence of a self-help doxa, or a doxa from an overlapping field. Uncovering of doxa or presuppositions that have a positive influence on entrepreneurial activity helps us to further understand the omnibus (Welter, 2011) nature of context. From a practice-based perspective, the uncovering of a self-help doxa in Liverpool shows that practices can be organised “around shared practical understanding” (Thompson et al., 2020, p.249). The presence of a self-help doxa could be seen as important in other fields of entrepreneurship, and this finding could be generalised (Baker & Welter, 2020, p.80) and applied to other contexts.

6. Conclusion

Using the field concept to understand two contexts allowed comparisons to be made between Hull and Liverpool. Understanding the composition of local ‘fields of entrepreneurship’ is vital for policymakers, influential agents, and organisations. These entities should be encouraged to take key roles in expanding and strengthening entrepreneurship by building homological alliances and empowering entrepreneurs. Policymakers should encourage connections between agents and organisations, both within or at the periphery of the field, so that more agents are subjected to the habitus and experience its positive impact on illisio. The presence of active and supportive fields of entrepreneurial practice have been established in Hull and Liverpool. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to seek out these fields, even if they are not obviously apparent. Once immersed, agents will experience the habitus connected to the field, and will build positive illisio (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and doxa (Bourdieu, 2010). This paper demonstrates the importance of a functioning field of entrepreneurship, as shown in Liverpool, where agents offer social capital (Neumeyer et al., 2019; Reid, 2021) to others, evidencing a suffusing (Hui et al., 2017), practice-based phenomena.

Our findings highlight the role agents play in fields less pronounced in terms of influence or activity. As shown in Hull, agents embedded in the field observe potential weaknesses and form homological alliances to positively influence it, highlighting the influence of shared practical understanding (Champenois et al., 2020; Schatzki et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 2020) in helping shape practices and the field itself. Entrepreneurs that are already active or influential are encouraged to practice institutional entrepreneurship or homological alliance-building to strengthen their field, widen its influence, and build positive habitus-based influence.

Overlapping fields of activity and presuppositions or doxa (Bourdieu,

1990, p.64) facilitate entrepreneurial outcomes in particular contexts. This is linked to fields of activity associated with self-help, which may not be solely focused on entrepreneurial activities, as seen in Liverpool. Entrepreneurs should be aware of, and engage with, other fields of activity that may not be focused on entrepreneurial activity, but may lead to entrepreneurial outcomes locally.

Research into entrepreneurship and context is prolific (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2023; Welter & Baker, 2021), and value is assigned to bettering our understanding of contexts and their link to entrepreneurial practice and outcomes. This article offers a theoretical perspective through a Bourdieusian conceptualisation and the associated concepts of *illusio*, *habitus*, *capital*, and *doxa*, capturing organising contexts (Johannisson, 2011) where entrepreneurial activity occurs in an interactive shared reality with an entrepreneurship-based phronetic (Flyvbjerg, 2001) understanding. Utilising the field construct in this way allows the nexus of practices and practical understanding, from a shared practitioner perspective, to be uncovered, in effect the “glue” (Thompson et al., 2020) of these practices contributes to outcomes in a context. The field construct also helps researchers understand layers of context, as the field sits at the meso layer, but is recursively connected to the micro and macro layers (Bourdieu, 2010). This aids our understanding of the relational (Bourdieu, 1977; Fletcher & Selden, 2013; Karataş-Özkan, 2011; Scott, 2013; Spigel, 2015) nature of context. Similar methods could explore physical or geographical contexts in which entrepreneurial activity occurs and where agents feel the effects of a field. This could even be a digital or online (Vershinina et al., 2022) field. This article contributes to the second and third waves of contextualisation in entrepreneurship research, as subjective and relational constructs are used to improve understandings of entrepreneurship and context (second wave); and an attempt to broaden the utilisation of theoretical constructs through field theory is introduced (third wave) (Welter et al., 2019). The use of the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ (Alterskye et al., 2023) and field dynamics as a unit of analysis recognises “the everydayness of entrepreneuring and its collective features; the place where, for practical reasons, they spend most of their daily life becomes very important in the sense making process” (Johannisson, 2011, p.142). The field construct facilitates a multiple-practitioner perspective (Champenois et al., 2020), uncovering shared practices and practical understandings (Thompson et al., 2020; Tsoukas, 2011) that contribute to outcomes within that context.

Ethnographic research methods (Thompson et al., 2022) could be employed in the future to assess the influence of other actors in entrepreneurial contexts, as well as the entrepreneurs themselves. Overlapping fields and linked dynamics that contribute to positive entrepreneurial outcomes should also be studied.

This research uncovered several issues that contribute to discussions on entrepreneurship, context, and practice-based views of entrepreneurship. Our understanding can be enhanced using the ‘field of entrepreneurship’ construct derived from Bourdieu’s theory of practice. Field dynamics and practice-based activities have been uncovered in different contexts. These findings can be learned from and generalised into other contexts.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Andrea Caputo: Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Alex Alterskye:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ted Fuller:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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