



COMMUNITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP.
FROM GENESIS TO THE LEGITIMIZATION¹

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Abstract

Purpose. Community Entrepreneurship (CE) at its very origin has been associated with the process of building a robust, entrepreneurial community, as a social as well as an economic endeavour by community entrepreneurs. Since then, many experiences have emerged all around the world, in impoverished territories of the Global North as well as in depleted contexts of the Global South, often giving birth to a specific kind of enterprise, named Community-based Enterprise or simply Community Enterprise. Apart from the framework of Community Entrepreneurship, these initiatives have often been explored under the social entrepreneurship construct, with which it shares many similarities. However, CE presents some distinctive features that may advocate a specific role within entrepreneurship studies. Considering the above, our study aims to provide an extensive background of issues related to CE, focusing on its specificities as well as its relationships with other strands of entrepreneurship studies.

Design/methodology/approach. A systematic literature review on Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection (WoS) has been carried out, limiting it to peer-reviewed academic articles published in English between 1990 and 2022.

Findings. Beyond descriptive analytics, the results discuss the main research topics explored within the realm of CE, highlighting challenges that connect researchers and practitioners.

Practical and Social Implications. Considering that both community enterprises and other kinds of Community Entrepreneurship are relevant for the development and regeneration of depleted contexts, especially in rural areas, this analysis can support practitioners and policy-makers willing to foster entrepreneurial initiatives based on local community involvement.

Originality of the study. Although the literature on CE dates back to the 1990s, it has recently experienced renewed interest from scholars. However, no systematic literature reviews on this topic have been already developed.

¹ Although the paper is the result of a joint effort, the drafting of paragraphs 3 and 4 is to be attributed to Massimo Albanese; the remaining paragraphs are to be attributed to Nicoletta Buratti.

1. Introduction

The label Community Entrepreneurship (CE) is used to interpret initiatives aimed at stimulating local community engagement and active participation in local development processes (Johannisson, 1990; Beeton, 2010; Dana and Light, 2011; Mars, 2022).

The most notable of these initiatives is the setting up of community enterprises, defined as organizations that engage in commercial activities to actively contribute to the development of a local community bringing economic, social, and environmental benefits (Buratti et al., 2022b). These initiatives are characterized by some distinguished features, namely they are typically embedded in places (Haugh and Pardy, 1999); built on local resources, and leveraging on social capital (Pearce, 2003; Tracey et al., 2005; Somerville and McElwee, 2011; Bailey, 2012), they involve the local community in their activities as well as in their governance (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Smith, 2012; Pierre et al., 2014; Shrestha et al., 2022).

Community enterprises are often considered a special kind of social enterprise, since they are characterized by the attainment of multiple goals, with an emphasis on social ones. Furthermore, they often assume the form of not-for-profit organizations, adopting a cooperative style of management to attain multiple stakeholders' satisfaction (Vestrum and Rasmussen, 2013). However, due to the specific focus on places and their community, scholars have argued that literature on community enterprise may represent a distinct corpus within the strand of entrepreneurship (Tracey et al., 2005; Cooney, 2008).

As emphasized by Smith (2012, p. 58) *"These theoretical variations on the theme of entrepreneurship are being used to label and explain all sorts of individual and collective enterprising behaviour enacted within our communities. ... Often the resultant explanations are not entirely convincing to scholars or practitioners alike"*.

In light of these different perspectives, a literature review can support the definition of CE and its distinguished features within entrepreneurship studies. Community entrepreneurship can refer to very different research fields (among these: entrepreneurship; management; sociology; geography; local development). To address this feature and obtain meaningful and relevant results, a literature review has been set up considering the different fields of interest. It should also be noted that in the analysis of the papers, the entrepreneurial perspective has been privileged, following the pattern of analysis proposed by Gartner (1985), which highlights the areas of interest to be investigated when studying the process of creating a business venture. For this reason, we can say that our work fits, within management studies, in the specific field of entrepreneurship. The paper is organized as follows. First, we introduce the topic and formulate the research questions which drive the following analysis. We then illustrate

the methodology adopted to select the body of literature to be analyzed and provide a descriptive analysis of selected papers. Based on the literature review, an attempt is made to clarify the development path of CE, pinpointing the main issues emerging from the various studies analyzed. Finally, we conclude by describing the limitations of our study, also giving indications for further research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 “Community” and “Entrepreneurship” as building blocks

Strictu sensu, CE construct is at the intersection between community and entrepreneurship, where a community may be defined as a group of people based in a geographically bound area, such as a village or locality (Haugh and Pardy, 1999). Being part of a community implies an intrinsic connection between members and a collective sense of difference from others not from the community (Lyons et al., 2012). Communities tend to be self-defining in place (Lyons et al., 2012), which then impacts and becomes fundamental to the entrepreneurial process (McKeever et al., 2015).

It may be harder to offer a clear-cut definition of entrepreneurship. Several different approaches have been developed over time and, as recognized by Smith (2012) “our appreciation of exactly what actions and activities constitute entrepreneurship *per se* is blurring as entrepreneurship theory matures and perhaps re-fragments” (ibid, p. 57). To our purpose, we consider entrepreneurship as the creation of a new organization (as proposed by Gartner, 1985), and as the process of creation and extraction of value from an environment (following the holistic definition of Anderson, 1995).

Since the seminal contribution of Johannisson (1990), many scholars have proposed empirical studies referred to geographical areas characterized by some commonalities, i.e., affected by critical economic, social, and/or environmental conditions and requiring some entrepreneurial behavior to revitalize and/or develop.

The experiences in the various contexts have been affected by the specificities of the social, cultural, economic, and institutional setting. As a consequence, the studies conducted on them have contributed to the sedimentation of practices and interpretations, resulting in a jagged body of knowledge. Due to this complexity and lack of clarity, scholars have stressed the urgency of “getting things in order”, by recognizing the link between community and entrepreneurs as a new frontier in entrepreneurship research (Lyons et al., 2012), as a new stream of thought within the broader strand on entrepreneurship (Fortunato and Alter, 2015).

The studies on CE are largely based on case studies with theoretical

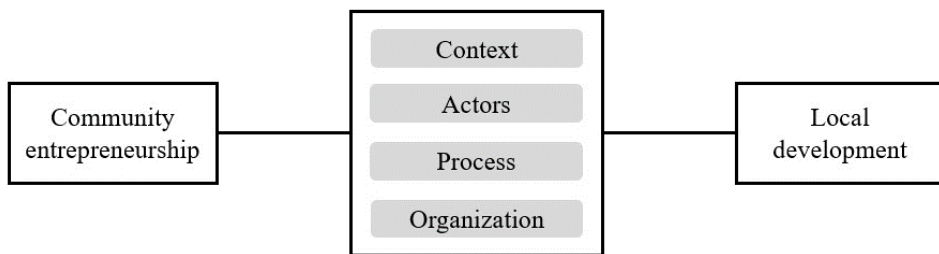
frameworks that are often poor or not explicit. Implicitly or explicitly, however, the literature on CE typically refers to two main research areas: community enterprise (as a specific kind of organization emerging from the community entrepreneurial process operated in a specific context by the so-called community entrepreneur as its main actor), and local development (where the focus is on the regeneration of the local community operated by the community entrepreneur who, thanks to peculiar ability, can stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals and orient them toward the welfare of the community as a whole).

This is also the perspective we are interested in (see Fig. 1); by conducting an extensive literature review, we aim to address two fundamental issues: the first, is related to the very nature of community entrepreneurship, and its distinctive characteristics; while the second focuses on its actual contribution to local development. It is well known that the main value of community entrepreneurship initiatives resides in the positive impact on the community and the place they are rooted in. However, these initiatives face several difficulties, so it is important to highlight if and to what extent researchers and practitioners have dealt with the subject and, eventually, pinpoint the conditions that make them sustainable and therefore able to permanently influence local development processes.

In summary, our literature review is organized to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the distinctive features of CE?
2. What is the actual contribution of CE's initiatives to local development?

Fig.1 Framework for the analysis



Source: authors' elaboration.

3. Methods

We developed a systematic literature review (SLR) based on high-quality sources to summarize CE research, evaluate the frontier of knowledge, and discuss ideas and gaps relevant to the topic.

To this end, the review process followed the input-processing-output approach (Levy and Ellis, 2006) and involved sequential steps.

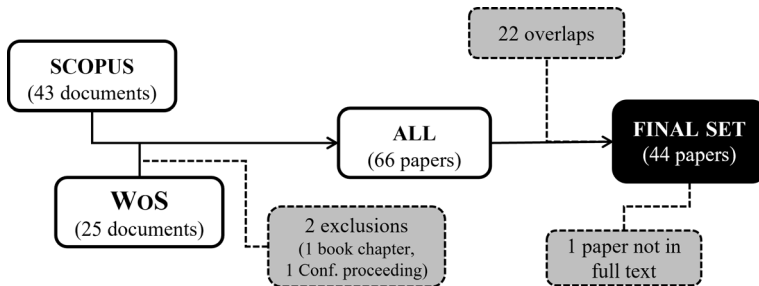
The identification of relevant literature started the first stage of the review process. Usually, SLRs are limited to quality literature; consequently, we searched within two major databases: Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection (WoS), limiting it to peer-reviewed academic articles published in English (thus excluding conference proceedings and book chapters).

Considering that community entrepreneurship is at the crossroads of different strands of literature, we decided not to limit the search to specific subject areas. The methodological reason was to ensure a wide range of perspectives, within which to search for the elements that could enable us to grasp the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon.

Specifically, we searched papers that contained the term “community entrepreneurship” in the title or keywords, and through two queries run in January 2023, we retrieved 43 (Scopus) and 25 (WoS) articles².

The search had no time limit, and after cross-checking the lists, we obtained 44 papers (Figure 2). Only one WoS-listed article was not on the Scopus list, and only one article was not available in full text, due to these aspects, some analysis are limited to 43 papers.

Fig.2 Selected literature



Source: authors' elaboration.

²To support the reproducibility of the input stage, we include the queries used in:

- Scopus database, (TITLE (“community entrepreneurship”) OR KEY (“community entrepreneurship”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “re”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”));
- WoS database, (TI=(“community entrepreneurship”)) OR AK=(“community entrepreneurship”), refined by (Document Types: Article OR Review Article) AND (Languages: English).

To develop the processing stage, we read and classified the documents according to the typical variables of a review, such as publication year, keywords, methodological strategy, and publication outlet. To classify:

- *the methodological strategies*, intended as “classes of research settings for gaining knowledge about a research problem”, we followed the taxonomy used in McGrath (1981, p. 182), adding the classes “combined methods” and “not specified”. After the classification, we compared the results and the doubtful cases were discussed, reaching an agreed classification;
- *the journals*, we adopted the journal h-index (Mingers and Yang, 2017) by basing on the Scimago Journal Rank of March 2023, as it is a useful index to evaluate the importance and the quality of peer-reviewed journals (Linke and Florio, 2019).

To sketch the state of the art of the produced knowledge and judge it, we adopted a 3-level analysis aimed at assessing:

- 1) *the scientific activity*. We analysed the density of documents (number of articles). Indeed, the act of generating academic papers (peer-reviewed articles) is a good proxy for (quality) research activity (Henneken and Kurtz, 2019),
- 2) *the scientific impact*. We developed a bibliometric analysis based on citation count. Although citations are not free of limits (MacRoberts and MacRoberts, 1989), they can be considered a proxy for scientific impact (Moed, 2005). Data were downloaded from Google Scholar in March 2023 via Publish or Perish software,
- 3) *the emerging topics*. To identify them, we focused on journals with the highest number of publications and journals classified in the first quartile of the Scimago Journal Rank³. We considered the quartile of the publication year and excluded literature reviews.

4. Descriptive results

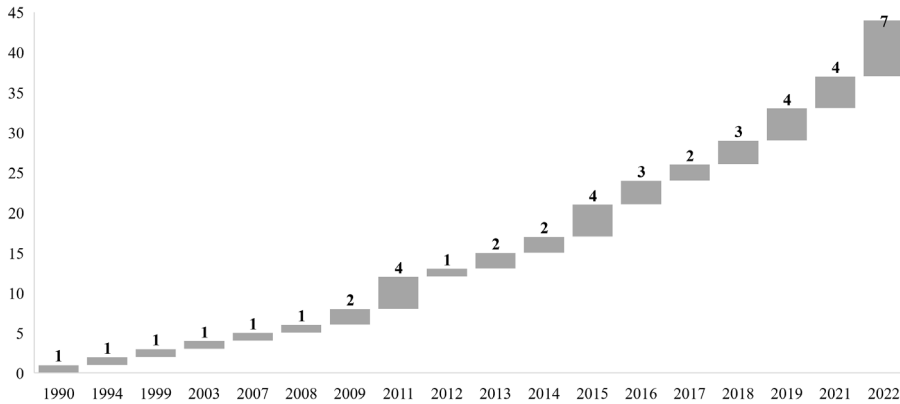
To analyze the evolution of scientific production on community entrepreneurship, we developed a timeline (Figure 3).

The review spans more than 30 years and the first article of this period was published by Johannisson in 1990. Over the next 20 years, scholarly activity was not intense, as only 8 articles were published, whereas, since 2011, community entrepreneurship has attracted more interest. Scientific activity has been more intense and regular only in the last 7 years, and

³The set of journals in each subject category is classified according to their Scimago Journal Rank and divided into four equal groups (four quartiles). The first quartile comprises the quarter of the journals with the highest values.

today community entrepreneurship is increasingly attracting interest as an area of academic scrutiny (note that 25% of the selected literature has been published in the last 2 years).

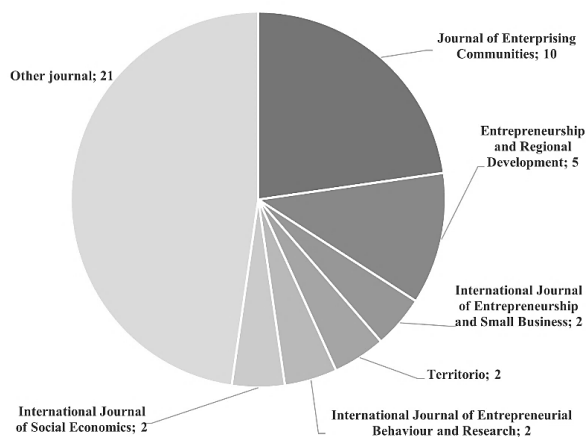
Fig.3 Timeline



Source: authors' elaboration.

Figure 4 and Table 1 offer an overview of journals which accepted manuscripts on community entrepreneurship and the importance of publication outlets. Journal of Enterprising Communities and Entrepreneurship and Regional Development are the journals that most frequently publish articles related to community entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the prestige of the journals publishing the articles in question has increased.

Fig. 4 Main publication outlets



Source: authors' elaboration.

Table.1 Articles by class of Scimago H-index published during 1990-2022

Journal h-index	1990-1992	1993-1995	1996-1998	1999-2001	2002-2004	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016	2017-2019	2020-2022	Total
161-180		1										1
141-160												0
121-140										1		1
101-120											1	1
81-100	1							2			2	5
61-80				1	1			1			2	5
41-60						1			1	1	1	4
21-40							2	3	8	3	4	20
0-20							1	1		3		5
NA										1	1	2
Total	1	1	0	1	1	1	3	7	9	9	11	44

Source: authors' elaboration.

Considering adopted methods, research set in natural systems stands out above all others, as they account for more than 65% of the analyzed literature (Table 2). This type of research can use interviews, observations, and archival data to investigate specific behavior systems and their prevalence may be associated with a non-advanced level of knowledge maturity on the topic as well as the need to understand the relational and cultural contexts, where community entrepreneurship develops and to analyze social actors involved and the role they play.

In recent years, articles pointing to greater generalizability of results (sample survey, combined methods research), as well as those of a conceptual nature, with a focus on analyzing and describing the state of research (LRs) are published.

Table.2 Research methods adopted during 1990-2022 and related research impact

Research method	1990-1992	1993-1995	1996-1998	1999-2001	2002-2004	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016	2017-2019	2020-2022	Total
Research sets in natural systems (i.e., case studies)	(1) 224,0	(1) 126,0		(1) 89,0	(1) 101,0	(1) 110,0	(2) 17,0	(4) 56,8	(5) 20,0	(6) 22,2	(7) 1,9	(29) 39,9
Empirical simulation and laboratory experiment												(0) 0,0

Sample survey and judgement task									(1) 28,0	(1) 23,0		(2) 25,5
Formal theory, conceptual study, LR								(2) 38,5	(3) 57,0		(2) 2,0	(7) 36,0
Computer simulation (attempts to model)											(1) 0,0	(1) 0,0
Combined methods								(1) 53,0			(1) 0,0	(2) 26,5
Not specified							(1) 11,0			(2) 39,5		(3) 30,0
Total	(1) 224,0	(1) 126,0	(0) 0,0	(1) 89,9	(1) 101,0	(1) 110,0	(3) 15,0	(7) 51,0	(9) 33,2	(9) 26,1	(11) 1,5	(44) 36,4

Notes: Number of publications in brackets; average number of citations per article out of brackets.

Source: authors' elaboration on Google Scholar data.

From the research impact perspective, the works of Johannisson (1990), Selsky and Smith (1994), Gliedt and Parker (2007) and Peredo (2003) are the most influential. These articles were developed on case studies that offered a few theoretical insights very useful for the following works; thus, they can be considered seminal papers. Over the last decade, articles of a conceptual nature, as well as papers based on the combination of different methods, have been developed, testifying to a slow maturation of the topic.

Table 3 shows the various subtopics that emerged over time in the main journals.

Table.3 Main topics in major journals

Authors	Year	Journal	Main topics
Johannisson	1990	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Depleted contexts as a stimulus for community development and cooperation. Importance of networking and the role of the community entrepreneur (leadership) in managing links with the market, institutions, and political actors.
Peredo	2003	Journal of Management Inquiry	Enterprises organised and managed by the local community as alternative initiatives to revitalise depressed contexts and pursue sustainable development.

Cooney	2008	Journal of Enterprising Communities	Community enterprise/Community entrepreneurship similarities and differences to traditional enterprises/entrepreneurial processes.
Dana, Light	2011	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Community entrepreneurship and the implications in terms of social capital, human capital, and cultural capital.
Spilling	2011	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Role of small enterprises in local communities and the chances of the entrepreneurial process to enact local mobilization through the management of personal networks.
Sundin	2011	Journal of Enterprising Communities	Community dimensions of social intentions characterizing (social/conventional) entrepreneurship.
Smith	2012	Journal of Enterprising Communities	Analysis of existing conceptualisations of community entrepreneurship and social enterprise.
Vestrum, Rasmussen	2013	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research	Community entrepreneurship and resources mobilization. Changes in community enterprises resulting from the resource mobilisation process.
Varady, Kleinhans, van Ham	2015	Journal of Enterprising Communities	The potential of community entrepreneurship in small-scale urban revitalisation.
Summatavet, Raudsaar	2015	Journal of Enterprising Communities	The role of networking, creating community, product development and mentoring in the experiential and entrepreneurial learning process.
Vestrum	2016	Journal of Enterprising Communities	The role of community entrepreneurs, local communities, and the external environment in the resource mobilisation process. Lack of knowledge about gender in community entrepreneurship research.
Madichie	2016	Journal of Enterprising Communities	The role of social/community entrepreneurship in pandemic coping strategies.
Valchovska, Watts	2016	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	Insights into the origins, key attributes, and development of community enterprises. Relevance of a mix of individual and community actions in the foundation/development of community enterprises.
Gurău, Dana	2018	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	The role of community entrepreneurship in protecting and managing the natural environment.
Roundy	2019	Journal of Business Venturing Insights	Community members and revitalization of entrepreneurial ecosystems.
Haug	2022	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	Influences of institutional legacy social structures and relations on community entrepreneurship.
Kalu, Dana	2022	Journal of Enterprising Communities	Relevance of social and cultural capital for community entrepreneurship.

Buratti, Albanese, Sillig	2022	Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	Analysis of entrepreneurial posture adopted by community entrepreneurs.
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Source: authors' elaboration on Scimago Journal Rank data

5. Discussion

One of the challenges in understanding more than 30 years of research is to grasp how the literature has evolved and how its results relate to each other. Our analyses suggest a distinct shift in research focus over time. We let these shifts influence our sensemaking in two phases.

First, we organize the shifts into three eras. Our organization under the three eras may be biased by subjective evaluations, but it is in line with observations about the most relevant papers published in periods 1 and 2 and with the rising interest in the topic in period 3. Second, and coherently with the framework proposed (Figure 1), we conduct a thematic exploration of the papers with their published keywords and content, using the eras as an organizing framework to extract substantive themes.

5.1 1990-1999: from the Community Entrepreneur to the entrepreneurial activity by groups with shared interests living in a small area

The first decade of our review is characterized by a very small number of studies (3), which nevertheless played a central role in the following development.

A keystone within the corpus of literature on community entrepreneurship is represented by the seminal work of Johannisson entitled 'Community entrepreneurship-cases and conceptualization', published on Entrepreneurship and Regional Development in 1990. The work describes two successful Swedish local development cases where the revitalization effort succeeded in turning a contraction process into a stable state, thanks to the involvement of the community by a local entrepreneur acting as a community leader. Following the idea that enterprises aiming at both business venturing and community revitalization call for social as well as commercial networking in local arenas⁴, the author defines the community entrepreneur as "a pivotal agent in the socio-economic community network. He or she economizes his/her personal networking by focusing on three issues: the management of the community boundary, internal arenas, and vital external linkages" (Johannisson, 1990, p. 79). In this perspective, the

⁴The idea in nuce had been introduced in a previous work co-authored with Nilsson (Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989).

community entrepreneur possesses leadership skills well beyond that in purely commercial settings, as he/she must initiate and orchestrate both social and political processes.

Community entrepreneurs are to be considered facilitators of entrepreneurial events conducted by other entrepreneurs rather than promoters of their own, individual business ventures; in this vein, the concept of community entrepreneur addresses the actor whose primary concern is the development of the community as a whole.

Shortly thereafter, Selsky and Smith (1994) added insights into the community entrepreneur concept.

They agree with the idea that community entrepreneurs represent a special kind of leader, as "in addition to being leaders of organizations in their own right, they play their most critical role in developing the collective capacities of organizations sharing interests in one or more community issues" (1994, p. 278). Effective community entrepreneurs do have three basic qualities: "(1) an ability to envision and articulate a multi-frame perspective; (2) an entrepreneurial orientation in brokering commitments, mobilizing resources, and managing events; and (3) a reflectiveness in their practice, which enables them to learn from, adapt to, and enact a changing social landscape" (1994, p. 278). These three qualities, traditionally discussed in terms of intra-organizational leadership (Bolman and Deal, 1991), are extended by Selsky and Smith to "inter-organizational, community-based contexts, where structures and norms are much weaker and need to be constructed" (1994, p. 278).

Fundamental, in community entrepreneurship, is the brokerage activity, i.e., developing, in addition to a sense of belonging, relational networks between distinct categories of people (Selsky and Smith, 1994). At the local level, networks of firms and other actors interested or active in the field of community development (individual citizens/volunteers, NGOs, neighborhood associations), and relationships with local institutions, are often essential (Johannisson, 1990). The community entrepreneur builds up a complex set of networks combining the formal as well as the informal social setting to facilitate community development; thus, networking is a crucial organizing vehicle for community entrepreneurs.

The decade ends with a study by Haugh and Pardy (1999), where CE is presented as an example of entrepreneurial activity by groups with social and economic benefits for a community. Namely, CE is referred to as the "...innovative re-combination of pre-existing elements of activity by inhabitants with shared interests living in a small basic administrative or statistical area. Community entrepreneurship attempts to use the process of entrepreneurship as a force for economic development by exploiting the resources and assets of the community" (ibid, p. 165). Community entrepreneurship is distinctive in that it refers to the process of social and

economic regeneration *for* a community *by* the community. The work emphasizes the importance of coordinating community members into a recognizable group to produce the community strategic document, and for the ideas for economic regeneration to come from the community itself. The A. conclude that developing community entrepreneurship requires a supportive infrastructure and a long-term commitment of people and resources to facilitate the process of releasing the entrepreneurial spirit of each community.

From then on, the role of the community entrepreneur as a social motivator will be explored further in later studies. The following decade will thus be marked by the co-existence of research focused either on the emergence and development of community enterprises or on local development initiatives centered on the key role of community entrepreneurs.

5.2 From 2003 up to 2012: the emerging construct of Community-based Enterprise and its debated positioning within the entrepreneurship studies

The second decade starts with a contribution destined to become a landmark in the debate on Community Entrepreneurship: Peredo's paper published in 2003 in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, entitled: *Emerging Strategies Against Poverty. The Road Less Traveled*.

Peredo introduces the idea of the Community-based Enterprise (CBE) as "a mechanism for change" ... emerging "as an innovative response by impoverished communities to macroeconomic, social, and political factors" (Peredo, 2003, p. 164).

The study, based on three entrepreneurial initiatives in the Peruvian Andes, sheds new light on the concept of CE, pointing out that the outcome of such a process can take on new characteristics and forms, not ascribable to the traditional profit-oriented enterprise, from which it differs by being based on collective initiative, being strongly linked to a place and having as its goal the development of the local community. With regards to this, she recalls that "each CBE arose out of a purely local initiative. Moreover, each of these communities was marked by a high degree of cohesiveness, and in each were social and economic needs not being met by outside organizations. Indeed, in most cases, the initial moving force behind community action was not economic but rather related to the demand for basic social services. Business activity came later" (Peredo, 2003, p. 164).

Finally, A. points out that "the idea that CBE can serve as a strategy for overcoming poverty in the Andean context and possibly in other similar contexts is based on two principal premises: (a) that development, if it is to be sustainable, must come from the people themselves; and (b) that institutional/public policies must incorporate the diversity of cultures as well as of diverse economic, environmental, and social systems" (ibidem).

The following years saw a growing interest in community entrepreneurship and community entrepreneurs, scholars were invited to debate about how to define them, as compared to social entrepreneurship, conventional commercial entrepreneurship, and traditional social organizations (Cooney, 2008).

Studies focused on specific experiences, located in Canada (Gliedt and Parker, 2007), India (Torri, 2009), Turkey (Varol et al., 2009), Finland (Dana and Riseth, 2011; Dana and Light, 2011), and Scotland (Smith, 2012) are published.

Amongst these, only the cases described by Torri (2009) and Smith (2012) are explicitly referred to the CBE concept à la Peredo, while the others describe: social entrepreneurial initiatives labelled green community entrepreneurship (Gliedt and Parker, 2007); the role of social community entrepreneur à la Johannisson⁵ (Varol et al., 2009); community entrepreneurship as a bottom-up political process through which community-based networks collaboratively mobilize localized resources in lobbying policymakers to invest in ventures benefiting the broader community (Beeton, 2010); and finally community entrepreneurship as a mean to maintain cultural traditions in remote contexts as production resources (Dana and Light, 2011; Dana and Riseth, 2011).

The most intriguing paper about the theoretical distinction between community entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and conventional entrepreneurship is the study of Sundin (2011): it is she that after presenting and comparing the dominating references on entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and community entrepreneurship, shows that not only (as expected) social enterprises but also conventional ones are based on social intentions and that these social intentions often have community dimensions. The cases she presents are in a specific context (Sweden), and we all know that when dealing with entrepreneurship (and social phenomenon in general) findings in one context may not be relevant in others. Notwithstanding, she offers useful insights about the fact that “the existing definitions and images of entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and community entrepreneurship, do not cover the wide range of activities and organizations that exist, nor do they cover the individuals and groups behind them” (ibidem, p. 220).

⁵ In this regard they affirm: “More than economic actors some entrepreneurs appear as social representatives who are defined as social or community entrepreneurs. They consider the development of the community as their main personal goal and possess an innovative idea for social change. In local sustainable development concern, community entrepreneurs appear as crucial actors who act as leaders to motivate groups and individuals” (Varol et al., 2009, p. 51).

5.3 From 2013 onwards: searching for theoretical legitimacy

The third decade is characterized by a rise in the interest in community entrepreneurship and its related topics, i.e., community entrepreneur, community enterprise and community development.

Two main features characterize the publications analyzed. First, the widening of geographical boundaries of the case studies proposed, with new entries from Norway (Vestrum and Rasmussen, 2013); Malaysia (Jaafar et al., 2014); Estonia (Summatavet and Raudsaar, 2015); United States (Varady et al., 2015; James and Victor, 2017; Gurău and Dana, 2018; Roundy, 2019; Mars, 2022); Africa (Madichie, 2016; Kalu and Dana, 2022); the Netherlands (Kleinhans and Ham, 2017); Australia (Adhikari et al., 2018; Lamont et al., 2021); Italy (Tricarico and Pacchi, 2018; Buratti et al., 2022a); New Zealand (Argyrou and Hummels, 2019); Nepal (Shrestha et al., 2022).

Second (and most importantly to our perspective), the deepening of the conceptual framework of reference is observed. A generalized more focused analysis of the analogies between social entrepreneurship and community entrepreneurship is developed (Vestrum and Rasmussen, 2013; Gliedt and Parker, 2014; Madichie, 2016; Pan, 2021; Kalu and Dana, 2022), and, in parallel, new frameworks, such as sustainability entrepreneurship (Levinsohn, 2013); institutional entrepreneurship (Vestrum, 2016; Haugh, 2022); humane entrepreneurship (Buratti et al., 2022a) are proposed.

To navigate among the different perspectives, it may be useful to first recall the distinction, emphasized by Vestrum and Rasmussen (2013) between a community entrepreneur as a change agent and a community enterprise (or community venture) as an organization embedded in the community to be able to mobilize resources. They compare the community ventures (CVs) to social enterprises, pinpointing the common elements (focus on social goals and the involvement of many stakeholders) but also highlighting the specific characteristics of CVs, that may not be valid for all types of social ventures.

The distinction between the role of the entrepreneur as a change agent (Vestrum and Rasmussen, 2013; Vestrum, 2016) and the venture as an organization embedded in a specific community enables us to acknowledge the mismatch between the aim to change the *status quo* and the need for valuing the social and cultural capital of the community as a resource. To acquire resources, the community venture must involve the various stakeholders in the area (municipalities, voluntary organizations, local businesses, etc.) each of which has its motivations. Therefore, the community entrepreneur acts as an agent of change in the mid-long run, but in the startup phase of the new venture must exercise the leadership and networking capabilities already emphasized by Johannisson (plus maybe strong mediation skills).

Apart from this, CE also presents some contact points with sustainabil-

ity entrepreneurship (Levinsohn, 2013) due to its focus on places (one of the sustainability principles) and the rising humane entrepreneurship perspective (Buratti, 2022a), due to the community leaders' strategic posture.

Anyway, social entrepreneurship remains the most used theoretical framework for comparative analysis and we may affirm that the distinction from CE is the embeddedness in place of community entrepreneurial initiatives; as recently recalled: "Community entrepreneurship describes the process of establishing a community-based, entrepreneurial, non-profit distributing venture that aims to create economic, social and environmental impacts for the communities in which it is based" (Haugh, 2022, p. 545).

Regarding the actual contribution to local community development, the issue analyzed vary according to the context of reference: most contribution underlines the impact of CE initiatives in rural environments (among others: Pierre et al., 2014; Adhikari et al. 2018; Pan, 2021), although in the years a rising interest towards these kinds of initiatives in urban contexts has been developed, focusing on such issues as co-production, citizen involvement, relationships between stakeholders and the socio-economic positive impacts of interventions (Varady et al., 2015; Kleinhans and Van Ham, 2017; Mars, 2022).

The kind of positive impacts described mostly refer to economic and social impacts. In some contexts, positive environmental impacts are also emphasized (Gray et al., 2014). It is worthwhile to note that, although the three categories of outcomes are closely interrelated and functional to one another, attention to environmental sustainability has emerged quite recently (Gurău and Dana, 2018; Pan, 2021; Shrestha et al., 2022; Buratti et al., 2022a; Mars, 2022).

As most of the cases described in the literature refer to entrepreneurial initiatives that are still relatively young, it is hard to assess the durability of the results obtained.

Notwithstanding, a few recently published articles have brought attention to the – sometimes - missing link between intentions and effective behaviours, offering both a methodological proposal to address the tricky issue of performance measurement (Silfia et al., 2021) and a deep investigation into the viability and sustainability of community enterprises (Shrestha et al., 2022).

5.4. Emerging perspectives

We are now going to recall our research questions to take a stance towards the most intriguing insights.

Our first research question is related to Community Entrepreneurship's distinctive features, as compared to other forms of entrepreneurship.

Concerning this first aspect, our literature review shows that overlaps

between community and social entrepreneurship are commonly acknowledged. However, some distinguishing features emerge. Firstly, the *context*: community entrepreneurship manifests itself in depleted, impoverished places and/or in territories characterized by a paucity of social services. Secondly, the *actor*: CE is centered on the ability of the community entrepreneur to mobilize local social capital, and to organize local assets for the creation and/or extraction of value through the involvement of the local community. Thirdly, the entrepreneurial *process*: is indeed molded by the need to balance between economic sustainability and commitment to social and environmental issues of the local community. Finally, the *output of the process*: what is commonly labelled as ‘community enterprise’ is associated by researchers and practitioners with highly variable practices.

As highlighted in a previous study (Buratti et al., 2022b, p. 20), “literature case studies are positioned along a continuum for at least three variables, regarding: i. the type of objectives (from the effects induced by income and employment growth alone to economic, social, and environmental objectives); ii. the level of community involvement (from individual firms to firms that involve the whole community in production and governance); iii. the share of income derived from commercial activity (from unsubsidized businesses to organizations based primarily on volunteer work and donations with minimal earnings) ... The variety of experiences registered calls for a broad definition, where the basic pillars to be considered are the following three: the attachment to a specific place; the aim of its social, cultural, economic, and environmental regeneration through commercial activities; the involvement of the local community in its activities, governance and – sometimes – management”.

A common objection to the specificity of community enterprise (as the main manifestation of the community entrepreneurial process) is that it shows many points in common with social enterprise (either in a cooperative form or not) and, sometimes, it may also resemble a traditional cooperative of workers. In this vein, one should distinguish between the legal status of the community entrepreneurial initiative and its core elements. An exemplary case is ‘mutuality’. In the workers’ cooperative, internal mutuality prevails, as the benefits pursued concern first and foremost the cooperative members (in terms of employment stability and fair remuneration). Whereas in the community enterprise, mutuality is directed internally to multiple actors (workers, volunteers, users, etc.) and externally to the local community (also attaining the interests of non-members) (Irecoop, 2016). In this perspective, there are some commonalities with social co-operatives, whose primary aim is directed to collective interest (Mancino and Thomas, 2005). However, in community enterprises, the community of reference is related to a defined territorial area, and this also entails specificities in terms of objectives (place revitalization) decision-making processes (based

mostly on extended assemblies), and business models (characterized by a mix of different activities, whose rationale is the attainment of a balance between economic sustainability and local communities' needs satisfaction).

As for the second research question (the actual contribution of CE initiatives to local development), our literature review showed that the scale of analysis is definitively local, and the issues analyzed vary according to the context of reference. Despite the rising interest in these kinds of initiatives, especially those developed following a bottom-up approach, there is little evidence of their actual contribution to sustainable local development, considering also that shared, comprehensive methods for assessing their impact are not yet a widespread practice.

Overall, there is little thinking about the metrics for CE initiatives results assessment (Bailey 2012; Varady et al., 2015). Several studies have instead highlighted the numerous threats encountered by existing community enterprises, concerning, especially, weak governance and managerial capabilities, shortage of resources, and discontinuous relationships with the local community and other relevant actors in the enacted environment. In this vein, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge that, despite their positive contribution to local development, they are affected in most cases by an intrinsic fragility, so it is necessary to correctly size the expectations regarding their sustainable development and achievements.

6. Conclusions

This literature review aims to offer a specific systematization of the literature on this topic which is still lacking, despite the growing interest in community entrepreneurship as a source of viable solutions to counteract decline and meet the needs of communities localized in depleted contexts, either in rural places or in urban areas.

However, our research has some limitations. First, the choice of the database and the lack of non-English language contributions limit access to experiences from contexts less prone to international publications. Second, the choice of the label "community entrepreneurship" may have limited the literature to be analyzed. Indeed, considering the analysis carried out, "collective entrepreneurship" and "community business entrepreneurship" could be useful terms for searching for relevant literature. Third, the choice to exclude from our analysis publications other than papers may offer an incomplete view of the body of knowledge developed on the topic.

Despite these limitations, this review of the existing literature has enabled us to formulate some conclusions and offer some guidelines for future research.

First, our study offers a portrayal of the development and current state of

the literature on community entrepreneurship, i.e., a hybrid form of entrepreneurship manifested especially in areas characterized by economic decline and social impoverishment and based mainly – albeit not exclusively – on community involvement in the governance of the firm thus established and/or in supporting the implementation of development projects.

Concerning the positioning of CE within the realm of entrepreneurship studies, overlaps between community and social entrepreneurship are commonly acknowledged. So, what are the distinctive features of community entrepreneurship? The literature analyzed pinpoints the crucial issue of mobilization of social capital, the ability to organize local assets, and the capacity to involve the local community by the so-called community entrepreneur. In one word, the community entrepreneurs' ability to enact the local environment and to turn an unfavorable, sometimes hostile context into one capable of offering collective well-being. In this perspective, social capabilities (Gray et al., 2014), entrepreneurial networking (Johannisson, 1990), and the ability to balance the need for economic sustainability and commitment to social and environmental issues of the local community are to be considered essential ingredients of community entrepreneurship, in its various manifestations.

Finally, as regards the actual contribution to local development, the analysis shows the multiple positive impacts that effective community entrepreneurial initiatives may have on places, while on the other side have highlighted the many threats to their viability and economic sustainability in the long run. Of particular concern, from an entrepreneurial perspective, access to local resources requires a superior ability to manage cooperative relationships with the community and other actors. In this regard, while institutional recognition of the potential of CE for communities' revitalization is crucial, it is also important to acknowledge their intrinsic fragility and to correctly size the expectations regarding their development and achievements.

Stated these findings, we consider it useful to draw attention to some issues that may be relevant to both researchers and policymakers interested in CE and related initiatives.

In the first place, and in the wake of what has been proposed by some authors, it seems useful to further structure and develop the reflection on the relationship between entrepreneurship, community, and local development.

Up to now the prevailing argument in the international debate is about similarities and differences between community entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship; considering what has been highlighted so far, it could be of interest for both researchers and practitioners to delve deeper into the specificities of the community entrepreneurial initiatives born in different contexts. A possible starting point is to adopt a shared definition of what a community enterprise is, as compared to other initiatives aiming

at places regeneration and involving the local community in its realization; second, to acknowledge the differences - if significant - between CE initiatives born in rural vs. urban contexts. As regards the pivotal capabilities of community entrepreneurs, it seems that the debate remained anchored to the personal skills of the community entrepreneur, i.e., the leadership and networking skills on which the success of the most promising initiatives are based. However, also considering the changes taking place in the socio-economic and technological environment, it appears important for the near future to address the issue of the impact that new digital technologies may have on community entrepreneurial initiatives. Some timid approaches to the topic have made their appearance (Fahmi and Savira, 2023); particular attention has been given up to now, to the role of social networks in the creation of an extended network of supporters that goes beyond the geographical limits of the resident community (Mars, 2022).

Another important theme that is underdeveloped relates to the assessment of their actual contribution to value generation in local contexts. This is a tricky issue, for at least two sets of considerations. On one side, there is no unanimous consensus on what can be considered the best methodology to adopt, and the variety of concrete situations requires a flexible approach based on a set of multidimensional indicators. On the other side, because even if the need to shift from the consideration of traditional output indicators towards outcome indicators seems to be established in the specialized literature on the topic, the measurement of such indicators requires strict coherence with the objectives formulated in the upstream phase of the entrepreneurial project, as well as the adoption of a medium-long term horizon, to detect the change generated through the initiative. Which requires strategic and managerial capabilities that are rarely found in the founders of the initiatives in question.

This consideration introduces us to the final remark.

Given the potential of CE initiatives in depleted contexts, it seems of paramount importance that government, aid, and economic development organizations must help foster the identification and training of future community entrepreneurship leaders, offering opportunities to improve the ability of existing - as well as would-be - community entrepreneurs, through specific programs of capacity building developed by qualified educational organizations in cooperation with mentors and practitioners engaged in community management.

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