



# **Adapting entrepreneurial learning to agriculture – a literature review.**

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June 2020

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## **Adapting entrepreneurial learning to agriculture – a literature review.**

### **Topic description:**

This paper aims to bring an improved understanding of entrepreneurial learning with specific interest for the agricultural sector. What is the relationship between the contextual dimensions identity, family and institutions and entrepreneurial learning in agriculture? And, how can future research improve our understanding of the process of entrepreneurial learning in agriculture?

### **Abstract**

The aim of this literature review is to explore how the theory of entrepreneurial learning can be usefully applied to the context of agribusiness. Whereas plenty of articles have been published on the notion of individual entrepreneurial learning, relatively little is known on how the process of entrepreneurial learning takes place within agriculture. Therefore, this paper aims to understand drivers of entrepreneurial learning, within the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector has some distinctive characteristics compared to other sectors, and this makes the process of entrepreneurial learning unfold differently. Three dimensions, Farmers' identity, family and institutions all have large impact on the entrepreneurial activities of farmers and are therefore examined in this paper. Additionally, it is explained how future research could examine potential links between agriculture and entrepreneurial learning. This study contributes to the entrepreneurial learning literature by contextualizing the entrepreneurial learning process and providing valuable insights. This paper ultimately acts as a starting point for any future research on entrepreneurial learning in agriculture.

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# 1. The theory of entrepreneurial learning

Entrepreneurial activity used to be mainly understood by existing theories and approaches. However, in recent years researchers have showed increased interest in the process of entrepreneurial learning to better understand and explain entrepreneurial activity. Although the number of studies on entrepreneurial learning has increased in the past 15 years, our knowledge is still quite limited about entrepreneurial learning.

The field of entrepreneurship can be defined as the scholarly examination of how, by whom and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated and exploited (Venkataraman, 1997). In the classical theories of entrepreneurship, the aspect of learning was often not taken into account at all. These early theories of entrepreneurship originated from the field of economics, and have particularly been concerned with defining the entrepreneurial function (Casson, 1982). Thus, the research was mainly about the functional perspective of the entrepreneurial activities. More recently, the research on the field of entrepreneurial activity has shifted its interest towards a personality perspective. Researchers have become more interested in the personality traits and learning curve that influences entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial activities (Greenberger & Sexton, 1988).

Many articles on entrepreneurial learning **use different definitions** for the concept. Overall there is a general lack of consensus on what entrepreneurial learning is. Within this paper, **entrepreneurial learning is defined as a continuous process that facilitates the development of necessary knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures**. This is the most used and striking definition that fits this paper. In other words, entrepreneurial learning is a fundamental and integral part of the development of organizations, regardless of the work field. It comprises knowledge, behaviour and affective or emotional learning. Studies on entrepreneurial learning are not only concerned with what entrepreneurs should do or learn during the process of exploring and exploiting an entrepreneurial opportunity in the creation of new ventures or growth of existing firms, but more importantly, the specific processes of learning that takes place (Wang & Chugh, 2014). Entrepreneurial learning is important for any business because it is about **learning to recognize and act on opportunities**, through initiating, organizing and managing ventures in social and behavioural ways (Rae, 2006). Entrepreneurial learning is capable of regenerating societies and economies by innovation and wealth creation, it uses creative thinking to stimulate vision, ambition and action, and it comprises lifelong learning for people to learn how to survive and grow as a business (Rae, 2006).

There are however many different approaches and perspectives to the concept of entrepreneurial learning. This has to do with the fact that there is lack of congruence in the literature which causes division in the theory. However, two main approaches on entrepreneurial learning can be distinguished within the available literature. Simply put, there is a distinction between an “experimental learning” and a “social learning” approach. Most articles appear to follow an **individual-cognitive perspective** (Wang & Chugh, 2014) while there is also a very relevant **socially-situated perspective** on entrepreneurial learning. Both theories include useful insights that help understanding entrepreneurial learning in the context of agriculture.

Because the two theories explain entrepreneurial learning from different perspectives, and because the approaches propose that entrepreneurial learning occurs at different moments, it is hard to connect them both into one framework. Therefore, the two approaches are presented as separate frameworks aiming to explain entrepreneurial learning in agriculture as good as possible. This might seem a bit complicated or confusing, but both theories actually prove to be very relevant for this paper.

From an individual-cognitive perspective, entrepreneurial learning is the experiential process where the personal experience of an entrepreneur is transformed into knowledge, which in turn can be used to guide the choice of new experiences (Politis, 2005). An individual's ability to identify opportunities is dependent upon the possession of the prior information necessary to identify an opportunity as well as upon the process through which individuals acquire and transform their information and knowledge (Corbett, 2005).

Secondly, the socially-situated perspective on entrepreneurial learning has primarily been developed by D. Rae (2006). His approach offers an understanding from a social and collaborative process of learning. This perspective views entrepreneurial learning as something that is embedded and influenced by the social dynamics of the entrepreneur's work-environment. He argues that entrepreneurial activity is more influenced by the environment that a farmer operates in than by his individual experiences.

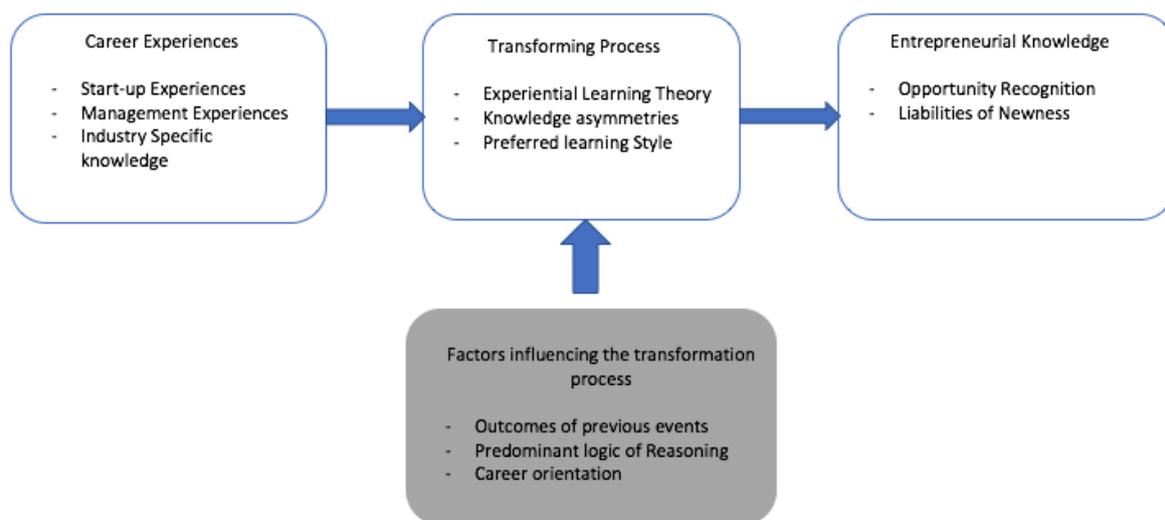
The two approaches show differences in how entrepreneurial learning comes in place, but they both agree on it having an impact on opportunity recognition, venture creation and exploitation. In the following sections, both views are comprehensively explained.

### ***Individual-cognitive approach on entrepreneurial learning.***

This section will first address the individual-cognitive approach as it is the most used approach in entrepreneurial learning literature. This approach is mainly explained through the work of D. Politis (2005), A.C. Corbett (2007) and D.A. Kolb (2001).

The framework below comprehensively illustrates the process of entrepreneurial learning from the individual-cognitive view on entrepreneurial learning based on the work of Politis (2005) and Corbett (2007). This approach in particular emphasises the role of entrepreneurial knowledge, rational decision-making with some development of learning within a social or team-based context. All aspects will consequently be further explained.

Individual-Cognitive approach to Entrepreneurial Learning Based on Politis (2005) and Corbett (2007)



In short, entrepreneurial learning is the process of developing necessary knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures by transforming prior knowledge, often derived from career experiences, into entrepreneurial knowledge. Prior knowledge is mostly derived from the entrepreneurs' career experiences, in terms of start-up, management and industry-specific experience (Politis, 2005).

Shane (2003) shows that an individual's knowledge about existing markets, how to serve that market, and knowledge about customer's problems will influence the opportunities one discovers. Building further on this, Ardichivili et al. (2003) similarly proposed that (1) special interest knowledge and general industry knowledge; (2) prior knowledge of markets; (3) prior knowledge of customer problems; and (4) prior knowledge of ways to serve markets will all increase the likelihood of successful entrepreneurial opportunity recognition. The statements made by Shane and Ardichivili et al. both fit into the **industry-specific knowledge** that Politis (2005) describes as part of the **entrepreneur's career experience**. Having the disposal of well-developed networks and a business reputation, are also valuable aspects in the development of a new venture. In addition, Aldrich (1999) showed that entrepreneurs tend to start business in industries in which they were previously employed, because

their experience allows them to take advantage of information of the exploitation of opportunities gathered from their previous employment.

Secondly, the **management experience** an entrepreneur possesses forms an important part of his career experience. Gartner (1990) found that founders of failed ventures had narrower management experience than the founders of successful ventures, which proved a positive relationship between founders' management experience and new venture survival. In addition, several studies showed that prior management experience increases an individual's intention to start a new venture, which facilitated the opportunity recognition process (Politis, 2005). On top of that, prior management experience also provides entrepreneurs training in many of the skills needed for coping with the liabilities of newness, this concept will be explained in a bit.

At last, **prior start-up experience** provides tacit knowledge that facilitates decision-making in entrepreneurial opportunities under uncertainty and time pressure. Shane (2003) argues that individuals with more start-up experience should see a given opportunity as more desirable than other individuals see it, and therefore be more likely to exploit it. It was further shown that prior start-up experience enhances the economic performance of new ventures (Gimeno et al. 1997).

To recognize an opportunity, an individual usually possesses information and knowledge that is complementary to the new information that is being recognized. This triggers entrepreneurial conjecture (Kaish and Gilad, 1987). The relevant knowledge an individual possesses is obviously totally different from someone else. This partly explains why some people discover certain opportunities while others do not.

The key outcome of the entrepreneurial learning process is to create the required **entrepreneurial knowledge**, which is thus a result of the entrepreneurs' career experiences. When applied in the context of entrepreneurship, learning consists of two components. These are 1) learning how to recognize and act upon opportunities, and 2) learning how to overcome traditional obstacles when organizing and managing new ventures, or in short handling liabilities of newness (Politis, 2005).

As discussed earlier, opportunity recognition is one's ability to discover and develop business opportunities. This component is often considered to be amongst the most important abilities of a successful entrepreneur (Politis, 2005). The second aspect of entrepreneurial knowledge that Politis (2005) describes is coping with the liabilities of newness. The liability of newness can be described as the different risks of dying of an organization during its life time. It can be assumed that young organizations have higher risks of failure compared to old ones. Previous entrepreneurial experience gives entrepreneurs the opportunity to increase their ability to cope with these liabilities of newness, and learn new knowledge that can be used in setting up other businesses. The previous experience of an entrepreneur is expected to have brought more financial facilities, a larger social network and a business reputation. This all provides them with the ability to enter into new markets, products or technologies with greater success.

In short, within this approach of entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial knowledge, which is the key outcome of the learning process consists of 1). Opportunity recognition and 2). Coping with the liabilities of newness. The entrepreneurs' career experiences, which is the starting point of entrepreneurial learning, consists of 1). Start-up experience, 2). Management experience and 3). Industry-specific experience.

What is missing is the process through which individuals acquire and transform their information and knowledge, also known as **the transformation process of entrepreneurial learning**. It is important to acknowledge that that prior experience is not sufficient for entrepreneurial learning to happen, but require that something must be done with it. The transformation process converts prior career experiences into entrepreneurial learning. Shane (2000) explains that people recognize different opportunities due to **knowledge asymmetries**. These knowledge asymmetries have come about by differences in learning or transforming. (Corbett, 2005).

As stated before, entrepreneurial learning is often described as a continuous process that facilitates the development of necessary knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures' (Politis, 2005). Entrepreneurs learn through doing and reflection, including 'learning by copying, learning by experiment, learning by problem solving and opportunity taking and learning from mistakes' (Cope and Watts, 2000). Therefore, entrepreneurial learning is often explained as an experiential process. The experiential learning process has been largely examined by D.A. Kolb (1984).

**The experiential learning theory** (Kolb, 1984) provides a holistic model of the learning process. The theory is called "experiential learning" to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process. This emphasis distinguishes the experiential learning theory from other learning theories. Kolb defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". Kolb explains that learning comes with experience and reflection. The creation of knowledge is the result of grasping and transforming experience. Initially, new knowledge is created when information is first perceived through the apprehension of a concrete experience or through the comprehension of an abstract conceptualization. After the information is perceived, the model discusses the way an experiment is transformed or processed. A distinction is being made between reflective observation and active experimentation.

There is certainly a choice in the way an experience is transformed. This depends on personal preference as well as the context and content of what is being experienced. Some tend to transform via extension, which means they learn through actively testing their ideas and experiences. Others prefer transforming experiences through intention, where they internally reflect upon the different attributes of their experiences and ideas. The same can be said about grasping experience, some prefer to make a symbolic representation of the experience while others purely rely on their own senses. In his paper on the experiential learning cycle, Kolb et al. (2001) thoroughly describes four different basic learning styles that all have their own characteristics. Although Kolb states that individuals learn best when they make use of all four forms of learning (reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active

experimentation and concrete experience), he also suggests that individuals have a preference for one or more of the earlier mentioned learning styles.

**The learning style** that an individual show in a certain situation is a great indicator of a personal trait, as it suggests that individuals have a preference for one over the other (Corbett, 2005). The experiential learning process can provide a way of explaining why these learning styles result in different opportunity recognition and exploitation abilities. Consequently, Corbett proposes that individuals will perform better during different parts of the entrepreneurial process given their preferred learning style. With this in mind, Corbett emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurial team building with learning. Setting up teams by giving members specific roles that match with their learning style could provide optimal results. It is clear that Corbett connects the theory of experiential learning to entrepreneurial activity.

To conclude his conceptual framework, Politis (2005) describes three aspects that can be important to consider in order to understand the entrepreneurs' predominant mode of transforming an experience into new entrepreneurial knowledge. The first aspect is the outcome of previous entrepreneurial events. Politis proposes that the outcome of previous events influences the way of transforming experience into knowledge. He proposes that a higher degree of past entrepreneurial failures lead to a higher degree of an explorative mode of transforming experience, while having a high degree of past entrepreneurial successes often leads to a higher degree of an exploitative mode of transforming an experience into knowledge. Secondly, predominant logic or reasoning influence the transformation process. Two types of predominant reasoning are distinguished; causation and effectuation. Causal reasoning is based on exploiting existing and latent markets, while effectual reasoning on the other hand is about creating new markets that do not already exist. Politis proposes that reliance on effectuation as predominant reasoning connects to a higher degree of an explorative mode of transforming an experience into knowledge, while a causal reasoning connects to a higher degree of an exploitative mode. Lastly, the career orientation of an entrepreneur is expected to have an impact on the predominant mode of transforming an experience into knowledge. Here, a distinction is made between four distinctive career concepts. Entrepreneurs with a transitory or a spiral career orientation are more likely to focus on an explorative mode of transforming while those with a linear or an expert career orientation often prefers an exploitative mode of transforming an experience into knowledge.

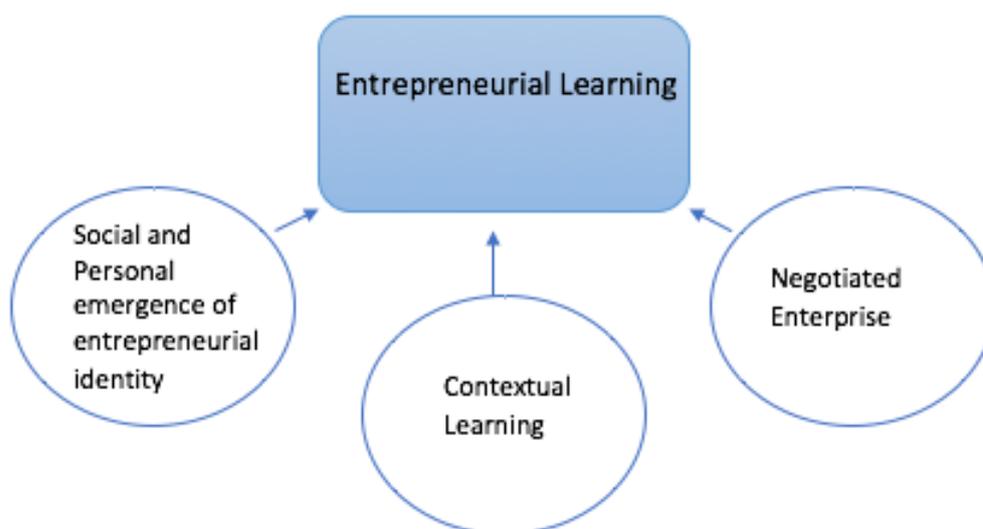
## ***Socially-situated approach on entrepreneurial learning***

In the individual-cognitive perspective, an individual's ability to discover opportunities is thus assumed to be based on prior entrepreneurial knowledge, application of experience and learning within a team-based context. There is however also a second approach which is based on a more socially situated perspective, which offers an understanding from a social and collaborative process of learning. This perspective views entrepreneurial learning as something that is embedded and influenced by the social dynamics of the entrepreneur's work-environment. This approach assumes that people learn to recognize and work on opportunities which arise from their social experiences.

Rae (2006) describes entrepreneurial learning on this more situated perspective. His paper aims to explore entrepreneurial learning as dynamic social processes of sense making, which are not only cognitive or behavioural but also effective and holistic. His main criticism on the earlier mentioned individual-cognitive approach is that it only focuses on the individual acquisitions and comprehension of knowledge. Rae believes that the biggest shortcoming in this is that it is not flexible enough because it does not hold the farmers' context into account. According to Rae, entrepreneurial learning occurs when entrepreneurs interact socially to initiate, organize and manage ventures. Therefore, the focus of his study is to explore the entrepreneurial learning process in the 'lifeworld' of the entrepreneur, by examining their social and contextual environment and interactions. So, in this approach, the focus is on the learning that occurs from interacting with the business environment rather than purely educational practice.

Although this particular study focusses on technology-based enterprises, it is still very relevant because it also focuses on the context of emerging entrepreneurship. Again, the framework for analysing entrepreneurial learning from this perspective is shown first, after which each aspect gets further explained.

### Socially-Situated approach to Entrepreneurial Learning based on Rae (2006)



In his paper, Rae (2006) describes three major themes that influence entrepreneurial learning; 1) personal and social emergence of entrepreneurial identity, 2) contextual

learning and 3) the negotiated enterprise. These themes will be concisely summarized below, because later on they will be connected to the farmers' entrepreneurial learning in the context of agribusiness.

The first theme is the **personal and social emergence of entrepreneurial identity**. This theme refers to the idea that developing an entrepreneurial identity is a key aspect of becoming an entrepreneur. Being an entrepreneur is not just about acquiring entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. Emerging entrepreneurs have to reconsider their personal and social identities that express who they are, who they want to be and how they prefer to be recognised within their social context. Social and personal emergence is an inherent aspect of becoming an entrepreneur and involves both social and cognitive learning.

The second aspect Rae described is **contextual learning**. Contextual learning includes social participation in community, industry and other related networks through which individual experiences are related and compared, and shared meaning is constructed. The context which an entrepreneur is involved in highly influences how entrepreneurial learning takes place, and how it is used. Entrepreneurship is not something that can just be learned from books. However, by being active within industry and social networks people can identify and act upon business opportunities.

The third and final theme is **the negotiated enterprise**. This refers to the negotiated relationships that entrepreneurs have with actors in the work-environment and the learning which emerges from these. The notion of the negotiated enterprise is that a business venture is not enacted by one person alone, but is dependent on the outcome of negotiated relationships with other parties. It is therefore necessary for the entrepreneur to create and communicate a shared belief in the reality of the venture, and it should be seen as a project of shared significance in which people learn to work together. Especially in an agricultural business, which is often a family-business the negotiated enterprise is highly important. However, this will be addressed later on in this paper.

Although the second and third aspect might seem a bit similar, there is definitely a difference. Contextual learning is really about the interaction that an individual has with its context, and this context governs what is learned as people become entrepreneurs, how this learning takes place and how it is used. Negotiated enterprise is more about the enaction and growth of the business as a result of the negotiated relationships with actors in the work-environment. In contextual learning, learning is constructed through social relationships and with negotiated enterprise learning emerges from interactive processes of exchange with others within and around the enterprise.

These three themes form the basis of Rae's framework that is based on social constructs. Furthermore, Rae (2000) emphasises that entrepreneurial learning processes may be present in different forms depending on the context that an entrepreneur acts in. Later on in this paper, this approach as well as the individual-cognitive approach on entrepreneurial learning will be used in assessing the role entrepreneurial learning plays in agriculture

## 2. What is farmers' entrepreneurial learning (EL) in the context of agribusiness?

Both approaches to entrepreneurial learning described in the previous chapter are quite theoretical, and therefore they are not yet applicable to the agricultural sector. A distinction is made between an individual-cognitive perspective and a situated perspective, but it is not applied on a specific domain of interest. In contradiction to the large amount of available papers on entrepreneurial learning, relatively little is known or written about the application of the concept in the context of agribusiness (Fitz-Koch et al., 2018). In fact, the literature review shows that mainstream entrepreneurship research has largely overlooked the agricultural sector (Fitz-Koch et al., 2018). Besides that, most literature regarding agricultural entrepreneurship is about the entrepreneurial skills required instead of the learning process that is involved (Seuneke et al., 2013). The underlying learning process leading to the development of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge has hardly been explored. Therefore, it is crucial to better understand entrepreneurial learning in agribusiness by examining the role entrepreneurship plays in agribusiness, using the literature that is available. After this, the possible motives and drivers for entrepreneurial learning from the farmers' perspective can be explained.

It is widely acknowledged that next to sound craftsmanship and management, **farmers increasingly need entrepreneurship** to survive in modern agriculture (Seuneke et al., 2013). But why is this the case? Studying papers that focus on entrepreneurship in agriculture provides us with some relevant information. It is clear that agriculture in general has undergone a shift in how it is viewed. Agriculture was usually seen as a slow and low-tech industry, operated primarily by **family firms** in a market **heavily regulated and financially supported** (Green et al. 2008). This is probably one of the reasons as to why there is such limited literature available on entrepreneurship in agribusiness. Today however, agriculture is among the world's largest sectors, accounting for 3% of GDP and employing millions of people (FAO, 2016). The sector is now typified both by the persistence of owner-operated farms and by strategically sophisticated approaches to markets and supply-chain relationships that are increasingly adopted by farmers (McElwee & Bosworth, 2010). The sector has been revolutionized because of improved engineering knowledge and a significant application of high technology. These developments are due to an increased pursuit of entrepreneurial activities. On the contrary, farmers often still need to operate in a tightly constrained and regulated, complex and multi-faced environment. This can act as a significant barrier to entrepreneurial activity (McElwee et al., 2006).

Existing studies on entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector focus mostly on the ability of farmers to create new opportunities, organized either as new business ventures or as part of the existing business entity (Bryden et al., 1992). For farmers, the main goal of new entrepreneurial activity is to remain and grow the business. However, for some farmers entrepreneurship represents one of the few available routes to economic survival and retaining their farm-based livelihood. Farmers often need to develop an entrepreneurial orientation in order to remain competitive in a market that is being overtaken by modern owner-operated businesses. So, for some farmers carrying out entrepreneurial activity is need oriented, while for other farmers

entrepreneurship is idea and growth oriented. For these farmers, entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for business development (Fitz-Koch, 2018).

Irrespective of what incentive there is for entrepreneurship, it is generally important for a farmer not to rely on just one core activity as form of income. This is one of the main reasons why **diversification** takes place. Several sources of income generally means an increase in gross income which is important especially during non-growing seasons because it generates the cash-flow needed to pay continuing fixed costs (Barbeiri and Mshenga, 2008). Apart from enhanced income and profit maximization, other reasons for farmers to participate in entrepreneurial activities can be greater opportunities to contribute to the community, (McGehee et al. 2007) and managing rural isolation (Vik & McElwee, 2011). Interestingly, it was shown that in farm households that rely on income from multiple sources, farm women in most cases have the responsibility for diversification activities (Dias et al. 2019).

A distinctive aspect that agriculture has in comparison to other sectors is the high degree of **emotional attachment** of the farmer/entrepreneur to the farm. Farms are often family businesses employed by several generations that all looked after the land carefully. Keeping the name on the land is another important aspect of the family farm. Because of this attachment, selling or losing the farm would imply a loss of identity and a sense of failure and shame among many entrepreneurs (Cassel & Petterson, 2015). Because of this, retaining ownership and avoiding an exit from business may be a prime driver of entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector.

Agricultural diversification is not necessarily something that has arisen in recent years. In fact, researchers argue that farmers trying to maximize profits by developing different types of agricultural diversification has always been a distinctive feature of the agricultural sector (Vesala et al., 2007). However, it can be concluded that there has been an increase in the number of farmers trying to exploit new opportunities. Furthermore, many new entrepreneurial activities have been discovered in recent years.

A distinction can be made between **on-farm and off-farm diversification** (Vik and McElwee, 2011). Any activity as part of the existing farm based business entity counts as on-farm diversification. Examples of on-farm diversification are farmers growing a new type of crop or by adding value to agricultural products through processing and packaging. These examples are on-farm and farm-related, but there are also non-farming businesses that are still on-farm. Especially agri-tourism is an emerging sector (McGehee & Kim, 2004). Agri-tourism is often started from social or cultural motivations, sharing the rural experience with outsiders for example, providing farmers with opportunity to socialize and meet new people. Others try agri-tourism because it's an interest/hobby or satisfaction (McElwee & Kim, 2004). Although it is thus primary socially or culturally motivated, numerous examples are known where agri-tourism businesses became more profitable taking over as the primary source of income (Busby & Rendle, 2000). Agri-tourism can for instance consist of on-farm accommodations for tourists, tours, guides or a restaurant that serves local food coming from the farm. In line with earlier suggestions, women showed to be more motivated to develop agri-tourism as a source of entrepreneurial enterprise than their male-counterpart (Hoppe & Korb, 2013).

Off-farm diversification on the other hand, are all new business ventures outside of farming. Here, one can think of farmers that serve other farmers, for example by machine contracting, construction work and consulting services. Simply put, off-farm employment is about taking jobs while on-farm activities or new venture creation is about creating jobs. With off-farm diversification, one could say that the farmer shifts from a full-time farmer to for example a part-time farmer. New venture creation is considered to play a big role in agricultural entrepreneurship. However, **farmers often do not possess the right entrepreneurial skills, networks or capabilities** in order to develop the new business in the best way possible. To succeed in business, a farmer needs professional and management skills, strategic, opportunity and co-operation/networking skills. The development of these new businesses asks for new entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. Entrepreneurial learning is required to develop these new skills and knowledge.

After an extensive literature search on entrepreneurship in agriculture, Fitz-Koch et al. (2018) found three main themes for understanding why, when, and how individuals identify and exploit opportunities in an agricultural context. The themes that were defined based on the article are identity, family and institutions. These themes play an important role in agriculture, which will later be explained. Highlighting the unique roles of the three themes in influencing agricultural entrepreneurship helps us describing the process of entrepreneurial learning in agriculture.

In the upcoming chapters, we will connect these three themes to both approaches on entrepreneurial learning. Each main question is supported by one sub-question explaining the particular theme. Consequently, it is shown how these contextual dimensions influence the process of entrepreneurial learning. So, this section talks about links that we are familiar with, or that are made through logical reasoning. At last, each theme ends with a paragraph that discusses the knowledge gaps that still exist, and how future research could improve our understanding of entrepreneurial learning further. As said before, there is still not much literature available on entrepreneurial learning in the agricultural sector and these paragraphs could act as a starting point for future research.

### 3. Identity and entrepreneurial learning in agriculture.

#### *What is the farmers' identity?*

In this research, Identity involves examining how individuals, in this case farmers, see and understand themselves as entrepreneurs. Within this paper, identity is concerned with the values and attitudes that underpin motivations, goals and intentions with engaging in entrepreneurship (Fitz-Koch, 2017). Exploring these themes is relevant for researching entrepreneurial learning in the context of agribusiness, because identity helps us understanding the entrepreneurial decisions that farmers make. However, to analyse what relationship there is between the identity of the farmer and the extent to which entrepreneurial learning takes place, it is good to give a general description of the farmers identity first. Identity is central to meaning, motivation, decision-making and other activities that can be seen as critical for entrepreneurial action. The identity and self-concept of a farmer includes physical, psychological and social attributes that are influenced by an individual's attitudes, values, motives and goals. This sub-question will address those aspects that build a farmer's identity.

Farming cannot be seen as any other job. To most farmers, farming is a way of life with a deeper meaning than simply a form of employment (Groth & Curtis, 2017). Most farms are family businesses that have been passed on for many generations and a farmer's identity is often formed through growing up on the land (Fitz-Koch, 2018). This identity provides farmers with a sense of who they are, giving meaning to their life and a sense of belonging. Farming is a sustainable type of business that cares about a healthy continuation of the firm rather than just maximizing profits possibly at the expense of future prospects. The next chapter will discuss the family aspect in entrepreneurial learning more extensively, but it is important to acknowledge that this aspect largely influences the farmer's identity as well. Because of the great attachment to their occupation, many farmers show an **occupational identity** (Groth & Curtis, 2017). This refers to a conscious awareness of oneself as a worker. The occupational identity is created from working within a particular occupation, and farmers can become extremely attached to their occupation. Researchers have also demonstrated that occupational identity influences land and water management (Groth & Curtis, 2017). Similarly, Burton (2004) argues that identity is constructed by the specific social context unique to the agricultural sector. Therefore, identity is built through everyday practices of farmers. For a farmer, how well the business is managed, how the fields are cultivated, or how productive the crops are, are all crucial factors because it gives status and confirms identity in relation to other farmers.

A farmer's occupational identity is typically influenced by the type of farm he or she possesses. It is clear that a multifunctional farmer has a different identity than a more traditional farmer. Traditionally, a farmer's identity is associated with two aspects; **stewardship and kinship** (Fitz-Koch et al., 2018). Stewardship is the ethic of responsible planning and management of resources, so taking good care of the land. Kinship is about keeping the family name on the land. This traditional identity is reflected in the types of opportunities that a farmer pursues. Furthermore, these two aspects suggest that it is difficult to shift out of agriculture into other sectors. Farmers are emotionally attached to their farm and rural community, and prefer to develop

new business based on farm resources and capabilities (Alsos et al. 2014). Therefore, selling or losing the farm would not only imply a loss of identity, it often involves a sense of failure and shame amongst many agricultural entrepreneurs (Cassel and Petterson, 2015).

According to Wilson (2006) the traditional farmer is an agricultural producer, also known as the conservative productivist. This is the most common type of farmer. The agricultural producer is one of four **types of farmers** that Wilson (2006) categorized. The other farmer types he derived are agribusiness person, conservationist and diversifier. The category that relates to a particular farmer provides information about the identity of the farmer. Therefore, it is useful to explore the three remaining themes further. The agribusiness person is someone who in fact is dominated by the profit motive. This type of farmer is quite the opposite of the “family farmer”. Next, the conservationist focuses on environmental and life-style concerns. The fourth type of farmer is the diversifier, who focuses more on non-agricultural sources of income instead of agricultural production. An alternative study made a distinction between modifiers, who defined themselves as farmers, and switchers, who defined themselves as tourism entrepreneurs (Di Domenico and Miller, 2012).

Some farmers only see themselves as farmer (agricultural producer) or as entrepreneur (diversifier). So, they maintain a singular main identity. Other farmers exhibit multiple identities to varying degrees (McElwee 2008). A farmer who is of one type may also show characteristics that belong another type (Burton & Wilson, 2006). It should be acknowledged that the defined types of farmers can show overlap. It is said that agricultural portfolio entrepreneurs, so farmers that have different sources of income, tend to have a stronger and more advanced identity compared to traditional production-oriented farmers (Vesala et al. 2007). Identity is crucial for understanding the social context of entrepreneurship in this sector, as new business activities are often triggered by the identity, values and goals of the farmers (Niska et al. 2012).

The type of farmer is not the only relevant aspect that forms a farmer’s identity. Other identities have also been considered in literature, such as an optimistic or pessimistic attitude or the preference of technology over traditional living or vice versa. One’s identity is built upon many aspects (Sulemana & Harvey, 2014).

Finally, the **motives and goals** that farmers have to start entrepreneurial activities can also tell us something about their identity. Entrepreneurial activities are an expression of an individual’s identity or self-concept. It is interesting to see when and in what situations people’s identities or self-concepts will motivate them to take action towards their goals. In general, most agricultural entrepreneurial activities other than the original business is aimed at generating more income or profit maximization (Little et al. 2001). Another antecedent for entrepreneurship is the opportunity to have a greater contribution to the community (McGehee et al. 2007). Furthermore, entrepreneurship is often seen as a social process to break the rural isolation that the farmer is in by meeting new people (Vik & McElwee, 2011). Another research showed that self-actualization and intrinsic motivation may propel agriculture entrepreneurs to seek opportunities for personal achievement and farm survival, which confirm a sense of who they are (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012). Notice that entrepreneurship in agriculture is not solely done for economic purposes, but often there are socio-cultural and emotional reasons involved. Especially off-farm income can contribute to a changed perspective of farm life from one that is focused on work

to one with an end goal of personal satisfaction (Sutherland 2012). Earlier it was discussed that off-farm diversification brings a shift from full-time farming to for example part-time farming. This could also cause a change in the farmer's identity, because a farmer is likely to develop a different self-image or personality.

### ***How does Identity influence entrepreneurial learning?***

#### *Entrepreneurial identity.*

Many farmers identify themselves as entrepreneurs (Seuneke et al., 2013). Farmers have a certain entrepreneurial identity that include a set of skills that were primarily derived from their traditional farming activities. However, earlier it was stated that farmers are increasingly developing new ventures or projects other than the farming activities itself. This asks for a somewhat revised entrepreneurial identity. This is where entrepreneurial learning comes in place. Going back to Rae's (2006) framework, the first stage of entrepreneurial learning consists of the individual's personal and social emergence which is the farmer learning about oneself. This informs the development and testing of entrepreneurial identity (Donnellon et al). It was examined that farmers can act entrepreneurially and develop new skills and competencies through practice and education, building an entrepreneurial identity to survive and grow. It is especially in this individual dimension that entrepreneurial learning takes place. However, the other two aspects of Rae's model also correlate to the farmers' identity. After developing an individual entrepreneurial identity, contextual learning and negotiated enterprise continue to the development of identity, but expands by including the story of the firm, not just of the entrepreneur (Donnellon et al. 2014). Many scholars like Rae (2006) find that entrepreneurial learning leads to consideration of 'who I want to be' and construction of an identity that enacts this aspiration. Developing an entrepreneurial identity does not only involve internal self-reflection, but also social engagement. Therefore, Rae's approach to entrepreneurial learning teaches us that the farmer shapes his entrepreneurial identity not only from an individual level but also by the environment and firm that he/she operates in.

#### *Farmers' multifunctional work.*

With diversification, the farmer shifts from a productivist role to more multifunctional ways of farming (Seuneke et al. 2013). This requires new entrepreneurial skills, network capabilities and market knowledge that is necessary to support the new venture creation and development. Especially in starting non-farming businesses, lack of these entrepreneurial resources can hinder the success of this diversification. Therefore, to become multifunctional, farmers must re-define entrepreneurship and develop self-conceptualisations that are more compatible with their new role in agriculture (Seuneke et al. 2013). The article of Seuneke et al. (2013) argues that because farmers already possess some form of entrepreneurial identity, this identity just needs to be re-developed instead of it being totally developed from scratch. In

other words, the personal and social identities that express the farmer and how he/she wants to be recognized have to be revised. Because of the fact that farm women are often less deeply rooted in agriculture, they were examined to more ready to re-develop their entrepreneurial identities than men were (Seuneke & Bock, 2015).

### *Career experiences.*

The process of entrepreneurial learning creates a change in the identity of the farmer. Recall that Politis (2007) described the development of (new) entrepreneurial knowledge as the result of the entrepreneurs' career experiences and the transformation process. The entrepreneurs' career experiences, that are rooted into the "original identity" form the basis of the new entrepreneurial knowledge. Furthermore, studies show that farmers develop their new or revised identities slowly through periods of explorative and experiential learning. This connects to the transformation process that Politis (2007) describes as well. This all leads to new entrepreneurial knowledge, which is integrated into the changed identity of the farmer. The farmer develops an entrepreneurship-related self-identity. The new identity is influenced by the entrepreneurial learning process.

Farmers with a traditional family-business are likely to have a lot of relevant industry-specific experience. However, these family farmers might lack knowledge in terms of management and start-up experience. Vice versa, entrepreneurs that come from another sector for example, are more likely to possess management and start-up experience to a high degree but might lack relevant industry-specific knowledge. Knowledge and skills are both aspects of the identity of an individual, as it shapes how someone portrays her- or himself. Politis (2007) proposes that individuals with prior start-up experience possess tacit knowledge that facilitates decision-making in entrepreneurial opportunities under uncertainty and time pressure. Previous start-up experience is considered to provide knowledge that helps an entrepreneur to overcome the liabilities of newness that new ventures face. The same can in fact be said about prior management experience; this provides the entrepreneurs training in many of the skills needed for coping with the liabilities of newness (Shane, 2003). Especially in setting up non-farming activities, differences in career experience and the type of firm largely influences how entrepreneurial learning that takes place.

### ***Limitations and future research on identity dimension.***

There is still a lot of unclarity in the literature about the relationship between the identity of a farmer and the way in which entrepreneurial learning takes place. There is certainly a research gap due to the limited literature that is available on entrepreneurial learning in agriculture. Further research could be very valuable to discover the links that might exist between entrepreneurial learning and the farmers' identity that we are not yet familiar with. This is relevant because if farmers would have more knowledge about how their identity is shaped, a stronger entrepreneurial environment could potentially be created.

One of the aspects where our knowledge falls short in are the **changes in entrepreneurial identity** and its effects on entrepreneurial learning (Zamani & Mohammadi, 2017). Entrepreneurs, also in the domain of agriculture, take on many identities during their entrepreneurship journey. However, we still know little about how and why entrepreneurial identity changes over time. Therefore, it is worthy of further investigation.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship educators might develop a better understanding of **entrepreneurial learning transfer** by examining the process by which related perceptions and skills translate to an entrepreneurial identity. This process is not yet fully explored within available research.

Another relevant topic that has not yet been examined is **how different types of farmers experience entrepreneurial learning differently**. Earlier we discussed the four different types of farmers that were developed by Wilson (2006), however it is not known whether these different farmers experience entrepreneurial learning differently. Do they tend to develop their entrepreneurial competences from personal experiences, or by interacting with their environment? Or possibly through a combination of both? Researching this knowledge gap is relevant because it could potentially help finding what identity traits have impact on the extent to which farmers recognize and act upon opportunities.

Politis (2005) presented entrepreneurial learning as an experiential process where the personal experience of an entrepreneur is transformed into knowledge, which in turn can be used to guide the choice of new experiences. The entrepreneurs' career experiences, consisting of start-up experience, management experience and industry-specific can be seen as being part of the entrepreneur's identity because it shapes how the farmer characterizes herself or himself. Especially with the prior notion of the occupational identity of the farmer, this is a logical rationale. The entrepreneurs' career experience component that Politis (2005) describes in his framework on entrepreneurial learning explains why certain entrepreneurs are more successful than others. The career experiences that an entrepreneur possesses is expected to have an impact on entrepreneurs' learning in terms of developing their effectiveness in opportunity recognition and in coping with the liabilities of newness (Politis, 2005). **Highlighting the differences in identity may help explaining how the process of entrepreneurial learning between farmer's takes place differently**. Why are some able to develop an entrepreneurial identity and others not? Again, this is important to assess what personality traits, potentially derived from

previous experiences, prove to have impact in the acquisition and development of the propensity, skills and abilities to discover and to grow a venture.

In conclusion, further research in the agricultural sector can contribute with knowledge about how and why identity plays a significant role as a driver of entrepreneurial activities both because of its motivational effect and by way of its interplay with social identity

## 4. Family and entrepreneurial learning in agriculture.

### *What is the farmers' family?*

Often described as the dominant form of organization in the world (Miller et al. 2007), family businesses have received increasing attention in the management literature during the last 20 years. Especially in the agricultural sector, family businesses are very common. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2014 more than 90% of farms were run by an individual or family and they produce about 80% of world's food. Thus, almost all farms are family-owned and often family-operated businesses. Many farms have been family businesses for a long time, and the involvement of several generations rooted in the family and household context is common (Fitz-Koch, 2018).

Family business management literature suggests that businesses with strong connections to the owners' family distinguish themselves from other types of businesses and that the influence of the family needs to be explicitly understood and studied (Sharma et al., 2001). As stated before, **family businesses are less concerned with financial goals than non-family businesses**. Family considerations and agendas are likely to drive the development of the farm business. However, this does not mean that diversification does not take place in a family firm. It often takes place for example with the goal of creating a more stable income or to fulfil unsatisfied needs of family members with regards to employment (Hansson et al. 2013). Fitz-Koch (2018) therefore suggests that **entrepreneurial activity in agriculture is influenced not only by the business life cycle but also by the family life cycle**. Farmers engaged in entrepreneurial activities tend to prefer their own resource base instead of losing control through external venture funding (Hansson et al. 2013). This proves that family composition and involvement in the firm can be an important incentive for entrepreneurship.

One distinctive aspect of a family business is the **focus on succession**. This is especially the case in agricultural firms, where several generations are often firmly rooted in the family and household context (Fitz-Koch, 2018). There is a large desire to preserve the farm for their children. Passing on the business to the next generation is more common in the agricultural sector than it is in any other sector. Succession influences farm household decision making to the point that future succession is prioritized over immediate financial success (Ilbery et al. 1996). Because family businesses represent a significant part of the world economy (Sharma et al. 2001), succession is not only an important issue for the individual firm but also for the economy worldwide (Hamilton, 2011).

**The farm woman** often has a distinctive role within the family dimension. In agriculture, even today, most European farms are formally held by men. Besides, the management of productions is also generally seen as a male domain (Seuneke and Bock, 2018). This leads to woman being more actively involved in the process of switching towards multifunctionality, especially in establishing non-farming business activities like agro-tourism (Seuneke and Bock, 2015).

As stated before, farming is not just a regular job. Farming is often seen as a way of life, and the farm represents a symbol of the legacy of the family. Farmers operating on a family farm often have a **high degree of emotional attachment to the farm**.

Other issues that have been identified as especially relevant to small and particularly family-owned businesses are working long hours, operating on a shoestring budget and the risk of failure (Cano-Rubio et al. 2017).

### ***How does family influence entrepreneurial learning?***

#### *Community of practice*

Hamilton (2011) is one of few researchers that explored entrepreneurial learning in the context of family business. Because family businesses are common phenomena in agriculture, it is very relevant to assess how the farmers' family influences the entrepreneurial learning process. Hamilton demonstrates that entrepreneurial learning is embedded particularly in social and historical contexts. This socially situated perspective of entrepreneurial learning that she describes is built upon three principles; communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation of practice, and cycles of reproduction and transformation (Hamilton, 2011). Hamilton (2011) rightfully views the family firm as a community of practice, a group of people that share a profession or craft. This community of practice is established by the founding generations of the farm in which the succeeding generation engage and participate. Legitimate peripheral of practice is about the examination of the relationship between members of a community of practice in one generation being joined by others from the next generation. This is concerned with the process by which newcomers become part of the community of practice through involvement in social practices which stimulates (entrepreneurial) learning. At the point of succession, this paper focuses on the participation of the two generations. So, within a community of practice, the dynamic of entrepreneurial learning is cyclical, generational and is acquired through participation in overlapping communities of practice.

#### *Reproduction and transformation of the farm.*

The family and business can thus be conceptualised as overlapping communities of practice that are engaging in a "generative process of producing their own future" that implies continuity and enduring practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, the business needs to be transformed and reproduced as it moves from one social, historical, technological or cultural context to another. Cycles of reproduction and transformation are vital for the survival of a family business because it reconstitutes itself as a community of practice in the next generation. Here, entrepreneurial learning is seen as a crucial part of the process of succession. Hamilton (2011) argues that the social dynamic of a community in practice, its power relations and conditions of legitimacy define the possibilities for entrepreneurial learning through participation. Entrepreneurial learning is an important factor in reproducing and continuing the family business as it shifts from the hands of one generation to the next, making it very dynamic. Farms do certainly not remain static after succession; new generations are likely to modernize business practices and pursue new opportunities to adapt to a changing environment. This is however not always

appreciated by older generations of the family. New generations with new entrepreneurial ideas may clash with their family resource availability and/or with community value and expectations (Dentoni, 2019). It could be said that the legacy of the farm, which is formed through traditions, norms and values can both hinder and facilitate entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning (Jaskiewicz et al. 2015).

The notion about the community of practice brings an understanding in how, in the transition between generations, practices are both reproduced and transformed. Bringing this aspect back to the two approaches on entrepreneurial learning, it can be noticed that the transformation of practices fit into Politis' theory of entrepreneurial learning based on Kolb's experiential learning theory. However, Hamilton (2011) argues that entrepreneurial learning is socially acquired, rather than individually acquired. Therefore, it suits the intuition of David Rae (2006) who explores entrepreneurial learning as social dynamic processes of sensemaking. Remember that his notion on contextual learning argues that the entrepreneur's context influences how entrepreneurial learning takes place, and how it is used. Situated experiences and social relationships may support the development of the farmers' ability to recognize and act upon opportunities. Besides this, translating practices from other business fields, or communities of practice, brings innovation (Hamilton, 2011). Here you see that entrepreneurial learning is formed through the social, environmental and economic context in which it takes place, which again is in favour of the socially-situated approach. So, the role family plays in entrepreneurial learning can be connected to Politis (2005), but even more so to Rae's (2006) intuition.

### *Opening up the family farm.*

Next to his concept of contextual learning, Rae (2006) described another concept that connects to both the family farm and entrepreneurial learning. His concept of the negotiated enterprise refers to the negotiated relationships that entrepreneurs have with actors in the environment, and the learning which emerges from these relationships. The negotiated enterprise was transformed by Seuneke et al. (2018) to the broader concept of opening up the family farm. The concept of opening up the family farm focuses on the relationship between the farmer's entrepreneurial learning and the new organizational dynamics created by the introduction of external labour. Often, the introduction of external workers to the farm is considered a key moment and the new dynamics created by this are ought to be of significant importance. Opening up the family firm stimulates entrepreneurial learning and the development of the farm as a whole because it makes the organization more complex and increasingly heterogeneous. The new entrants introduce new skills, experiences, knowledge, networks and viewpoints to the farm (Seuneke et al. 2018). This stimulates farmers to consider new perspectives, and therefore opening up the family farm is a significant incentive for entrepreneurial learning to occur.

At last, the farm women's also play a distinctive role in the process of entrepreneurial learning. Because of their involvement in new on-farm business activities, the agricultural identity is not only being re-developed, but they also provide access to new networks and learning environments (Seuneke and Bock, 2015). This is crucial in developing necessary knowledge, which is part of the entrepreneurial learning process, and it contributes to effective multifunctional entrepreneurship.

### ***Limitations and future research on family dimension.***

Again, researching the family aspect in relationship to the process of entrepreneurial learning, shows that there are still some major knowledge gaps in literature. Our knowledge is still very limited about entrepreneurial learning in the domain of agriculture, let alone about the role of the agricultural family. Still it is very relevant to further examine how entrepreneurial learning might be understood in the context of agricultural family business, because these insights could potentially influence or improve entrepreneurial activities in agriculture. Most agricultural businesses are owned and operated by families, so a family perspective on entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector has potential to contribute to the mainstream entrepreneurship field (Fitz-Koch, 2018). Furthermore, agricultural entrepreneurship research that takes the family dimension into account can also contribute to entrepreneurship literature in other areas. For example, the agricultural sector is an appropriate context for studying how family and household factors affect entrepreneurship, or how entrepreneurial activities influence the family or a household (Fitz-Koch, 2018).

The current, and very limited literature that is available on entrepreneurial learning in family business provides us with some valuable insights. However, these insights are **unlikely to be generalizable** to a particular population. For example, the article of Hamilton (2011) is intended to offer empirical insights to expand the theoretical frameworks in order to better understand the entrepreneurial phenomenon, not to be generalised to a population. **Further research could examine how entrepreneurial learning takes place in different family businesses by making comparisons.** One can imagine that a farmer in Germany for example is likely to have a different family composition with different priorities than a farmer in Egypt. This consequently influences the degree in which knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures is being developed. Future research may place more emphasis on **theory building in more specific areas and contexts**, to make the theory more applicable.

Current research has largely overlooked the **role of risk-aversion** in entrepreneurial learning. Entrepreneurial learning involves engagement in entrepreneurial activity, and this often comes with risk. This brings an interesting difference in **family businesses compared to non-family businesses**. Agri-entrepreneurs' family roots can turn them more risk-averse than other type of entrepreneurs as a consequence of their change resistance and their fear of losing the family wealth (Naldi et al. 2007). Earlier it was stated that that retaining ownership and avoiding an exit from the business are prime drivers of entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector. This is contrary to other sectors, where exit is often considered the natural final stage of the process. Succession influences farm household decision making to the point that future succession is prioritized over immediate financial success (Ilbery et al. 1996). Although it is a controversial statement, Naldi et al (2007) argue that family firms indeed take less risk than non-family firms. This hypothesis is supported by the prove that if family firms take risks while engaged in entrepreneurial activities, they take risk to a lesser extent than nonfamily firms (Naldi et al. 2007). Because of their attitude towards an exit, it is reasonable to support the assumption that farmers are relatively risk averse. Risk-averse farmers might prefer to continue business by using the same

practices and staying in the same environment which means that their knowledge based on experiences does really evolve. **Communities of practice may become 'static' in their knowledge base and resistant to change** (Roberts, 2006).

However, it should be acknowledged that risk aversion is a relative concept and measure which is likely to be context and circumstance specific. Still, it makes sense to propose that in a family firm entrepreneurial learning takes place, but only to a certain extent. A risk-averse attitude could inhibit entrepreneurial learning to take place, or at least causing it to take place to a limited extent, simply because the entrepreneur has less relevant career experience, and there is no real need to learn new skills. Following the framework of Politis (2005), in this case the farmers' insufficient career experiences and knowledge means that the transformation process of entrepreneurial learning does not take place to a sufficient extent. To prove this, further research into the relationship between farmers' identity and attitudes towards risk and to what extent this influences the entrepreneurial learning process is required.

The fact that family **farmers have a strong desire to preserve the farm for their children can either have a positive or negative effect on entrepreneurship**. On the one hand, it could constrain entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector. Farmers can be quite conservative when it comes to their business practices, and especially when things are going well, and the same practices have been working for several generations they might not see any reason for establishing entrepreneurial activities. This is opposite to Hamilton's view, but it could be a credible scenario. Continuously sticking to the same practices and habits could take away the occurrence of entrepreneurial learning.

On the other hand, it could also become a key driver for pursuing business activities to create employment for family members in order to keep the family on the farm (McGehee & Kim, 2004). Employment for family members is in fact one of the main motivations for exploiting agri-tourism (McGehee & Kim, 2004). It was already discussed that new businesses, especially non-farming businesses ask for new entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. Therefore, entrepreneurial learning that leads to the development of these new skills and knowledge would in fact be influenced by the characteristics of a family farm. Pursuing business activities for family purposes by transforming knowledge and experiences fits into the Politis' (2005) component of entrepreneurial knowledge. Secondly, when in the process of succession newcomers join the previous generation with the aim of creating transformational change by introducing new practices, entrepreneurial learning will in fact take place. However, succession still remains a very complex process so we are still unsure about how the acquisition and development of propensity, skills and abilities to start or grow a venture exactly takes place within family farms.

## **5. Institutions and entrepreneurial learning in agriculture.**

### **What is the farmers' institutional context?**

Agriculture is one of the **most highly regulated and institutionalized sectors**. North (1991), defines institutions as the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interactions. There is a distinction between formal and informal institutions. **Formal institutions** is a multifunctional concept that includes aspects such as political, economic and legislative systems. **Informal institutions** on the other hand are about social norms, values and attitudes. As North (1991) argues, the institutional context draws on the concept of formal and informal institutions as “rules of the game,”. Both formal and informal institutions can facilitate and constrain entrepreneurial activities in the agricultural sector (de Wolf et al., 2007).

To start with the formal institutional context, a distinctive aspect that distinguishes the agricultural sector from many other sectors is the **high level of policy support** it receives. Although this support is significantly different per country, post-war agricultural policy helped transform farmers into producers reliant on price, production and income support (Morgan et al. 2010). This is quite paradoxical given the fact that farmers have a long tradition of self-reliance and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, governments can influence the crops farmers grow through regulations, subsidies and quotas. Despite the policy liberalization of recent years, agriculture remains one of the most highly regulated and institutionalized sectors (Fitz-Koch et al. 2018).

A second important aspect of the formal institutional context is **the legal environment**. Farmers have to comply to many laws and legislations that influence their activities and pursuit of entrepreneurial activities. Food and safety laws may be the most important ones for agricultural businesses as it tells a farmer to what prerequisites his agricultural products should comply. Changes in these laws are directly noticeable at the farm level. Other laws influencing agriculture are health and safety laws and consumer laws. These legal factors can affect how a company operates, the costs and the demand for products. Logically, the formal context of the agricultural sector largely influences the possibilities for entrepreneurship in agriculture. Changes in technology, political forces, and regulation can be decisive influences on the existence and occurrence of new opportunities (Shane, 2003).

The informal institutionalized context is a more complex aspect to explain. Informal institutions are socially shared rules, often unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of official channels (Urbano et al., 2017). These **social norms and values** shape the behaviour and nature of human interactions. Especially in close agricultural communities, informal institutions have quite some influence, as they often relate to tradition, norms and values that are deeply embedded within agriculture. However, informal institutions also play a role in regional, national and even international contexts.

In terms of recognizing and developing new businesses, Fitz-Koch et al. (2018) found two types of entrepreneurs that interpret their institutional environment differently. First of all, the producer-farmer develops new business according to the societal norms and values of the local community. This producer-farmer feels like business needs to be undertaken within the traditional boundaries. Alternatively, the entrepreneur-farmer seeks business growth and development regardless of social norms and the institutional environment.

### ***How do institutions influence entrepreneurial learning?***

External factors can both facilitate and constrain entrepreneurial activities (Fitz-Koch et al. 2018), which means entrepreneurial learning is also influenced by these factors. This chapter discusses the most important and relevant ways on how this happens in the agricultural sector.

#### *Formal institutions inhibiting entrepreneurial learning.*

The high level of policy support the agricultural sector receives has been found to inhibit entrepreneurship (Fitz-Koch, 2018). The underlying reason for this is that the financial support removes the need for farmers to search for new business opportunities and potentially exploit them. Although the importance of entrepreneurship is generally acknowledged by farmers, efforts to increase financial support are seen as more attractive than the pursuit of their own business opportunities (Maye et al. 2009). Because it is not that attractive to undertake entrepreneurial activities, entrepreneurial learning takes place in a far lesser degree. This can be explained from the two earlier mentioned perspectives. From an individual-cognitive approach, entrepreneurial learning is obstructed because experiential learning is very limited and existing knowledge is not exploited. From a socially-situated perspective, it is obstructed because the farmer has not enough interaction with the social and business environment. Because of this, the farmer does not develop an entrepreneurial identity nor does it learn from the environment he or she operates in.

#### *Formal institutions supporting entrepreneurial learning.*

On the other hand, there is also reason to believe that formal institutions in fact do facilitate entrepreneurship and with that stimulate entrepreneurial learning. Fuentelsaz et al. (2019) argue that formal institutions provide the framework of trust that the entrepreneur needs when starting up a business. Formal institutions are capable of facilitating the perception of business opportunities which will result in an increase in the level of entrepreneurial activity. An example of a policy influencing entrepreneurship are formal institutions that promote the investment of venture

capital (Sobel, 2008). Other facts such as the protection of property rights (Dau and Cuervo-Cazurra, 2014) also positively influence innovation and entrepreneurship.

Other studies have shown that when local agriculture is being promoted by policy makers, farmers are encouraged to start direct marketing, processing or farm-tourism activities (Vandermeulen et al. 2006). In this scenario, entrepreneurial learning is actually supported by formal institutions. Therefore, it can be concluded that formal institutions, specifically policy-makers, can both facilitate and constrain entrepreneurial learning.

The farmers who do engage in entrepreneurship have to navigate through the formal rules and regulations of the industry, and besides that they are likely to encounter pressure from informal institutions. The formal rules and regulations that a farmer must comply to in their entrepreneurial activities are country- and industry-specific. This could have impact on the degree in which entrepreneurial activities take place within the agricultural sector, however this is the case in practically all sectors.

#### *Informal institutions influencing entrepreneurial learning.*

The informal factors are however more specific to the agricultural sector. Agricultural communities often have strong societal norms and values that are deeply embedded within farming, in such a way that traditions and habits can obfuscate new business opportunities. Consequently, social peer pressure may inhibit their realization (Fitz-Koch et al. 2018). Because of this, informal institutions can also inhibit entrepreneurial learning to take place.

Informal institutions influence opportunity recognition of (potential) entrepreneurs as well as opportunity exploitation and access to resources (Welter, 2011). The social context a farmer operates in highly influences the degree to which entrepreneurship takes place. According to Rae (2006), entrepreneurs can learn from their social context. However, not all farmers experience informal or societal institutions in their daily life. A distinctive aspect of agriculture is the (sometimes lack of) social participation in community, industry and other networks. This relates to the concept of contextual learning that Rae (2006) describes within the pursuit of new entrepreneurial opportunities. He explains that through situated experience and social relationships people learn intuitively and may develop the ability to recognise opportunity. A farmer's network provides generic business advice to help identify and develop new business activities and to mobilize knowledge and other resources (Clark, 2009). Farmers learn through interactions with actors such as their partner, family, friends, staff, colleagues, entrepreneurs, customers, suppliers, government representatives and so on (Seuneke et al. 2018). However, in order to learn farmers must actively look for interactions with their social environment. If this happens, entrepreneurial learning takes place as a result of the social network of the farmer.

Although farmers' generally see the need for a community, they often experience difficulty in actually establishing one. This difficulty in establishing new networks can often be explained by the area in which the farmer is located. Farms are generally located in rural areas with less diverse business activities, which leaves farmers with fewer opportunities to network with other (agricultural) businesses (Rønning, 2011).

As a result, the area in which a farm is located can partly inhibit, or at any rate make it more difficult for a farmer to experience entrepreneurial learning.

In this case, we take the social environment as part of the informal institutions of the agricultural sector, because it sets the norms and values for entrepreneurship. Seuneke et al. (2013) converted the concept of contextual learning (Rae, 2006) to the concept of “crossing the boundaries of agriculture” to stress the importance of interaction outside of the agricultural domain especially in the development of non-farming activities. Farmers develop the knowledge and skills to start and develop new business activities, so the process of entrepreneurial learning, through social interactions in the work-environment as well as outside of the agricultural domain. Within the concept of contextual learning, women play a leading role in crossing the boundaries of the farms, connecting with new networks in new context and learning from that (Seuneke and Bock, 2015). Women were in particular able to cross the boundaries of the agricultural domain because often they could fall back on their prior experiences outside agriculture through education and employment (Seuneke and Bock, 2015). Seuneke et al. (2013) found that less experienced farmers on the other hand felt uncomfortable and incapable of connecting with and operating in non-farming environments. This influences the process of entrepreneurial learning in a negative way, because less interaction and exposure to new knowledge means less learning.

### ***Limitations and future research on institutions.***

Unsurprisingly, there are not many papers published on the role of institutions in the entrepreneurial learning process of farmers. However, by connecting available literature, some interesting findings are shared. Still, further research is required to develop a better understanding of the role both formal and informal institutions play in the entrepreneurial learning process.

The impact of formal institutions in relation to entrepreneurship has been well researched (Welter, 2011). However, there are still some knowledge gaps. It was already argued that formal institutions are country-specific. Not only do the rules and legislations differ per country, it is also likely that farmers in some countries are more reliant on formal institutions than others (Abass et al. 2018). Especially in developing countries, there is a high dependence of the smallholder farmers on formal institutions’ resources to adapt, especially for developing/ building the local capacity. This is mostly due to a lack of knowledge and limited or no access to financial resources. (Abass et al. 2018). **It can be assumed that formal institutions highly influence how the process of entrepreneurial learning takes place, and that it varies between countries**, however this assumption is in need of further examination.

Further research could also look into **how formal institutions can be changed in order to optimize opportunities for entrepreneurial learning amongst farmers**. Especially in developing countries, this process of developing necessary knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures can potentially be supported by the formal institutions helping the farms to grow and get more stable.

The informal institutions of the agricultural sector that influence entrepreneurial learning is a less examined topic in literature. Just like formal institutions, societal norms and values in developing countries are different than those in emerging economies. Besides, the societal context is harder to examine as it is not tangible. Laws and legislations are written down in official documents, whereas informal institutions are unwritten, socially shared rules. Examining their impact on entrepreneurial learning is way more complex. A good start to future research on informal institutions can be to **examine the societal context of farmers in different areas**, and trying to connect this to the degree of entrepreneurial activity or how these farmers experience the process of entrepreneurial learning. Because societal institutions are deeply embedded within agriculture, a better understanding of how these institutions impact the entrepreneurial (learning) process in agriculture is needed to broaden our understanding of entrepreneurship. Future studies should not just focus on the role of institutions themselves, but also on **how institutional forces and processes are interpreted by actors involved in the pursuit and development of new business opportunities** (Fitz-Koch et al. 2018). Earlier we described the difference between the producer-farmer who is bound to the societal context and the entrepreneur-farmer who is not. These two types obviously experience and translate the informal institutions differently and further research can show what relationship there is between the way an individual interprets the social norms and values and to what degree entrepreneurial learning takes place.

Finally, up until now formal and informal institutions have been described as two separate domains. However, the relationship and fit between the two has not yet been well examined in agricultural literature. With its history of policy support, the agricultural sector is a good setting to study how the **interplay between formal and informal institutions** at different levels (sector, regional and national) affects entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial activities. New insights may be yielded on how the failure to align formal and informal reform may undermine entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning (Fitz-Koch et al. 2018). By examining this interplay, a richer understanding of the role of institutions for entrepreneurship can be developed. This is not only valuable for the agricultural sector but it can potentially provide knowledge for other sectors.

## 6. Conclusion and discussion.

This paper has analysed and synthesized available literature with the purpose of adapting entrepreneurial learning to the agricultural sector. This is an important topic because a better understanding of entrepreneurial learning in agriculture could potentially lead to an improved ability to discover and develop business opportunities by farmers. With this knowledge, factors that prove to inhibit entrepreneurial learning could for example be reduced while factors that facilitate entrepreneurial learning might be reinforced. There is a gap in literature about understanding entrepreneurial learning in agriculture. Whereas plenty of articles have been published on the notion of entrepreneurial learning, relatively little is known or written about the application of the concept in the context of agribusiness. In fact, a simple Scopus search on “entrepreneurial learning” AND “agriculture” only brings up two articles. This proves the relevance of this literature review.

Because it is quite a new concept, researchers are yet to agree upon a final definition on entrepreneurial learning. Within this paper, entrepreneurial learning is defined as the continuous process that facilitates the development of necessary knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures (Politis, 2005). This article first presents two views on entrepreneurial learning before connecting them both to the agricultural sector. Politis' (2005) framework views entrepreneurial learning from an individual-cognitive perspective. Rae (2006) presents a second approach on entrepreneurial learning, that describes a more socially-situated perspective. Although it might be a bit confusing, both theories can actually contribute to examining the role entrepreneurial learning plays or can play in agriculture. After comprehensively explaining the two views on entrepreneurial learning, the role entrepreneurship plays in agriculture has been examined. Based on this, the need for entrepreneurial learning in agriculture is explained. It is emphasized that the agricultural sector has some distinctive characteristics compared to other sectors. The focus on succession, social communities, emotional attachment to the farm and dependency on institutions are only a couple of vital factors influencing agriculture. These characteristics have all been taken into account within this paper.

Three themes based on Fitz-Koch et al. (2018) are examined on how they influence or are being influenced by entrepreneurial learning. The three themes are the farmers' identity, family and institutions. These are all dimensions that contribute to decision making in agricultural businesses. By highlighting the unique roles of the identity, family and institutions that influence agricultural entrepreneurship, this paper argues that entrepreneurial learning is already present in agriculture, but a lot of knowledge gaps still exist. A better understanding of entrepreneurial learning is valuable to both farmer/entrepreneurs and governments as it can explain how farmers learn how to be effective in starting up and managing new ventures. A better and more in-depth understanding of entrepreneurial learning could potentially help entrepreneurs in finding ways to discover and develop new business opportunities, and governments or other stakeholders in developing an entrepreneurial environment.

Entrepreneurial learning contributes to a healthy economy and job creation, it stimulates innovation and it brings engagement. There is however a lot more to prove and discover in regard to the process of entrepreneurial learning in the context of the agricultural sector. Future research could deepen our understanding of

entrepreneurial learning. There is especially more work required in empirically investigating relationships between entrepreneurial learning and identity, family and institutions. Based on these limitations, future research concepts are proposed in this paper. Whereas this paper only considers existing literature, practical research could study farmers over a longer period of time to see how entrepreneurial learning takes place and evolves within the (family) farm. Furthermore, entrepreneurial learning research so far has focused on applying existing theories in the entrepreneurial context. Future research may place more emphasis on theory building in certain under-researched areas, for example, how the two approaches to entrepreneurial learning come into play in different entrepreneurial contexts. Finally, future research could propose a new framework on entrepreneurial learning that takes both the individual-cognitive as well as the socially-situated approach into account. Ultimately, this paper could act as a starting point and call for any future research on entrepreneurial learning in agriculture.

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