



EPHEMERAL

“Entrepreneurship and Place: How Entrepreneurs Manage Evolving Relationships Across the Life-cycle”



Funded by the
European Union

EPHEMERAL MSCA Doctoral Training Network

Grant Agreement No.: GAP-101227644

Report on Training Week 1 (Deliverable 2.6)

Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK

18-22 May 2026

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1. SUMMARY

The first training week was attended by 7 of the 9 PhD researchers in person, with online provision for the other two to attend certain parts of the programme. Veronica Ivannikova (Northumbria's student) was unable to attend due to delays in the visa process, which Kiana Kaulitz (Aveiro) had not yet been able to secure a visa to register on the programme.

The event was preceded by an online meeting on Wednesday 6th May so that the new researchers could introduce themselves to the group prior to this first meeting. The preliminary session also allowed the project leads to explain the overall ambition of EPHEMERAL, to set out the expectations for the first week and to set some pre-reading to help the students to get the most value out of the sessions organised.

The Training Week was scheduled to include the Rural Entrepreneurship Conference, an annual event staged in the UK. This allowed the researchers to learn about some of the emerging research and policy priorities from a wider audience of speakers, develop networking skills and gain experience of a relatively small academic conference. The conference also allowed us to raise awareness of EPHEMERAL in the academic community.

The aims of the week were:

- 1) Begin to build the EPHEMERAL PhD community
- 2) Provide baseline knowledge on the critical underpinning theory relating to the role of entrepreneurship in rural development
- 3) Showcase diverse rural business activities in Northumberland
- 4) Teach researchers about the importance of intersectionality in entrepreneurship research
- 5) Deliver training on interviewing policy makers and practitioners
- 6) Provide guidance on how to make the most of academic conferences

A core aim was to develop key skills from the Vitae Researcher Development Framework with a focus on the underlying knowledge base (lectures and conference sessions), professional conduct (team-working and conference skills), and developing ethical and inclusive research methods (intersectionality workshop).

Overall, the combination of social activities, lectures, practical sessions and conference activities were very well received by participants. The team gelled very well with high levels of engagement throughout the week leaving us feeling very optimistic about the anticipated progress in the coming months before the second proposed training week in Groningen (Scheduled for Sept 28th – October 2nd, 2026).



2. AGENDA

Monday 18th May: (pm)

- 15.00 – 17.00 Introduction to EPHEMERAL & meet the team
 Work in small groups to prepare your profile for the website
- 18.30: Welcome dinner (Dakwala, Newcastle)

Tues. 19th May:

- 9.30 – 11am: Knowledge: Unravelling the big questions: Rural Entrepreneurship and Place (Elisabete Figueiredo, Tialda Haartsen plus guest speakers: Mark Shucksmith, Newcastle University & Keith Halfacree, Swansea University)
- 11.00 – 11.30: Coffee Break
- 11.30 – 13.00: Team-building: Discussion of Work Packages in light of the morning
 Session presentations
- 13.00: Collect pack lunch and head to the coach
 Field Trip to rural businesses

Wed. 20th May:

- 9.15 – 10.30: Skills: Preparations for conference and stakeholder interviewing
- 10.30 – 11.00: Coffee Break
- 11.30 – 13.00: Career planning; Getting the most out of your PhD; Expectation setting
 for supervision; Brief presentations from Maria Salomaa and Medina Savira on experiences of completing PhDs.
- 13.00 – 14.00: Lunch
- 14.00 – 17.00 PhD & Early Career Rural Methods workshop on Intersectionality in Entrepreneurship Research (Angela Martinez Dy, Loughborough University & Celeste Eusebio, Aveiro University)
 (Parallel: EPHEMERAL management committee)
- 19.00 – 21.00: Welcome Reception for REC 2026 (The Town Wall, Newcastle)

Thurs. 21st May (Students participate in the REC conference:

- 8.45 – 9.15 Coffee and registration
- 9.15 – 9.30 Welcome and Introduction
- 9.30 – 10.30 EPHEMERAL Keynote: “Entrepreneurship for the Rural” Steffen Korsgaard, University of Southern Denmark
- 10.30 – 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.00 – 12.30 Parallel track sessions
- 12.30 – 1.30 Lunch
- 1.30 – 2.45 Parallel track sessions



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- 2.45 – 3.15 Coffee
- 3.15 – 5.00 Entrepreneurship in rural areas: policy dilemmas
- (5.00 – 6.00 EPHEMERAL PhD Students to interview policy stakeholders)
- 7.00 – late Conference Dinner, Blackfriars Restaurant

Fri. 22nd May:

- 9.00 – 9.15 Coffee
- 9.15 – 11.00 EPHEMERAL sharing findings from policy interviews to determine key themes
- 11.15 – 12.45 Gender round table (Gesine Tuitjer, Thünen Institute; Andreas Giazitzoglou, Northumbria University; Mahdiah Zeinali, University of Lincoln; Zimu Zu, University of Cranfield)
- 12.45 – 13.00 REC Closing remarks
- 13.00 “Grab and go lunch”
- 13.30 – 15.00: EPHEMERAL: Reflection & feedback - research aims / impact aspirations

Saturday 23rd May:

Optional visit to the Northumberland County Show <https://northcountyshow.co.uk>

3. DELEGATES

Egon Noe	University of Southern Denmark	Project lead
Steffen Korsgaard	University of Southern Denmark	Supervisor
Pernille Hansen	University of Southern Denmark	Administrator
Sofia Motta	University of Southern Denmark	PhD Researcher
Anna Petra Ruoso	University of Southern Denmark	PhD Researcher
Celeste Eusebio	University of Aveiro	Supervisor
Elisabete Figueiredo	University of Aveiro	Supervisor & WP lead
Johannes Temm	University of Aveiro	PhD Researcher
Kiana Kauritz (online sessions only)	University of Aveiro	PhD Researcher
Gary Bosworth	Northumbria University	Supervisor & Training programme lead
David Charles	Northumbria University	Supervisor
Grace Gao	Northumbria University	Supervisor
Veronica Ivannikova (online only)	Northumbria University	PhD Researcher
Paul Cowie	Rural Design Centre	Non-academic partner/placement host
Andy Dean	Community Action Northumberland	Non-academic partner/placement host
Tialda Haartsen	University of Groningen	Supervisor & WP lead
Elham Nadermohammadi	University of Groningen	PhD Researcher
Faidah Mardika	University of Groningen	PhD Researcher
Medina Savira	University of Groningen	Recent PhD graduate



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Nestor Vercher	Valencia University	Supervisor & WP lead
Florencia Alvarez Garcia	Valencia University	PhD Researcher
Sabina Kuraj	Valencia University	PhD Researcher
Keith Halfacree	Swansea University	Guest speaker
Mark Shucksmith	Newcastle University	Guest speaker
Angela Martinez-Dy	Cranfield University	Guest workshop host
Maria Salomaa	Tampere University	Marie Curie RUN-IN graduate

4. Field Trip Review

The note below has been prepared for our project website, identifying some early learning outcomes from visiting rural businesses in Northumberland.

EPHEMERAL Field Trip, 19th May 2026.

Thanks to our hosts Duncan Wise (Northumberland National Park), Sam Kellie (First and Last Brewery) and Hugh Richardson (Wheelbirks Farm), as well as our photographer, Charlie Sykes (Charie's photography).

The afternoon was planned to introduce members of our research network to the challenges and opportunities for different forms of entrepreneurship across rural Northumberland, showcasing diverse businesses at different stages of development.

We began by visiting The Sill, the National Park visitor centre which opened in 2017. This is run by the National Park Authority but despite being a public organisation, we heard many examples of their entrepreneurial outlook. They are **embedded in the physical and material landscape**, both in the design of the building and the overall purpose of the destination to educate visitors about the natural and cultural history of the landscape. In presenting social, cultural and natural history of people in the landscape, they are trying to be inclusive of different uses, experiences and representations of the National Park and its distinctive forms of rurality.





Duncan gives us a feel for the National Park landscape from the roof of the Sill



Sam explains the growth of their businesses and showcasing some of their innovative products

The Sill provide opportunities for local businesses to run events and activities there, and sell some of their products in the gift shop. The growing visitor numbers have also helped the neighbouring pub-restaurant to widen its offer to visitors, highlighting the very localised multiplier effects that can occur in a small rural area. The village of Once-Brewed has just a handful of isolated houses, and is some 10 miles from Hexham and about 30 miles from Newcastle but the Sill has provided a link for tourists between the Hadrian's Wall attractions and the National Park. Our host, Duncan, explained how the Centre acts has created a new destination to boost the local tourist economy and how it has created employment opportunities within the Centre as well as opportunities for other businesses to work with them. In particular, their status as a public authority provides different avenues for funding that might not be accessible to other rural businesses and this has helped collaborative exhibitions, exemplified by the photographic competition on display when we visited.

The second stop was First and Last Brewery in Bellingham. Another 40-minute coach ride through sporadic thunderstorms highlighted the challenges for any business in these locations to transport their produce to markets! Sam Kellie, who runs the brewery with his wife Red, explained how they had increased the size of the business over 10 years – from starting in a small barn behind a village



pub to taking over a former ambulance centre in Bellingham. They were now employing 11 people (approx. 5 full time equivalents) and were proud to be creating opportunities for local people. Given that the owners' ambition was partly motivated by staying in the area that they call home, the distinctive local economic circumstances were something to embrace. The costs of travel, the sparse networks and markets were largely beyond their control so the entrepreneurial mindset focuses on the art of the possible. First and Last have developed a reputation for using local ingredients, creative innovation beers with locally grown fruits and naturally foraged ingredients like damsons, spruce tips and gorse flowers – apparently these add a lovely citrusy flavour to the beer! One of the most interesting comments from Sam was that he felt the villagers were proud to have their own brewery, even if they didn't drink beer. This highlighted the **symbolic role of rural businesses** – demonstrating that these remote communities have the capacity to sustain interesting and diverse business activities and thus raising local aspirations for how their local economy might evolve. Focusing on the opportunities, their desire to support and engage with the local community encouraged them to open a tap-room at the brewery. This gives them direct interaction with their customers, and helps to control the supply chain to increase profitability on direct sales. Sam also explained that being located close to the start of a footpath to a nearby waterfall helped to boost footfall for the tap-room. The local emphasis on their brand also meant that any pubs in the environs of the National Park were keen to stock their beers to boost their own local food and drink offer which is a growing demand among visitors to the region – the representational aspect of rural business.

Finally, we moved on to Wheelbirks. The **everyday life** of tending a herd of cattle has evolved to a family enterprise that combines traditional agriculture with running a café, ice-cream parlour and event space. After being owned by the family since the 1880s, the whole business is currently for sale as the brothers are nearing retirement. After a tour of the farm, including an explanation of the milking parlour and ice-cream making procedures, we were treated to a buffet tea and, of course, some ice cream tasting.





Hugh explains how the milking process works, and Charlie captured this great photo of one of their Jersey herd!

Hugh was able to tell us about how they have adapted to changing market forces, creating an events business out of the disaster of the foot and mouth disease outbreak that hit his dairy herd in 2001. Reinventing the business with a much smaller herd of jersey cattle provided a niche opportunity to make luxury ice cream. Rather than place-less milk sold into national supply chains, Wheelbirks was once again serving local communities and helping to reconnect people to farming. The highlight of their year is open-farm Sunday, and their various farm tours and opportunities to see donkeys, chickens and cows are all part of the consumer experience. You could argue that is creating a particular, perhaps idealised, **representation of rurality** and farming but it is one that the family seek to promote sustainable production, quality produce and connection with consumers. They have around 20 employees during the summer season, creating work experience for young people, and they have had other businesses running events and hiring space on site. Their craft shop also provides a market outlet for local micro-businesses.

Overall, the day illustrated the diversity of Northumberland's rural economy, providing an important introduction for our new cohort of PhD researchers. Our hosts each demonstrated how rural businesses and public sector organisations create tangible products, venues and landscapes, as well as how they can tap into our imaginations and attachments to rurality in marketing themselves to wider audiences. Taking this learning back to our Rural Entrepreneurship Conference, we were



also able to call for rural policy to do more to recognise the multiple forms of value that these businesses generate for their local communities.

Our next EPHEMERAL training week will take place in Groningen, in the Netherlands, when we will see more examples of rural entrepreneurship across their province and as far out as the Wadden Island of Schiermonnikoog. Follow our project page for more updates as the project evolves:

www.sdu.dk/en/forskning/forskningsenheder/samf/clf/forskning/forskningsprojekter/ephemeral

5. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Key knowledge from lecture content:

The presentations from Keith Halfacree, Tialda Haartsen, Mark Shucksmith and Elisabete Figueiredo provided a strong sociology and human geography underpinning for the project to balance the stronger focus on business and entrepreneurship later in the week. Keith elaborated on the different ways in which rural areas are experienced by different people – a key consideration for our study of the changing nature of entrepreneurial embeddedness and the ways in which they portray rural places. This linked in with Elisabete’s explanation of how more intense urban-rural linkages are changing the rural entrepreneurial context. We also learned from Mark and Tialda about the challenges faced by individuals and communities living in rural areas and seeking fair access to good employment, services, education and training, state benefits and infrastructure. The role of the social sector and the social role played by rural businesses came through very strongly, reminding us that research into rural entrepreneurship is inevitably social as well as economic.

Intersectionality learning:

The workshop on intersectionality drew on two papers co-authored by our guest host, Angela Martinez-Dy, both of which were included in the pre-reading list for attendees.

Dy, A. M., & MacNeil, H. (2025). “Doing inequality, doing intersectionality”: intersectionality as threshold concept for studying inequalities in entrepreneurial activity. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 31(1), 136-154.

Dy, A., & Agwunobi, A. J. (2019). Intersectionality and mixed methods for social context in entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 25(8), 1727-1747.

The workshop raised awareness of the need to include intersectionality in research design if the inequalities faced by different groups of entrepreneurs were to be understood through the research process. This design phase is also important for ensuring that certain groups are not accidentally excluded or marginalised through the research methods.



Angela explained that intersectionality is threshold concept for studying inequalities in entrepreneurial activity. Distinguishing structural issues from individual agency highlights the challenges that some entrepreneurial actors will face as they attempt to grow and learn within a pre-existing social and/or economic structure that may create barriers for their development. The workshop was complemented by discussions of how entrepreneurs can tailor products and services more effectively to consumers with different needs (led by Maria-Celeste Eusebio). The students also attended a “Gender Round Table” session on the Friday of the conference to see how some of these issues were influencing contemporary rural entrepreneurship research.

Conference and networking skills

The PhD researchers all provided to be very confident individuals, and took every opportunity to engage with conference delegates. As a small conference, this was a perfect introduction for them to see the protocol and etiquette of academic conference presentations, asking questions and networking around the event.

Expectations of Supervision

We ran a short workshop with a checklist of what students and supervisors expect from supervisions and where responsibilities lie for progress on their projects. This acted partly as an icebreaker to ensure that everyone felt comfortable to discuss variability in supervision styles and experiences but also as a way to help both students and supervisors to reflect on our own expectations and experiences. In addition, we heard from two recent PhD graduates, Medina Savira from Groningen and Maria Salomaa, a former MSCA PhD student in the RUN-IN project.

Learning from interviewing activity

As part of the Conference, a number of regional policy-makers and rural business support organisations were invited. This provided an opportunity for the MSCA researchers to gain experience of carrying out very short interviews with policy-professionals. To prepare them, David Charles gave a short presentation on different purposes and styles of research interview and we co-designed a set of 3 questions to put to the policymakers, a selection of whom had agreed to participate.



The questions were:

- How do you think different types of rural locations influence opportunities for entrepreneurship?
- What sort (sector/size/people/organisation shape/business model) of businesses do you want to see growing in our rural areas?
- In your experience, what sort of interventions are most effective at promoting entrepreneurship in rural areas?

The aim of this activity, in addition to the experience of talking to policy makers, was to explore how many different perspectives might emerge – reinforcing some of the learning from the start of the week, helping researchers to think about how to approach different professionals, and informing the project as a whole about the need to consider the heterogeneity of audiences in our communications planning.

A FEW SALIENT POINTS FROM THE FLIPCHART NOTES TAKEN BY GB IN THE FEEDBACK SESSION:

First learning point – you can have the best designed questions, but interviewees sometimes just want to tell you what they want!

There is a communication gap between the type of information we write in report and papers and what they need for policymaking – but whose responsibility is it to do the translation? Should academic researchers provide practical steps to follow, or is the government responsibility to seek clarification or do their own interpretation and synthesis of different evidence?

We need to be aware of the different needs of politicians and policymakers – and the different ways in which they might use evidence/research.

Are we providing solutions or analysis for policymakers?

What sort of Businesses should be in the rural?

- What the market wants and what the skills of the people can deliver.
- Ones that provide resilience and independence for rural communities – community energy, land management etc
- Ones that fill the gaps that policy cannot deliver
- Community-led growth (but no real substance behind what it means)

Policy makers seem to want to escape the economic growth emphasis but struggle to identify mechanisms to plan it or measure it.

