PART II

ARTICLES

Mona HEDFELDT[*], **Gun HEDLUND**[*]

A CLASH BETWEEN THE BUSINESS AND POLITICAL CLIMATES IN SWEDEN – GENDER IN THE EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL FUND PARTNERSHIPS

Abstract: In this paper we highlight and discuss a Swedish equality paradox in two different spheres: entrepreneurship and politics. We focus on the EU Structural Funds and women entrepreneurs' access to resources through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Combining human geography and political science, we draw upon network and partnership theory posing questions concerning the room for manoeuvre for women entrepreneurs to gain access to relevant networks, to create new networks in order to establish relations with EU related partnerships, and to gain access to the process of allocating EU structural fund financial resources.

Keywords: European Structural Funds, partnerships, entrepreneurship, gender, women, room for manoeuvre, networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an obvious gender-equality paradox in Sweden regarding two different spheres: entrepreneurship and politics. Sweden is ranked 23rd of the 25 EU member states regarding self-employed women and in first place concerning women's political representation.[1] In the discussion on economic growth and innovation in the EU and national policy, the improvement of women's entrepreneurship is stressed. Entrepreneurship and politics for regional development and innovation are supposed to interact, according to the policy of the EU's structural funds. The idea of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), with its

[*] Mona HEDFELDT, [*] Gun HEDLUND, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Örebro University, Sweden, e-mail: mona.hedfeldt@oru.se; gun.hedlund@oru.se
[1] This changed as a result of the entrance to parliament of a new male dominated right-wing party (18 men 2 women) in the election September 2010.

reliance on learning and networking (Homeyer, 2007), serves as an ideal for different regional partnerships. The Swedish case raises the general question whether regional structural fund partnerships may create a space for gender-inclusive networking between entrepreneurs and politicians.

Sweden's small share of self-employed women is partly explained by its strongly gender-segregated labour market. The post-war expansion of the welfare state combined with urbanisation resulted in women mainly working within the public sector. Other factors are the gendered discourses on entrepreneurship in daily life, which have disadvantaged women (see e.g. Ahl, 2002; Pettersson, 2002), as well as the gendered conditions under which men and women run (or do not run) businesses (see e.g. Berg, 1994; Hanson and Blake, 2005). The expansion of the welfare state has, on the other hand, also been regarded as a cause of women having entered the public sphere of politics (Haavio-Mannila *et al*., 1983; Hedlund 1988, 1996). Since the breakthrough in the 1970s, a gendered division of labour has resulted in 'male' and 'female' policy areas, with men being active in the areas of economics and business, and women in social and cultural affairs (Wängnerud, 1998). Using Anna Jónasdóttir's distinction between gender-related presence and content in politics, the level of gender segregation has decreased in *formal* representation in the 1990s (Jónasdottir and Jones, 2009). A masculine norm does, however, exist in the *content* of innovation policy, as is visible in discourses on clusters, entrepreneurship, and innovation, as well as in prioritised fields of business (Blake and Hansson, 2005; Pettersson, 2002; Lindberg, 2008a, b). Challenging this norm in order to promote the interests of women as entrepreneurs will demand the inclusion of new groups in areas where politics of redistribution takes place (Jónasdóttir and Jones, 2009).

In economic geography, geographical differences in entrepreneurship and regional economic success have been discussed using terms such as industrial districts, local milieus, and agglomeration (Asheim, 2000). Historical traditions, tacit knowledge, and local buzz all affect the local business climate, and social capital are often ascribed an important role. According to Molyneaux (2002), social capital – a contested concept in the social sciences – is strongly gendered, especially when it comes to exclusion and inclusion. She problematizes the fact that governments are often keen to mobilize women in their community-development programmes (Molyneaux 2002, p. 177).

Even in studies of political representation, distinct geographical variations in gendered representation have been found (Lindgren and Vernby, 2007). A tradition of higher education, women's access to public services and the labour market, a lack of strong local patriarchal culture, and women's agency are factors that seem to improve the position of women in politics (Hedlund, 1996; Forsberg, 2000).

The inequality of the conditions under which men and women run businesses has been recognised by successive Swedish governments during the last fifteen years. These obstacles must be made a part of politics, and the question is who will do so? One crucial relation worth mentioning is that between women representatives involved in innovation policy and women entrepreneurs themselves (Philips, 1995). The process whereby the interests of self-employed women are identified and articulated and the arena in which this takes place are also crucial.

The escalating political interest in entrepreneurship and self-employment is part of a shift within Swedish regional policy. In line with EU policy, regional development policy has changed its focus from a national redistribution among regions to a decentralised economic growth policy with competing and independent regions (Frisk, 2008, pp. 47–54; Hudson, 2005, pp. 311–327). From a gender perspective, one of the main concerns is how regional policy is implemented through partnerships.

The aim of this article is to analyse and discuss gender inclusiveness in European Regional Development Fund Partnerships (ERDF) with a particular focus on women entrepreneurs. We do this by studying four different regions in Sweden selected for their regional variations in *climate of entrepreneurship* and *gender-equal entrepreneurship*. Our analytical approach combines structural and agency perspectives as a platform for posing and answering the following questions:

1. What room for manoeuvre do women entrepreneurs possess to gain access to relevant networks and/or to create new networks in order to establish relations with EU partnerships?

2. What room for manoeuvre do women entrepreneurs possess to gain access to the process of allocation of EU structural fund resources?

Following this introduction, two policy-related concepts that are crucial for our empirical study are briefly presented: networks and partnerships. In the third section we present our multidisciplinary theoretical framework relating gender, partnerships, and regions to the three concepts *room for manoeuvre, political climate,* and *institutionalisation*. We then demonstrate our empirical analysis of the European Structural Fund Partnerships in the four selected regions. Finally, we conclude by summarising our study, and discussing the relations between agency and structure as an avenue for further research.

2. PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

Conceptually and in practice, partnerships are closely linked to a new perspective concerning the role of the State and politics in modern society. Traditional political decision-making and control are considered inadequate to handle

complex problems. A great number of different partnerships and networks can be identified where the State is only one of many players seeking solutions (Hysing 2009). Partnerships differ from informal networks as they often have a formal status based on the idea of a win-win situation among the participants who are supposed to strive for a common goal and problem definition. 'From government to governance' is a storyline often quoted in social science research (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Hedlund and Montin, 2009; Svensson and Nilsson, 2008). 'Government' represents a hierarchical chain of control with imperative decisions. 'Governance', on the other hand, designates authoritative decisions arrived at through 'negotiations'. *Multi-level governance* is a term that depicts how local development in a small municipality can be intertwined with negotiations in Brussels on regional structural funds. Private-public partnerships and network politics raise questions about the impact on certain fundamental values of representative democracy (Elander, 1999, 2002). Often there is a close link to the ideas of inclusive planning and deliberative democracy, in which different groups, so-called 'stakeholders', meet. If a partnership includes the relevant players within a specific area, and they meet as equals, then perhaps we can speak of 'deliberative' or 'discursive' democracy (Dryzek, 1990).

We assume that it is important for women entrepreneurs, defined as stakeholders, to have opportunities to establish relations with networks surrounding structural fund partnerships in order to gain access to the process of allocating structural fund resources. The importance of networks and contacts for business owners and entrepreneurs is emphasized in research on entrepreneurship as well as geography (see e.g. Aldrich and Brickman Elam, 1995; Johannisson, 1996, 2005; Renzulli, Aldrich and Moody, 2000). There seem to be a homosociality among men to bond, interact, and establish contacts with people who resemble themselves (Hanson, 2000; Hamrén, 2007; Hedlund, 2008). At the same time as weak ties – in networks (Granovetter, 1973) and bridging networks (Putnam, 2000) – can help entrepreneurs gain access to resources that they do not have at their own disposal, exclusion mechanisms in social networks can obstruct the possibility to develop necessary contacts and compete on an equal basis.

The policy dissemination of the partnership concept has been more successful in Sweden than Great Britain (Bache and Olsson, 2001). The EU has played an important role through its structural fund policy. During the period 1995–2007, critical assessments and evaluations have exposed the partnership processes as a male-dominated project run by public officials (Hedlund, 2008; Horelli and Roininen, 1999; Hudson and Rönnblom, 2007; Lindsten *et al.*, 2001; Rydstedt, 2006; Westberg, 2008). Local authorities and county councils nowdays play a more prominent role while different stakeholders are excluded (Hedlund, 2008). Evaluations have criticised the lack of horizontal objectives (gender equality, integration, and the environment) in the programmes. It is not clearly

formulated what kind of gender equality – gender mainstreaming in all kinds of projects or gender-fair distribution of structural fund resources – that is intended to characterise the policy process (Bacchi, 1999).

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Room for manoeuvre, political climate, and *institutionalization* are useful concepts for the theoretical development of governance studies (Prins, 2000). A Dutch study finds it important that the interaction between women's movements and the state machinery (and the EU machinery, in our case) works, and that the interaction is built on mutual trust. A flexible combination of authoritative top-down steering and the coordinative steering of different networks is the most suitable process in potentially controversial policy areas. We will use these theoretical concepts introducing a dual concept of climate: political climate and entrepreneurial climate.

3.1. Room for Manoeuvre

Prins (1993, p. 78) defines room for manoeuvre as

> … the relation among actors themselves as well as between actors and the institutions involved […] The relations between actors – the interactions which influence behaviour, that is, by extending or limiting it – and institutions determine the freedom of manoeuvre. Together these determine the room for manoeuvre, which can vary in time and is also dependent on the sort of actors and institutions which are involved in the discussion.

Our operationalisation of this definition is the opportunities for women entrepreneurs to gain access to relevant networks and/or to create new networks in order to establish relations with EU partnerships and the process of allocating their financial resources.

Gender is a factor that affects the room for manoeuvre of entrepreneurs. The notion of an entrepreneur as being male and involved in a male gender-coded business affects women entrepreneurs and women aspiring to start businesse (Scholten, 2003; Nutek, 1999). Also the notion of economic growth and innovation policy as being a male domain may affect the space for creating networks between women in politics and women entrepreneurs. The room for manoeuvre to create gender-inclusive networks in politics seems to have grown as the gender segregation has decreased. Also, women politicians in top positions really do represent women's interests in employment policy (SCB, 2008; Lindgren and Vernby, 2007).

3.2. Entrepreneurial Climate and Political Climate

Studies and reports on entrepreneurial climate often apply a geographical perspective, and sometimes (but not always) a gender perspective. Combining two different indexes of entrepreneurial climate in Sweden gives us four categories into which we can sort four counties displayed in figure 1.[2]

Gendered entrepreneurial climate should include social structures and social infrastructures according to Danilda (2001) and Forsberg (1997, 2000). One of our chosen regions, Jönköping, contains the small municipality Gnosjö, which has been the subject of several studies on successful entrepreneurship and industrial districts (see e.g. Johannisson, 1996). Feminist research reveals other images of the region; un-equal gender structures (Forsberg 2000) and a local male gender-coded entrepreneurship (Pettersson 2002; Wigren 2003). This lead us to the conclusion that entrepreneurial climate is an elusive, yet gendered and geographical concept (cf. Hedfeldt, 2008).

Favourable
entrepreneurial climate

JÖNKÖPING   HALLAND

Non-gender-equal   Gender-equal
participation in   participation in
entrepreneurship   entrepreneurship

VÄSTERNORRLAND   JÄMTLAND
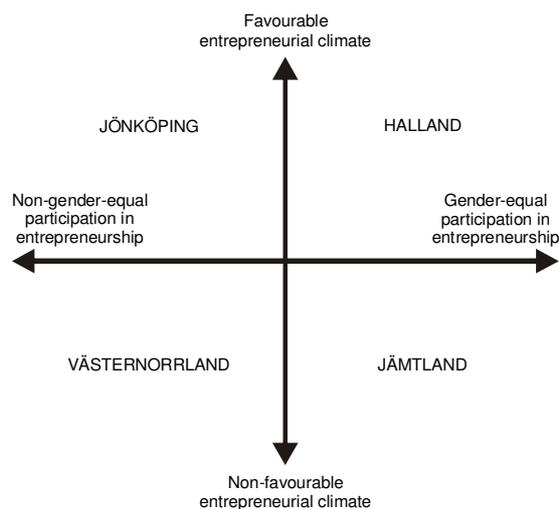
Non-favourable
entrepreneurial climate

Fig. 1. Regions chosen for further study

Source: Svenskt Näringsliv (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise), 2007; Företagarna
(The Swedish Federation of Business Owners) 2008

---

[2] The four regions are ranked differently in the two indexes. Jönköping (1) and Halland (2) keep the two top-positions in the index entrepreneurial climate while Västernorrland (18) and Jämtland (19) are in the bottom of the list of 21 counties. The index includes the following variables: the quotient of male/female entrepreneurs, age structure, women in male dominated branches, and the density of entrepreneurs in the female population (official statistics from Statistics Sweden. In the other index, gender equal business climate, Jämtland (2) and Halland (6) are ranked among the top ten while Jönköping (12) and Västernorrland (19) are placed among the bottom ten. The variables are: attitudes to the local climate among entrepreneurs, local taxation, privatization of public service, employment, share of entrepreneurs in the population, establishment of new entrepreneurs.

In studies of gender and political climate some conclusions recur frequently (Bergqvist, Adman and Jungar, 2008; Eduards, 2005; Hedlund, 1996; Lovenduski and Norris, 1996), for instance that politics is generally a male-dominated arena and that a combination of structural and agency factors may explain national, regional, and local variations of gendered representation. Eduards (2005) concludes that the resistance to women's inclusion often involves an assumption of gender neutrality and consensus. To point to men as a category or group and openly discuss their advantages or responsibilities is 'forbidden'. Gender conflicts are not unusual in Swedish politics and the conflict dimension itself consists of men's often subtle and hidden collective resistance to the participation of women. This seems to testify that the norm of consensus is problematical from a power-related gender perspective (Karlsson, 1996; Larsson, 2004).

The EU's 'soft steering' and the OMC method investigated by Dasi (2007) and Zirra and Buchkremer (2007) aim to incorporate a gender perspective into national and regional policy (Hudson and Rönnblom, 2007). Referring to Prins's analysis of how to avoid governance failure, it is apparent that a gender-inclusive, authoritative, top-down form of steering does exist in regulating procedures of the OMC process. The male-oriented innovation discourse and its narrow definition of economic growth, which favours male-dominated business, creates a more complex picture (Blake and Hansson, 2005; Lindberg 2008a, b). Prins's notion of the importance of horizontal steering of different networks creates an even more complex picture, which leads us to *institutionalisation.*

3.3. Institutionalisation

The EU's Structural Funds have practised the Open Method of Communication, OMC, as an ideal model of steering (Homeyer, 2007, pp. 45–46). Gender equality is stressed as one of the horizontal objectives in steering documents. In real-world application, OMC has displayed significant national differences. In the Swedish case, most of the 1.33 billion Euro is allocated to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to finance measures within the objective 'Regional Competitiveness and Employment' during the period 2007–2013. As state feminism has kept its institutions (Bergqvist, Adman, Jungar, 2007), the principle of gender mainstreaming is integrated within the government's steering of the regional structural fund programmes and their partnerships. The composition of the partnership boards and their supervisory committees is strictly regulated and accords with Swedish political culture (SFS 2007).[3] The gender

---

[3] The boards display some variations depending on size and regional structure. 8–10 persons represent the municipalities; 3–4 persons represent the labour market (business and unions), one person civil society, and 2–3 persons state administration at the regional level.

mainstreaming policy and inclusion of business representatives may thus create room for manoeuvre for women entrepreneurs' networks. Consensus and common goals should be the main guiding principles in the partnership (Rydstedt, 2006). We refer to the following definition in discussing the inclusion of women entrepreneurs:

> Institutionalization is not only a question of 'structures', but also of those formal and informal processes in which actors and factors interact with each other. [...] Without the 'willingness' to accept certain agreements and procedures, institutionalization will only partially be successful. (Prins 1994, p. 78).

The present regionalisation process creates a lack of institutionalisation called the 'regional mess' (Stegmann McCallion, 2008, p. 587) with 40 different central state actors and 38 different regional 'maps'. Sweden has a 'fragmented growth- and development policy as well as weak and unclear regional organization of society' (SOU 2007, p. 18). The rhetoric of 'Europe of the regions' seems to be used by domestic actors to provide resources which can cause a redistribution of power in the national context (Stegmann McCallion, 2008, p. 588). Sweden's entry into the EU and a push for reforms from below intertwined with decentralization of Swedish regional policy occurred during the same period. Stegmann McCallion's nine identified key actors (men from different levels in administration and politics) seem to represent the 'male networks' which may create gender barriers in regional development and innovation policy (Bull, 2001; Forsberg and Lindgren, 2010; Lindberg, 2008; Westberg, 2008). Another lack of institutionalisation is the refusal of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and the Swedish Federation of Business Owners to participate in the partnerships.[4] A third factor is the short-term nature of the projects run by the Resource Centres for women.

4. THE FOUR INVESTIGATED REGIONS AND THE REGIONAL MESS

Many actors such as the County Council, County Administration Board, municipal associations, and central state agencies contribute to creating the blurred situation in the regional/meso administrative level (Stegmann McCallion, 2008). The County Council is mainly responsible for health and care, and the County Administration Board is the state regional agency with a historically prominent role in the planning and distribution of resources for regional development. It seems as if the organisation of the EU structural funds provided

---

[4] Telephone interview 28th May 2009.

a 'tool box' for how to create new regional development associations which are steered by a council of non-directly-elected representatives, called regional development councils (RDCs). These municipal associations have limited power and prestige even though they do play a role in coordinating between regional growth programmes and EU regional structural fund programmes. Instead they can be seen as a solution whereby the central state is withdrawing from its previous attempt to redistribute power to the regional level (Hedlund and Hedfeldt, 2009; Stegmann McCallion, 2008). In the regions where no RDC is established, the County Administrative Board is involved in the coordination of the different programmes. Two of the selected counties in our study (Halland and Jönköping) have RDCs which may pave the way for gender-inclusive networking in relation to the structural fund partnerships. Two of the four regions investigated belong to the partnership Mid-North Sweden and the others to Småland and the Islands and West Sweden respectively. From a political and an administrative point of view, these partnerships differ in terms of how they relate to their regional surroundings.

4.1. Agents

Primarily, we focus on five central agents involved in different and criss-crossing networks related to the structural fund partnerships and women entrepreneurs: the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, Resource Centres, the Swedish Federation of Business Owners, the two Regional Development Councils (RDCs), and the County Administrative Boards in the regions with no RDC. Our empirical data consists of 32 interviews with persons related to these agents, structural fund applications from the period 2008–2009 and official documents on the partnerships.

Since 2007 *the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth* has been handling the legal and formal aspects of the applications to the structural funds in specific regional administration offices. Representing the central state administration, it has for more than 15 years promoted women's entrepreneurship at a national level. It has also hosted a national programme during more than 10 years to develop *Resource Centres* for women operationalized at regional and local levels. The multilevel structure and the mix of different actors involved make the Resource Centres (RCs) an example of governance. The RCs aim to improve the situation and opportunities for *women* (not only women entrepreneurs) and to promote women's *participation* in regional development processes. There are severe limitations in the actual room for manoeuvre of RCs in regional development processes (Scholten, 2003; Nutek, 2004; Tillväxtverket, 2009). Due to an unclear commission from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, other agents have difficulties relating to them. The short-

term nature of RC projects makes it even more difficult for them to become established agents that can influence structures and process such as Regional Growth Programmes and Regional Development Programmes. Furthermore, RCs are obliged to cooperate with other agents while reciprocal obligations do not exist.

The allocation of state resources for regional development is the responsibility of the newly established RDCs in the South, and the County Administrative Boards in the North. In both cases they also have a role in coordinating project ideas and initiatives and handling applications to the structural funds.

The Swedish Federation of Business Owners represents the entrepreneurs themselves. It is a women-led organisation which has taken a stand for women entrepreneurs and made statements on the gendered conditions for entrepreneurs in media (Lindberg, 2008a). The federation does not participate in the partnership boards of the EU structural fund programmes due to its being considered a formal state authority according to the government bill. However, it is represented in the supervisory boards presented by the state authority as individual business owners in order to "create the image of an active and involved business community".[5]

4.2. Looking for Women Entrepreneurs

We will now investigate the different counties Jämtland, Västernorrland, Halland and Jönköping. We define representatives of women in business as women who represent business, rural, and Sami organisations; women's regional resource centres; and women with personal experience of entrepreneurship or business. This definition includes women politicians with a personal background in business or experience of this policy area.

The two northern regions, Jämtland and Västernorrland, have, partly as a result of local conflicts, not been active in the current bottom-up regionalisation process (Länsposten, 2nd June 2009). The gender equality expert in the County Administrative Board of Jämtland states that she has been 'extremely active' in influencing the writing of the structural fund programme, though without success; male dominated branches dominate the operative part of the programme.[6] These two traditional County regions belong to the same EU structural fund partnership, Mid-North Sweden, and the 23 representatives (11 women and 12 men) are, according to the government bill, selected according to different quotas: local/regional politics, labour market organizations, state

---

[5] Telephone interview, 28th May 2009, the Swedish Federation of Business Owners.
[6] Telephone interview, 28th May 2009, Gender Equality Expert at the County Administrative Board of Jämtland.

authorities, one NGO, and two representatives of the Sami ethnic minority group.[7] The regional network of women which seems to be available in this institution is dominated by women holding key-positions in the public sector: state authorities and regional or local politics. In the supervisory board which oversees two different EU structural fund partnerships we find no women representing entrepreneurs from these geographical areas. Of a total of 69 members of the partnership and the supervisory board, we find three women from the two northern regions, representing trade and craft, farming, and reindeer breeding respectively.

In the south of Sweden the two regions Halland and Jönköping are active in the regionalisation process and have created RDCs. They belong to two different EU structural fund partnerships. The representatives are selected according to the same quota principle as in the north.[8] In the structural fund partnership West Sweden and its supervisory board, to which Halland belongs, we find no local women entrepreneurs. In the other structural fund partnership, Småland and the Islands, we find the same situation for the region of Jönköping. Networking for self-employed women in the two southern regions seems to be even more dependent on contacts within the public sector. As in the case of the northern structural fund partnership, the southern partnerships include a group of women holding key positions in politics and state administration. Three of these are situated in the regions of Halland and Jönköping. Thus the establishment of RDCs has not opened the doors to positions of power for women entrepreneurs. Of a total of 81 representatives in the EU related institutions, we find no women entrepreneurs from the regions of Halland and Jönköping.

4.3. Networking

In both north and south, when asked who in the partnerships they might network with to be able to initiate project planning and applications for funding, women entrepreneurs mainly mention women, and in some cases a man, in public administration or politics. Businesswomen in top positions in some cases find that otherwise potentially useful networking with male politicians in key positions in the partnership would be a waste of energy. The complicated path into the application process is a hindrance since consultants are not used in ERDF.

There are well developed and established women's networks in all four regions connecting state and regional civil servants, local politicians, and women entrepreneurs. These networks use their room for manoeuvre to further the

---

[7] http://www.tillvaxtverket.se
[8] The southern partnerships do not have any Sami representatives.

interests of women entrepreneurs regarding the national state funding. Comparing structural fund applications we do not find that the existence of RDCs or Resource Centres results in the inclusion of women entrepreneurs.

In our four regions there are three Regional Resource Centres, in Jönköping, in Halland, and in Västernorrland. Jämtland had a Regional Resource Centre until 2007.

According to representatives of Resource Centres, networks are not only useful, but necessary when planning projects and applying for and receiving funding. Networks make navigating the application process possible and facilitate access to funding. Through networks and other agents' knowledge, projects can be further developed and refined. The representatives emphasize their contacts with other agents in their own *local* setting such as meeting other agents face-to-face, socialising and working together. On the matter of *whom* the representatives for Resource Centres network with, this ranges from politicians and civil servants to representatives of business organisations. Both men and women are found among these network contacts.[9] This social capital seems to be seen as useful when it comes to small community development projects. The very large structural fund projects including male entrepreneurs seem to be based on networking over a larger geographical area.

Comparing structural fund applications we do not find that the existence of RDCs or Resource Centres results in the inclusion of women entrepreneurs. 'Real' women entrepreneurs are however more often included in Jämtland's large project applications. Jämtland differs from the other counties in that a majority of its municipalities have a female chair of the municipal executive board.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have so far not found any particular geographical variations in the involvment of women entrepreneurs in the structural fund partnerships. This can be explained by the national form of *institutionalisation* which mirrors the traditional Swedish corporative system. The public sector, politics, and state administration gain the majority of the seats, while private sector business interests and NGOs constitute a minority. The OMC ideal of learning and listening seems problematic since the business organisations refuse to be involved. The only exception is the decision of the Federation of Business Owners to try to influence the informal networks and the supervisory committees. Agents who may be a resource in a *business related network* of women

---

[9] Telephone interviews with representatives of RCs in Västernorrland and Jönköping, 18th August 2009.

entrepreneurs are extremely rare in the structural fund partnerships. We find no representatives from the national or regional resource centres and very few women from the business community.

From a macro-level point of view, it is obvious that *the political climate* and *the business climate* seem to clash with regard to the involvement of business representatives in the EU regional structural fund partnerships. This conflict also exists regarding the State's threat to incorporate gender mainstreaming into the nomination process to corporate boards – a highly controversial topic. The dual aspect of local climate – politics and business – takes different forms in the four regions. The two northern counties, which belong to the Mid-North Sweden structural fund partnership, seem to have a traditional political climate with regard to the current regionalization process. Jämtland has nominated two women from the entrepreneurial sphere to the EU partnerships and supervisory board, while Västernorrland has nominated one out of sixty-nine members. They may, however, differ in terms of gender-inclusive political climate: two Jämtland women with key positions in state administration have seats on the supervisory board, and a majority of the top positions in the county's local politics are held by women (4 of 6). The combination of a gender-equal business climate and a gender-inclusive political climate seems to explain the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in some of Jämtland's large project applications.

In the south of Sweden, the two counties Halland and Jönköping have started a regionalization process and created RDCs. These newly established institutions do not necessarily reflect the gender-inclusive political climate. No women entrepreneur and three women from local politics or state administration represent these counties among 81 members of the EU structural fund partnerships and the supervisory board. Halland and Jönköping belong to two different EU structural fund partnerships. In both counties a minority of the top positions (3 of 18) in local politics are held by women.

Halland's combination of a 'modern' political climate with the voluntary establishment from below of an RDC and a gender-equal business climate has not resulted in women entrepreneurs being appointed to a structural fund partnership. Jönköping has a favourable regional business climate, but with non-equal gender participation. Even in this case, the result is that the very few women entrepreneurs who do take part in the structural fund partnership and the supervisory board come from other geographical regions. Based on these data and interviews with representatives from the business organizations, the Resource Centres, the two RDCs and County Administrative Board civil servants, we conclude that the *room for manoeuvre* seems to be limited regarding networking with other women entrepreneurs holding seats in the formal partnerships. This means that networking has to be done with other alliances, mainly in the public sector. These contacts are taken at the local level, and seem to be a way of muddling upwards through the system. Of interest is that, according to

the interviews, both men and women are part of these networks which again seem to be centred around agents from the public sphere. The networks are based on face-to-face contact, and they seem to provide paths into the extremely complicated application process. It does not seem that the 'regional mess' creates distinct variations among the different regions studied. Belonging to a 'modern' region with an RDC taking part in the bottom-up regionalisation process does not seem create more room for manoeuvre for women entrepreneurs seeking access to the power elite in the structural board partnerships. A combination of the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming at the EU and national levels, a gender-equal business climate, and a gender-inclusive local political climate seems to create a specific room for manoeuvre to create access to elite institutions of the structural fund partnership in Jämtland.

An area of future research is how informal networks function in the creation of project plans and influence the setting of priorities. The role of national and regional Resource Centres and the Swedish Federation of Business Owners will be further investigated. An assumption is that networking with agents from the public sector is not enough to reach a gender-fair allocation of resources from the European Regional Development Fund partnerships (ERDF). This raises an important question: Does informal networking afford a path that leads to access to funding, or are the resources in the EU structural funds closed to women in business?

REFERENCES

AHL, H. J. (2002), *The Making of the Female Entrepreneur: A Discourse Analysis of Research Texts on Women's Entrepreneurship*, Jönköping: Jönköping International Business School.
ALDRICH, H. E. and BRICKMAN ELAM, A. (1995), 'Strong Ties, Weak Ties and Strangers: Do Women Business Owners Differ from Men in Their Use of Networking to Obtain Assistance?', *Working Paper Series*, Washington D.C.: Small Business Foundation of America.
ASHEIM, B. T. (2000), 'Industrial Districts: The Contributions of Marshall and Beyond', [in:] CLARK, G. L., FELDMAN, M. P., and GERTLER, M. S. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
BACCHI, C. L. (1999), *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems*, London: Sage.
BACHE, I. and OLSSON, J. (2001), 'Legitimacy through Partnership? EU Policy Diffusion in Britain and Sweden', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 24 (3), pp. 215–236.
BERG, N. G. (1994), *Servicelokalisering og entreprenørskap*, Trondheim: Geografisk Institutt, Det sammfundsvitenskaplige fakultet, AVH, Universitetet i Trondheim.
BERGQVIST, C., ADMAN, P. and JUNGAR, A-C. (2008), *Kön och politik*, Stockholm: SNS Förlag.
BLAKE, M. and HANSON, S. (2005), 'Rethinking Innovation: Contact and Gender', *Environment and Planning A*, 35, pp. 681–701.

BULL, M. (2001), Om regionalpolitiken blev jämställd. Jämställdhetsperspektiv på regional-politik, *Enheten för integration och jämställdhet. Länsstyrelsen i Västra Götaland*, 52.

DANILDA, I. (2001), 'Finns det ett speciellt företagsklimat för kvinnor som driver företag?', [in:] EKSTEDT, E. (ed.), *Kunskap och handling för företagande och regional utveckling*, Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.

DASI, J. F. (2007) 'Is the OMC a Way to Improve Good Governance in Europe? The OMC as Practice for Territorial Governance', *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 14 (1).

DRYZEK, J. S. (1990), *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy and Political Science*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

EDUARDS, M. (2005), *Förbjuden handling. Om kvinnors organisering och feministisk teori*, Malmö: Liber Ekonomi.

ELANDER, I. (1999), 'Partnerskap och demokrati: omaka par i nätverkspolitikens tid', *Globalisering – Demokratiutredningens Forskarvolym*, IX. SOU, 83, pp. 327–364.

ELANDER, I. (2002), 'Partnerships and Urban Governance', *International Social Science Journal*, 54, pp. 191–204.

FORSBERG, G. (1997), 'Rulltrapperegioner och social infrastruktur', [in:] SUNDIN, E., (ed.), *Om makt och kön*, Stockholm: Fritzes.

FORSBERG, G. and LINDGREN, G. (eds), (2010), *Nätverk och skuggstrukturer i regional-politiken*, Karlstad: Karlstad University Press.

FORSBERG, G. (2000), 'Regional Variations in the Gender Contract: Gendered Relations in Labour Markets, Local Politics and Everyday Life in Swedish Regions', *The European Journal of Social Sciences*, 11 (2).

FRISK, M. (2008), *Sju miljarder för sju minuter?: Planering, politik och hybrida geografier i tunnelbygget genom Hallandsås*, Diss., Karlstad: Fakulteten för samhälls- och livsvetenskaper, Karlstads universitet.

GRANOVETTER, M. (1973), 'The Strenght of Weak Ties', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (6).

HAMRÉN, R. (2007), 'Vi är bara några kompisar som träffas ibland: Rotary som en manlig arena', Stockholm: Normal förlag.

HANSON, S. (2000), 'Networking', *Professional Geographer*, 52 (4).

HANSON, S. and BLAKE, M. (2005), 'Changing the Gender of Entrepreneurship', NELSON, L. and SEAGER, J. (eds) *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, Oxford: Blackwell.

HAAVIO-MANNILA, E. *et al.* (eds), (1983), *The Unfinished Democracy*, Oslo: Nordic Ministery Council.

HEDFELDT, M. (2008), *Företagande kvinnor i bruksort: Arbetsliv och vardagsliv i samspel*, Diss., Örebro: Örebro universitet.

HEDFELDT, M. and HEDLUND, G. (2009), 'European Structural Funds and Regional Partner-ships – Hindrande or Resource for Women in Business or as Entrepreneurs', Non-revised paper presented at the 12th Uddevalla Symposium in Bari, Italy.

HEDLUND, G. (1988), 'Women's Interests in Local Politics', [in:] JONES, K. B. and JÓNAS-DÓTTIR, A. G. (eds), *The Political Interests of Gender. Developing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face*, London: Sage.

HEDLUND, G. (1996), *Det handlar om prioriteringar. Om kvinnors intressen och villkor i kom-munalpolitiken*, Diss., Örebro Studies: 14.

HEDLUND, G. (2008) 'Partnership, Gender and Democracy', [in:] SVENSSON, L. and NILSSON, B. (eds), *Partnership – As a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable Change*, Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press.

HEDLUND, G. and MONTIN, S. (2009), *Governance på svenska*, Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press Sweden.

HOMEYER, I. von (2007), 'The Role of the OMC in EU Environmental Policy: Innovative or Regressive?', *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 14 (1).

HORELLI, L. and ROININEN, J. (1999), *Ex-ante evaluering ur jämställdhetsperspektiv av Sveriges tillväxtavtal*, Helsinki: Tekniska högskolan (Picaset).

HUDSON, C. (2005), 'Regional Development Partnerships in Sweden: Putting the Government Back in Governance?', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 15 (3), pp. 311–327.

HUDSON, C. and RÖNNBLOM, M. (2007), 'Regional Development Policies and the Constructions of Gender Equality: The Swedish Case', *European Journal of Political Research*, 46 (1), pp. 47–68.

HYSING, E. (2010), *Governing towards Sustainability: Environmental Governance and Policy Change in Swedish Forestry and Transport*, Diss., Örebro: Örebro universitet.

JOHANNISSON, B. (1996), 'Personliga nätverk som kraftkälla i företagandet', [in:] JOHANNISSON, B. and LINDMARK, L. (eds), *Företag, Företagare, Företagsamhet*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.

JOHANNISSON, B. (2005), *Entreprenörskapets väsen*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.

JÓNASDÓTTIR, A. G. and JONES, K. B. (eds), (2009), *The Political Interests of Gender Revisited. Redoing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

KARLSSON, G. (1996), *Från broderskap till systerskap*, Lund: Arkiv avhandlingsserie 44. Diss., Göteborgs universitet.

LARSSON, K. (2004), *Andrahandskontrakt i folkhemmet: närmiljö och kvinnors förändringsstrategier*, Diss., Örebro universitet.

LINDBERG, M. (2008a), 'Genusgränser i Sveriges innovationspolitik', Paper presented at the conference Bortom Rösträtten, Södertörns högskola, 12th June.

LINDBERG, M. (2008b), 'Ett slående mönster: Hur Sveriges innovationspolitik formar genus och vice versa', *GENUS i Norrsken*, 2.

LINDGREN, K-O. and VERNBY, K. (2007), 'Om kvinnorepresentation och rätten till heltid', *Kommunal ekonomi och politik*, 11 (4), pp. 8–31.

LINDSTEN, S. *et al.* (2001), *Om regionalpolitiken blev jämställd- jämställdhetsperspektiv på regionalpolitik*, Stockholm: Näringsdepartementet samt Länstyrelserna i Västra Götaland, Blekinge län och Hallands län.

LOVENDUSKI, J. and NORRIS, P. (eds), (1996) 'Women in Politics', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 1 (49).

LÄNSPOSTEN (2009) Östersund, 2nd June.

MOLYNEUX, M. (2002), 'Gender and the Silences of Social Capital: Lessons from Latin America', *Development and Change*, 33 (2), pp.167–188.

NUTEK, (1999), *Infrastruktur för kvinnors företagande i sju europeiska regioner*, Stockholm.

NUTEK, (2004), *Resurscentra för kvinnor – en kraft för regional utveckling? En analys av projektfinansierad verksamhet under perioden 1998–2002*, Stockholm.

PETTERSSON, K. (2002), *Företagande män och osynliggjorda kvinnor: Diskursen om Gnosjö ur ett könsperspektiv*, Uppsala: Kulturgeografiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet.

PHILIPS, A. (1995), *The Politics of Presence. The Political Representation of Gender, Etnicity and Race*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

PIERRE, J., and PETERS, B. G. (2000), *Governance, Politics and the State*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

PRINS, M. (1993), 'Women's Emancipation as a Question of Governance: Actors, Institutions and the Room for Manoeuvre', [in:] KOOIMAN, J. (ed.), *Governance: New Government – Society Interactions*, London: Sage.

PUTNAM, R. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

RENZULLI, L., ALDRICH, H. and MOODY, J. (2000), 'Family Matters: Gender, Networks, and Entrepreneurial Outcomes', *Social Forces*, 79 (2).

RYDSTEDT, J. (2006), *Partnerskap i samförstånd? En studie av den regionala partnerskapsmodellen ur ett intresseperspektiv*, Magister essay, Lunds: Department of Political Science, Lunds university.

SCB (2008), *På tal om kvinnor och män. Lathund om jämställdhet*, Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån.

SCHOLTEN, C. (2003), *Kvinnors försörjningsrum – Hegemonins förvaltare och murbräckor*, Lund: Institutionen för kulturgeografi och ekonomisk geografi, Lunds universitet.

SFS (2007) 459; dnr N 2007/3312/RT Näringsdepartementet. Lag om strukturfondspartnerskap.

SOU (2007) 10 Slutbetänkande av Ansvarskommittén, Stockholm.

STEGMANN MCCALLION, M. (2008), 'Tidying Up? European Regionalization and the Swedish Regional Mess', *Regional Studies*, 42 (4), pp. 579–592.

SVENSSON, L. and NILSSON, B. (2008), *Partnership – As a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable Change*, Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press Sweden.

TILLVÄXTVERKET, (2009), *Följeforskning av verksamhet vid lokala och regionala resurscentra för kvinnor, rapport 0039*, Stockholm.

WESTBERG, H. (2008), 'Who Is Allowed to Contribute to Sustainable Development by Participating in Partnerships?', [in:] SVENSSON, L., and NILSSON, B., (eds), *Partnership – As a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable Change*, Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press.

WIGREN, C. (2003), *The Spirit of Gnosjö – The Grand Narrative and Beyond*, Jönköping: Jönköping International Business School.

WÄNGNERUD, L. (1998), *Politikens andra sida: om kvinnorepresentation i Sveriges riksdag, Statsvetenskapliga institutionen*, Diss., Univ. Göteborg.

ZIRRA, S., and BUCHKREMER, J. (2007), 'Learning within Fields: The Limited Success of the European Employment Strategy in Germany', *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 14 (1).

WEB PAGES

THE SWEDISH FEDERATION OF BUSINESS OWNERS' WEB PAGE, www.foretagarna.se, 4.06.2009.