

Entrepreneurship in rural areas: The role of women?

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Introduction

Rural areas in Sweden as in many other places in Europe face demographic challenges, including an ageing population (Westholm & Waldenström, 2008). Young people, and women more than men, move to the larger cities for education and employment, and do not return. This results in depopulation and a smaller tax base in rural areas, with resulting difficulties in maintaining social services, such as healthcare, or child care. Retail and consumer services are discontinued due to falling demand. Agriculture is fully rationalized and faces economic problems. The result is a down-ward spiral. In Sweden, the development has been accentuated by the closure of traditional manufacturing industries in small towns and in rural areas (Hedlund and Lundholm, 2015).

In want of job opportunities in traditional manufacturing industries or agriculture, there is now significant hope for entrepreneurship to contribute to rural development (Stathopoulou, Psaltopoulos and Skuras, 2004), to transform depleted communities (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004) and to change the identity of outmoded industrial rural areas (Berglund, Gaddefors and Lindgren, 2016). However, entrepreneurship is still largely perceived as a male phenomenon (Ahl, 2006). The role of women in processes of rural entrepreneurship is still downplayed in policy and scattered in the academic literature (e.g. Alston, 2003, Little et al, 2000, Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012.) Even if early policy for women's entrepreneurship in Sweden included women in rural areas, policy focus has been redirected solely to urban areas (Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund, and Tillmar, 2017). This is despite the fact that many of the new businesses in rural areas are in female gendered industries. Examples are bed and breakfast, tourism and hospitality or alternative health care (Asztalos, Morell and Bock, 2007; Seuneke and Bock, 2015; Warren-Smith and Jackson, 2004).

But we do not know very much about the extent, orientation, profitability or development potential for women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. Neither do we know what immigration has contributed with. There is a lack of knowledge on how women's rural entrepreneurship influences gender relations and equality. There is thus a need to develop more knowledge on women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. This paper reports on a review of the literature and provides preliminary results from a quantitative study of women's entrepreneurship in rural areas in a Swedish region.

The paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing extant literature on women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. In the next section we report the results from a pilot study based on quantitative data on the extent and characteristics of women's entrepreneurship in rural areas in a Swedish region. The section begins with a detailed report on our data and method. The paper concludes by outlining a number of propositions to be studied in further research.

1. Literature review

In the following we report the results of a review of extant literature on women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. The search words used were: rural, entrepreneurship, women and gender. The search engine used was Google scholar. The search resulted in approximately 50 research papers. Some of the papers were quantitative, but the majority were qualitative; based either on interviews, ethnographies or discourse analysis. When categorizing the papers and comparing the results, we considered the theme of the papers (type of article, purpose, method, nation of study), in relation to the results and approach (view of gender, entrepreneurship, rurality). Below we present the findings, organized in six themes. We conclude by formulating a number of lessons, or questions for further empirical research, that emerged from the review.

1.1 Sectors investigated

Some authors argue that economic conditions in farming have deteriorated to the extent that entrepreneurs leave these industries and enter into other forms of businesses (Alsos, Carter & Ljunggren, 2011). Examples of other businesses are tourism, cafés, accommodation and horse related activities (Aszatalos Morell & Bock, 2007). Still, most articles in our review focus on farm based businesses. Either they deal directly with farming (Prügl, 2004), or with women engaged in farm diversification (Alston, 2003; Bock, 2004; Seuneke & Bock, 2015) or farm tourism (Brandth & Haugen, 2010; Caballé, 1999; Cánoves, et al., 2004; McGehee & Jennings, 2007; Pettersson & Heldt-Cassel, 2014).

Other studies have looked at a variety of sectors, including small-scale food production (Anthopoulou, 2010; Millman & Martin, 2007), a farmer-to-customer market in an agricultural setting in the US (Sattler Weber 2007), the wild berry industry in Sweden (Hedberg, 2016), the 'feminized' sectors of food, health, and service in Sweden (Webster & Haandrikman, 2017), and various kinds of businesses (mini-camping, tea garden, group accommodation, canoe rental, B&B, plants, pedicure, glass atelier, furniture shop, pick your own fruit, and dog grooming) (Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012). Following this the question arises in which sectors rural women entrepreneurs in Sweden are active, in relation to the industries which have previously been studied.

1.2 View of women and/or gender

Concerning the perspectives on women applied in the articles reviewed, most authors have an essentialist view of gender. The categories men and women are treated as variables, equal to biological sex (e.g. Driga et al., 2009; Tigges & Green, 1994). Some focus only women (Alston, 2003; Anthopoulou, 2010; Bock, 2004; Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012; Sattler Weber, 2007; Webster & Haandrikman, 2017), while others include women and men, sometimes comparing them (Bensemman & Hall, 2010; Millman & Martin, 2007). A few studies apply a 'doing gender' approach, where gender is regarded as a social construction (Brandth & Haugen, 2010; Hedberg, 2016; Pettersson & Heldt-Cassel, 2014). In this sense, the literature on women's entrepreneurship in rural areas to some extent seems to mirror the literature on women's entrepreneurship in general. That is, there is still a lack of studies taking a 'doing gender' approach.

1.3 Rural life as conservatively gendered

A number of studies focusing on farm-women entrepreneurs in Europe find that they are constrained by responsibilities for housework, child and elderly care (Björkhaug & Blekesaune, 2008; Caballé, 1999; Prügl, 2004). The studies are undertaken in southern and central European countries that lack public welfare provision such as day care. Swedish and Norwegian studies, on the other hand, do not focus gendered family obligations (Hedberg, 2016; Webster & Haandrikman, 2017; Brandth & Haugen, 2010). The few that do have not found that it is a constraint (Pettersson & Heldt-Cassel, 2014). We contend that this is due to good provision of public welfare services also in rural Sweden. Hence, studies in women's rural entrepreneurship needs to account for differences in the macro level institutional context affecting women (and men) differently for example in different welfare state regimes. Further, more investigation of the possible constraints that gendered responsibilities put on women rural entrepreneurs is needed, also in a Swedish context.

1.4 Women's entrepreneurship – an individual business activity?

Entrepreneurship is in the mainstream literature studied as an individual activity, undertaken by individual motifs. In this respect, extant literature on women's rural entrepreneurship is not any different as many papers focus on entrepreneurship as an individual endeavor, albeit sometimes constrained by gendered divisions of labour (Alston, 2003; Anthopoulou, 2010; Bock, 2004; Caballé, 1999; Cánoves, et al., 2004; Hedberg, 2016; Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012; McGehee & Jennings, 2006; Pettersson & Heldt-Cassel, 2014; Webster & Haandrikman, 2017). But in contrast, we also read about family and co-preneurship (Millman & Martin, 2007), collective processes (Sattler Weber, 2007) and motifs related to community sustainability (ibid), which raises the question of whether women's rural entrepreneurship is important for other reasons than economic sustainability.

1.5 Using and escaping gender stereotypes

While some previous studies focus on the material and/or symbolic constraints of gendered stereotypes and how women can escape those (Bock, 2004; Fournier, 2002), other studies in the extant literature show how women use these stereotypes to position their businesses (Anthopoulou, 2010; Brandth & Haugen, 2010).

Fournier (2002) found that women 'played' with gender roles in a way that gave them space to act and left other puzzled. For example, on occasions when they were expected to behave /appear in a feminine way – they choose the opposite (the hard-working farmer) and vice versa. This way of escaping gender stereotypes she calls an 'active work of disconnection'. Similarly Bock (2004:254) writes: "It became easier for them [the women entrepreneurs] to resist the external pressure to conform to the traditional gender-image and traditional image of farming. And the criticism of others hurt them less."

At the same time as family obligations restricted them, rural women entrepreneurs (in food production) in Greece used an idealized image of the 'rural mother' – related to the rural idyll – in their marketing (Anthopoulou, 2010). A Norwegian study found that women entrepreneurs in farm tourism wanted to show an image of a traditional rural lifestyle (Brandth & Haugen, 2010). In another study of farm-related tourism entrepreneurship in Sweden found a similar use of the gendered rural idyll and the image of 'a traditional farm woman', by women entrepreneurs (Heldt-Cassel, 2015; Pettersson & Heldt-Cassel, 2014). The women, however, still challenged how gender is 'done' by identifying themselves as

entrepreneurs and by changing the use of the farms. As concluded by Brandth & Haugen (2010 p. 442): "undoing gender is not particularly straightforward, as women and men are situated within certain conventions when it comes to communicating country living to visitors and meeting visitors' expectations of gender and work".

Hence, when women use stereotypes (feminine care, womanly hospitality, or motherly cooking) to position their businesses, the gender order is simultaneously reinforced and challenged. A woman entrepreneur might build a successful independent business, or be the manager of a large enterprise while marketing traditional femininity. The diverging conclusions in extant literature give rise to questions regarding how this dynamic affects the viability of rural areas in Sweden, as well as how it affects women and their entrepreneurship.

1.6 Other power dimensions – class and race

Rurality in Europe appears primarily white – issues of race were basically silenced in the literature. The exceptions are two studies of Thai women (Hedberg, 2016; Webster & Haandrikman, 2017). Though most Thai women live in urban areas, this category is overrepresented in rural areas as compared to other immigrants (Webster & Haandrikman, 2017). Yet, their entrepreneurship is not recognized. The authors write: "Thai entrepreneurs, as women and racialized 'others', are thus not granted belonging in the privileged narrative of entrepreneurialism, meaning that their business activities are not critically explored" (p. 17).

Also regarding class, there is little discussion in the reviewed literature. Rurality is classed, as land ownership is privileged, but rurality may be classed in other ways than traditional divisions. Bryant and Pini (2009:48) explore intersections of gender, class and rurality and observe that class may be more than "a ranking on an occupational scale, property ownership or degrees of engagement in consumption". Instead they discuss how class is emotionally inscribed in ways that are gendered, economic and moral and expressed through symbolic signifiers and cultural narratives (ibid).

The previous studies reviewed in this paper do not discuss age, while we know that demographic changes, and especially the ageing of the population characterize rural areas (Westholm & Waldenström, 2008). How these changes influence women entrepreneurs in terms of changes of demand, markets and access to resources like personnel are questions arising.

1.7 Lessons learned and questions emerging from the literature review

From the review, we identify five issues, or questions, for further empirical inquiry of women's rural entrepreneurship in Sweden:

The first question that emerges from the literature review is what rural women entrepreneurs really do; which industries are they in? Does the literature on rural women entrepreneurs reflect the activities that women carry out in rural areas in Sweden? Hence there is a need to map the extent and types of business activities that women are engaged in in rural Sweden

Second, previous studies indicate that welfare state provision has an impact on women's rural entrepreneurship. Hence, there is a need to study role of welfare provision for business start-up, but also the role of public sector cut-backs for women's choice of business ownership in rural areas.

Third, the literature indicates that women's rural entrepreneurship is primarily an individual process. But there are also interesting examples of collective entrepreneurial

processes where context plays a major role. Does that account also for rural Sweden? We will take an interactive and ethnographic approach to further look into such processes.

Fourth, there is still a lack of studies on women's rural entrepreneurship that take a doing gender approach, which strengthens our idea that it would be fruitful to study imagery, symbols and narratives from a doing gender perspective.

Fifth, there is a need to study the impact of age, class, ethnicity as resource and constraint, particularly in the light of the current immigration boom and the placement of many newly arrived immigrants in rural areas and small towns.

2. Quantitative pilot study – data and method

In our project of mapping women's rural entrepreneurship in Sweden, we chose the region of Småland as a pilot area. Småland is known as a region with many entrepreneurs and small firms (Berggren, Brulin & Gustafsson, 1998; Wigren, 2003; Johannisson & Wigren, 2006), but also for traditional and conservative gender orders (Pettersson, 2002; Saarinen, 2002). It is one of the largest regions of Sweden with low population density, yet almost at the national average (OECD, 2012). Thus, many rural municipalities and cities of medium-size characterize the region. One third of the population lives in predominantly rural areas. The region has large assets of forest and farmland, yet tourism is lower than average for Sweden, with the exception of Kalmar county which is located by the Baltic Sea. Småland has the highest share of employment in the manufacturing industry in Sweden, and thus a high proportion of low-skilled workers. A sub-contracting model within rubber and plastic, machinery and automotive components dominates the entrepreneurial activity and there are few high-technology and knowledge intensive companies. There are active industrial clusters in the famous rural municipality of Gnosjö, but also furniture design and manufacturing, and furniture trading, as for instance IKEA. In the rural municipalities, there is an ongoing trend towards an aging population as the young and well-educated leave for the larger cities, and thus do not take over family businesses.

Småland is divided into three counties, Jönköping, Kronoberg and Kalmar. The share of entrepreneurs among the working population within these counties was similar to the national average, 9 per cent in the year 2012, according to a survey from Swedish Agency of Economic and Regional Growth (2016). However, the county of Jönköping differs somewhat from the other counties by having a share of 11 per cent. The numbers indicate that Småland could be a rather typical Swedish region. On the other hand, when comparing the share of women entrepreneurs (among all entrepreneurs) on the national level, 22.7 per cent in 2012, the women entrepreneurs in Jönköping have the lowest share among the counties of Småland, 19 per cent, in relation to men entrepreneurs. The shares in the counties of Kronoberg and Kalmar were 21 per cent and 24 per cent respectively (Swedish Agency of Economic and Regional Growth, 2012). The figures indicate that the extent of women's entrepreneurial activity, in relation to men's, is both higher and lower than the aggregated level in Sweden, and that the conditions for women entrepreneurs might vary between different parts of Småland.

When conducting the quantitative database study of women's rural entrepreneurship, we used the individual-based database LISA, made available by Statistics Sweden (SCB). We used the latest data available at the time for the study, which was data for 2012. The database consists of integrated registers from the labour market, civil registers and taxation registers

(Statistics Sweden, 2016). The population of this current pilot-study included every Sweden registered individual aged 16 up to 74 years, who were employed the year 2012.

2.1 The operationalization of entrepreneurs/business owners

The entrepreneurial activity of women in the rural areas of Småland was explored by measuring the numbers of business owners, and the share of women entrepreneurs by the numbers of women employed. The definition of business owners in the database, and thus in the current pilot-study, was based on the individual's *main* source of active employment¹ in November of the current year (Statistics Sweden, 2016). This way of selection excludes part-time business owners. However, this may create a bias in the study as part-time business owners may have their business-income registered mainly in November of the current year. Statistics Sweden estimates the month of November as a reliable time of measurement.

In the data, the business owners are categorized into two different forms of business-ownership, *self-employment/partnership* and *employed in their own limited company*, within which it is possible to determine sex. The sex of the business owners cannot be determined in *public companies* and *economic associations* by the database LISA (Statistics Sweden, 2016), and therefore these categories were not included in the current pilot-study. The pilot-study included the total population of business owners/entrepreneurs who have their worksite in the rural municipalities of Småland.

2.2 The categorization of rural municipalities in the Region Småland

The interest of the current pilot-study is to explore the extent of women's entrepreneurship in the rural areas. The categorization of certain areas as 'rural' is, of course, not given. There are various ways of defining what the rural is. Halfacree (2007) suggests that three interrelated 'facets' characterize rural space: (i) rural localities, measured e.g. in terms of physical distance to town centers, sparse number of inhabitants or dwellings (ii) formal representations of the rural, e.g. imagined in policy or popular belief, and (iii) everyday lives of the rural, including subjective and diverse spaces. In this current paper, we primarily adhere to what Halfacree defines as rural localities and the specific categorization of rural areas follows the Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis. State agencies are advised to use this categorization in facilitating comparison between different reports of rural analysis (Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis, 2014).

The Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis (2014) has categorized Swedish municipalities into six different types²: *Rural municipalities* (i) *very remotely situated*, (ii) *remotely situated*, (iii) *close a larger town*, *Dense municipalities* (iv) *remotely situated*, (v) *close a larger city* and (vi) *Metropolitans*. Thus, three of the categorizations describe rural areas. The rural categories are described as follows:

i. *Rural municipalities very remotely situated* are characterized by having the total population within rural areas, that on average have at least 90 minutes travelling time to an agglomeration of at least 50 000 inhabitants.

ii. *Rural municipalities remotely situated* are characterized by having at least 50 per cent of the population within rural areas, and less than 50 per cent of the

¹ Registered income whether loss or gain (Statistics Sweden, 2016).

² The categorization is based on the year 2012.

population having less than 45 minutes travelling time to an agglomeration with at least 50 000 inhabitants.

iii. *Rural municipalities close to a larger town* are characterized by having at least 50 per cent of the population within rural areas, and at least 50 per cent of the population having less than 45 minutes travelling time to an agglomeration with at least 50 000 inhabitants.

Although the rural areas are divided into three different types, only two types of rural municipalities are represented in Småland: (ii) *remotely situated* and (iii) *close to a larger town*. In Sweden, there are 45 *rural municipalities remotely situated* and 70 *close to a larger town*, and Småland has 5 *remotely situated*³ and 12 *close to a larger town*⁴ (Swedish Agency of Growth Policy Analysis, 2014).⁵

2.3 The Swedish classification system of industries

Relevant to the outlined theory we explore within which industries women entrepreneurs have their main entrepreneurial activity in the rural areas of Småland. In Sweden, the industries are classified according to the NACE⁶ system. The Swedish hierarchal classification system is structured on five levels, 1 up to 5-digit scale, each classification level being more detailed. In the database, the business-owners and employees are linked to their worksite and thus an industry classification code. The industry code of the business-owners refers to their main activity at the rural worksite (Statistics Sweden, 2007). The current study is carried out at the most detailed classification level, the 5-digit scale, which has been found to be especially important in analyses of women's entrepreneurship since female-dominated industries more often consist of several activities (i.e. Nutek, 2006, Sköld, 2015).

2.4 Definition of other variables studied

To measure the profitability of the rural businesses of women we used the size of the firm in terms of the numbers of employees, the net sales and the profit in year 2012. To explore the impact of age we categorized the business owners into five age groups: 16-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55-65 and 66-74 years old.

3. Results from the pilot study

3.1 To which extent are women entrepreneurs represented in the rural areas of Småland?

On the aggregated level, 9 per cent of the women employed in the rural municipalities of the study are small business-owners⁷, which is a significantly higher share than the national average for women in Sweden (5 per cent, Statistics Sweden, 2017). However, the figure is significantly lower than the equivalent figure for men in the same municipalities which was 18.3 per cent.

³ Gislaved, Gnosjö, Hultsfred, Högsby and Sävsjö

⁴ Alvesta, Aneby, Borgholm, Emmaboda, Lessebo, Markaryd, Mönsterås, Mörbylånga, Tingsryd, Torsås, Uppvidinge and Vaggeryd

⁵ There are 15 rural municipalities in Sweden *very remotely situated*, most of them in the north part of Sweden.

⁶ Classification of Economic Activities in the European union

⁷ Small-business owners as their primary income in November 2012.

Most of the women entrepreneurs encompassed in the data have only this occupation. Yet, some combine their business ownership with being an employee in another company (12.2 %) or by being an owner of another firm (5.3 %). A few of the entrepreneurs (4 %) even have a third source of income.

3.2 Women entrepreneurship in different rural municipalities

When analyzing the data on the municipal level, large differences are revealed. The share of working women who are entrepreneurs ranges from 5.7 per cent up to 15.2 per cent (see figure 1). The lowest shares of entrepreneurs are found within the group *Remotely situated* municipalities.

Gnosjö (5.7 %) and Gislaved (6.0 %) are municipalities that are famous for their entrepreneurial culture, yet there we found the lowest shares of entrepreneurs among women employed. The highest shares of entrepreneurs among the women, 15.2 per cent, are found in municipalities that are located *close to a larger town* (see figure 1).

How can we understand these differences between the two types of municipalities? Are there different regional gender contracts, population density, an industry structure with few dominant corporations or unemployment that shape the patterns? What is the role of industrial opportunities, such as tourism? The municipalities where over 10 per cent of employed women are entrepreneurs are all located by the coast of the Baltic Sea or on the island of Öland, i.e. municipalities with tourism opportunities.

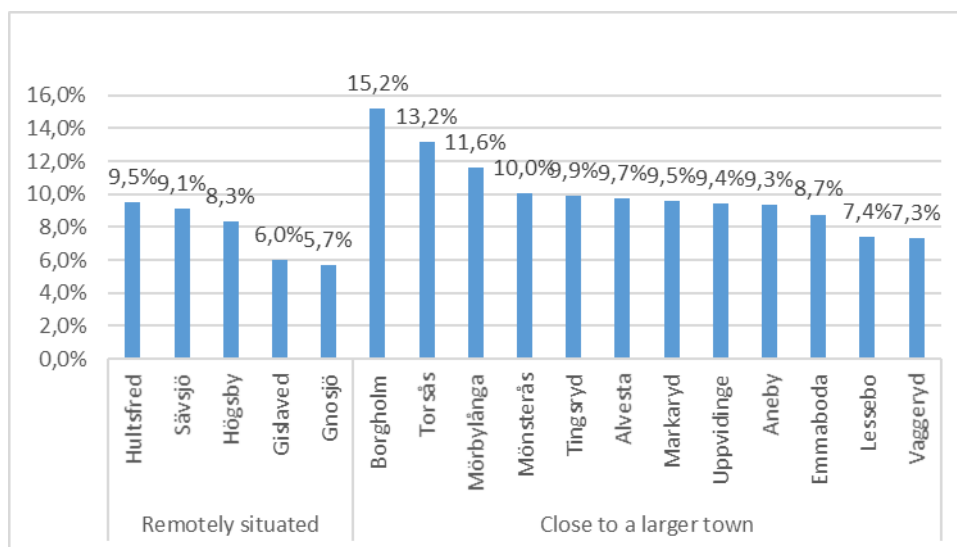


Figure 1 Shares of women entrepreneurs by women employed

In comparison with the shares of employed men that are entrepreneurs in the different rural municipalities, the pattern is similar. The lowest and highest shares of men who are entrepreneurs are found within the same municipalities as for the females⁸. Men are to higher

⁸ The lowest shares of men entrepreneurs by men employed are found in Gnosjö (10.6 %) and Gislaved (13.8 %), and the highest shares are found in Borgholm, (36.6 %), Torsås (28.8 %) and Mörbylånga (26.3 %).

extent business owners/entrepreneurs than women, no matter what type of rural area. This result indicates that the gender contract does not differ between types of rural municipalities. The results evoke questions that call for qualitative studies on a local level.

3.3 Industries dominating among rural women entrepreneurs

The women entrepreneurs are, in numbers, most represented in the industries of *Forest management* (518), *Hairdressing* (307), *Mixed farming* (131), *Restaurant and mobile food activities* (90), *Physical well-being activities* (88) and *Accounting and book keeping* (80). However, women entrepreneurs are present in a variety of industries. The results show that the 3 511 entrepreneurs are active in 332 different types of industries (see table 1).

Table 1 The ten most common industries sorted in descending order of the numbers of women entrepreneurs

Numbers of entrepreneurs	Industry
518	Forest management
307	Hairdressing
131	Mixed farming
90	Restaurant and mobile food activities
88	Physical well-being activities
80	Accounting and book keeping
53	Physiotherapists etc.
50	Retail sale of flowers and plants
50	Business and management consulting
44	Literary and artistic creation

3.4 Legal form, size and profitability of the businesses

Women run their businesses to a higher extent in the form of *self-employment/partnership* (80.4 %) than in *limited companies* (19.6 %). Most of them have no employees (75.5 %) or less than five employees (15.2 %). The women entrepreneurs who run their businesses as a *self-employment/partnership firm* have to higher extent small firms with less than five employees (99 per cent of the entrepreneurs). Among the entrepreneurs *employed in their own limited company*, the number of employees vary more. Among the limited companies 57 per cent have less than 5 employees, and 8 per cent run businesses with 20 up to 250 employees.

The women entrepreneurs *employed in their own limited company* are fewer, yet running larger companies than the entrepreneurs that are active in self-employment/partnership firms. The largest share of women entrepreneurs who run their businesses as *employed in their own limited company* were found in the well know ‘entrepreneurial areas’ Gnosjö (36.7 %) and Gislaved (29.3 %). In total however, these municipalities had the lowest shares of employed women being entrepreneurs.

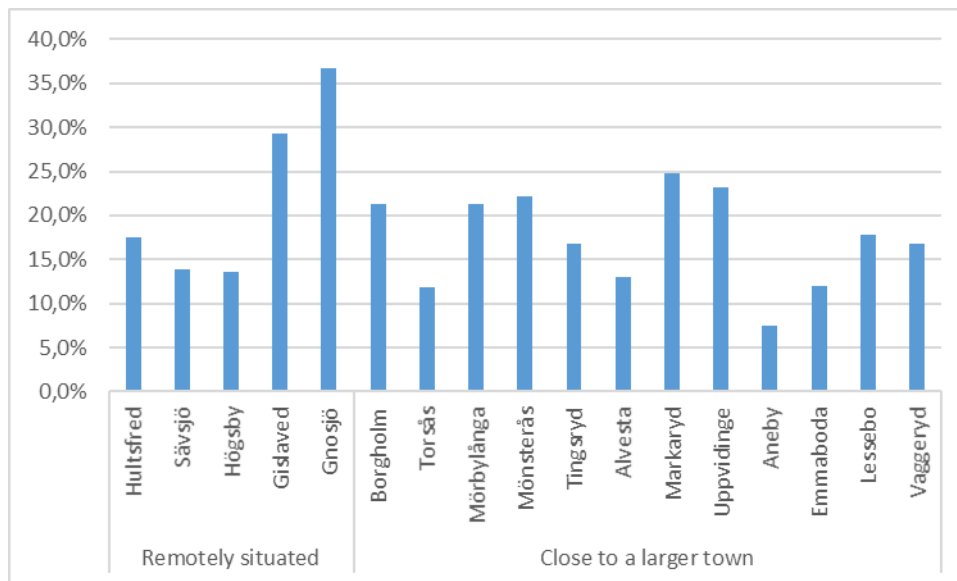


Figure 2 Shares of women entrepreneurs employed in their own limited company among the rural municipalities

Regarding profitability, we studied the net sales and the profit in the year 2012. A third of the entrepreneurs had a net sale less than SEK 300 000 and 12 per cent below SEK 49 000, yet 5 per cent had net sales of SEK 10 million up to 350 million. Thus, there is large variation.

This holds for the profit as well. As much as 15.9 per cent of the entrepreneurs declare a loss. Another 15.3 per cent have a profit of less than SEK 49 000. Yet, profits of between 1 and 15 million SEK are declared by 3 per cent of the entrepreneurs.

The highest net sales and profits were registered among those employed in their own limited company. These were also the companies that had the highest number of employees.

3.5 Size and profitability in different industries

We made a deeper investigation of the businesses in the 14 most common industries in the selected rural areas.⁹ Within 8 of these 14 industries, 80 up to 100 per cent of the entrepreneurs are solo entrepreneurs. Only in the industries *Retail sale in department stores with food etc.*, *General cleaning of buildings* and *Hairdressing* did we find entrepreneurs having more than 10 people employed. The women-owned businesses within the most common women dominated industries are thus small.

With regard to the size of net sales, there is diversity among the business in most of the industries. However, there are industries that stand out as more lucrative, and others as less lucrative. In three of the industries, most of the entrepreneurs have net sales between SEK 1 and 10 million. That is *Retail sale in department stores with food etc.* (87 %), *Retail sale of flowers and other plants* (79.1 %) and *Restaurant and mobile food activities* (59.3 %). However, within four of the industries, most entrepreneurs declare net sales less than SEK 100 000. These were, *Mixed farming* (36.1 %), *Forest management* (65.4 %), *Literary and artistic creation* (50 %) and *Other personal service activities* (48.1 %). In terms of profit there are 10 entrepreneurs within these female dominated industries with a profit over SEK 10

⁹ Since we were interested in if there were any differences between Sweden-born and foreign-born entrepreneurs, we selected the 10 most common industries for each group. This resulted in 14 relevant industries to study, as several of the industries are represented within both groups.

million. These entrepreneurs run their businesses within *Mixed farming, Forest management, Retail sale in department stores with food etc., Business and management consulting, Physiotherapists and Literary and artistic creation.*

3.6 The age of rural women entrepreneurs

When studying the age of the women entrepreneurs in the rural municipalities of Småland we can see that the entrepreneurs have a mean age of 54 years (median 57 years), which is also the mean age for the men entrepreneurs. In comparison with the mean age of the total employed, which is 44 years for both men and women, the entrepreneurs are on average older (see figure 3). We can see that 30 per cent of women entrepreneurs are in the age of 45 up to 54 years, 26.5 per cent are 55 up to 65 years old and 28 per cent are 66 up to 74 years old. It is a lower share among men entrepreneurs that are in the age of 66 years up to 74 years old, 23 per cent, than among women entrepreneurs. Thus, men entrepreneurs are in general younger than women entrepreneurs are. Moreover, only 15 per cent among both women and men entrepreneurs are younger than 39 years old.

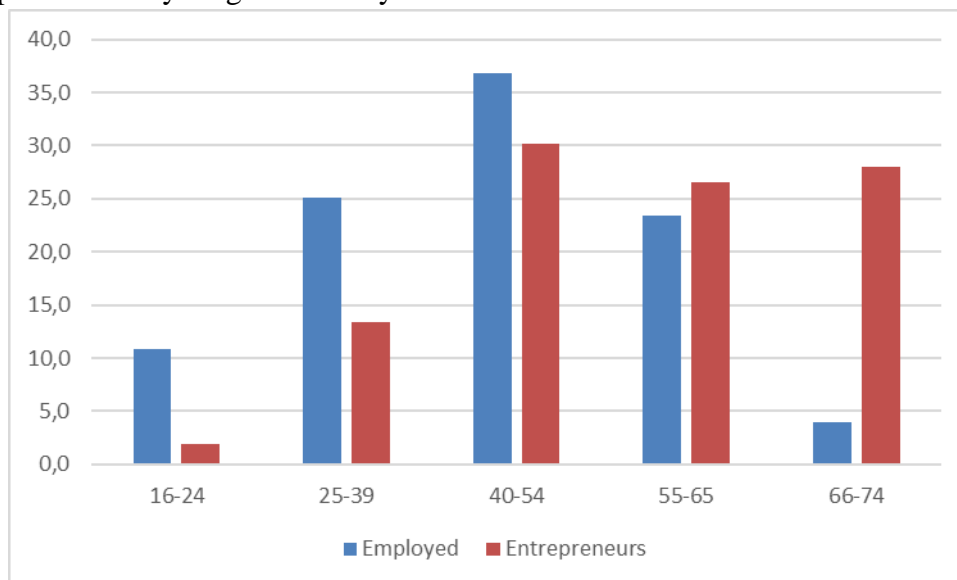


Figure 3 Shares of total employed and total entrepreneurs per age categories in the rural municipalities of Småland

However, the figure changes when removing the industry *Forest management*, since 58 per cent of women entrepreneurs and 67 per cent of men entrepreneurs in this industry are aged 66 years and older. Nevertheless, the results in figure 4 show that, beside that industry, 82-83 per cent of the entrepreneurs are aged 40 years or older, women or men. A higher share of women entrepreneurs (21 %), than men entrepreneurs (18 %), is aged 66 and older. If comparing to statistics on the national level for 2012, we find that 17 per cent of the women entrepreneurs were 61 years or older and for men the figure was 28 per cent (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2012). Women entrepreneurs in the rural municipalities in Småland are thus to a higher degree older than on the national level.

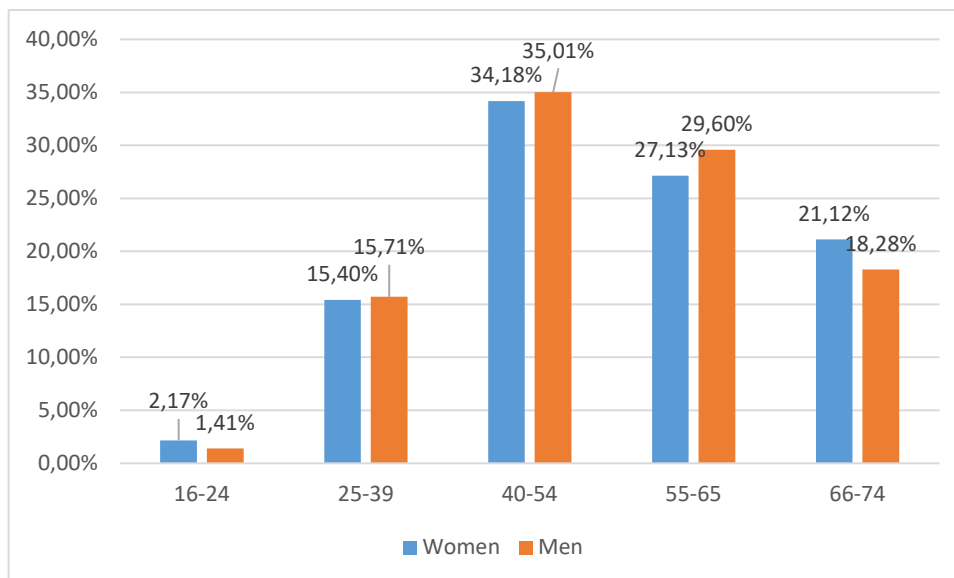


Figure 4 Shares of the entrepreneurs by age groups – women and men respectively

The age of the entrepreneurs varies with the different municipalities, still the shares of entrepreneurs younger than 39 years old are quite similar between the municipalities (see figure 5). The results do not show any significant differences between the two types of rural municipalities; *remotely situated* and *close to a larger town*. In the age group of 66 years old up to 74, the variation between the municipalities is the largest, with the share of employed women being entrepreneurs varying from 19 per cent to 40 per cent. In several of the municipalities (8) almost a third of the entrepreneurs are older than 66 years.

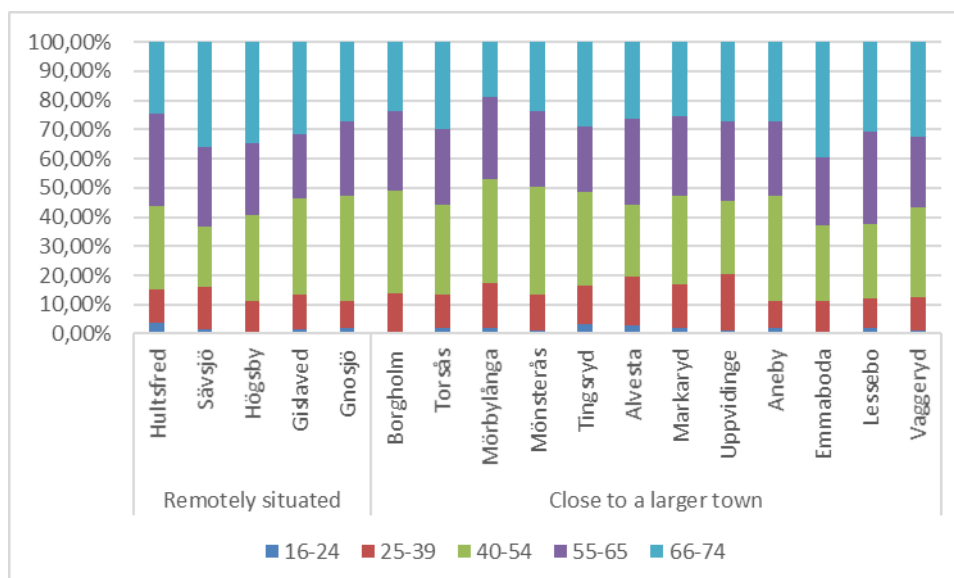


Figure 5 Shares of entrepreneurs per age category among the rural municipalities of Småland

3.7 Sweden- and foreign-born rural women entrepreneurs

Fully 89 per cent of the rural women entrepreneurs included in this pilot study are born in Sweden. However, within the group of employed foreign-born rural women, entrepreneurship is almost equally common as among the Sweden-born (8.2 per cent, compared to 9 per cent). The foreign-born women are entrepreneurs, in relation to their numbers of employed, to a higher extent than the Sweden-born women within 8 of the 17 municipalities. Nevertheless, within 5 of the municipalities the foreign-born are entrepreneurs to a significantly lower extent. The question emerges why foreign-born women are more represented as entrepreneurs in certain rural municipalities and less in others.

As for the Sweden-born, the foreign-born women have the lowest share of entrepreneurship in the group *Remotely situated* municipalities (figure 6). Does the context in these rural municipalities constrain women entrepreneurial activities in general and foreign-born women in particular or does the context enable salaried jobs? Does the context enable foreign-born women's entrepreneurial activities more than the Sweden-born women's, or are the foreign born more constrained in terms of receiving an employment?

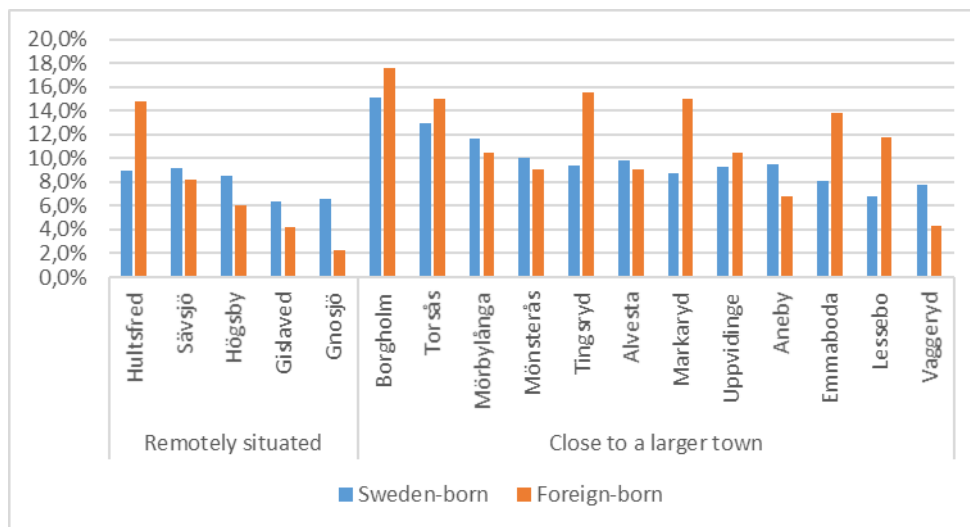


Figure 6 Shares of women entrepreneurs by women employed, Sweden-born and foreign-born respectively, among the rural municipalities

Table 2 presents the most common industries within which the foreign-born entrepreneurs are active. These industries are *Restaurants and mobile food activities, Hairdressing, Physical well-being activities, Other personal services activities* and *Forest management*. The most common industries for Sweden-born and foreign-born entrepreneurs respectively follow almost the same pattern, although differ in numbers and in ordering (cf. table 1 and 2). Yet, the Sweden-born entrepreneurs are, in numbers, significantly over-represented within the industries related to the ownership of *forests* and *farmland*, which may be due to inheritance of land. The foreign-born women, however, are over-represented in *Translation and interpretation* (7 out of 13), *Sales of cars and light motor vehicle* (4 out of 7), *Ambulatory and occasional retail sale of food etc.* (4 out of 4) and *Retail sale via stalls and markets of food* (3 out of 3).

Table 2 The ten most common industries sorted in descending order of the numbers of foreign-born entrepreneurs

Industry	Numbers of foreign-born entrepreneurs	Numbers of Sweden-born entrepreneurs
Restaurants and mobile food	45	45
Hairdressing	25	282
Physical well-being activities	14	74
Other personal service activities	13	21
Forest management	11	507
General cleaning of buildings	10	22
Buisness and other management consulting	8	42
Accounting and book keeping	7	73
Retail sale in department stores with food etc.	7	21
Translation and interpreting activities	7	6

The results in figure 7 show that among the Sweden-born entrepreneurs it is more common to run a limited company that you are employed in, than it is in the group of foreign-born entrepreneurs. This could mean that the Sweden-born entrepreneurs also have larger and more profitable businesses than the foreign-born. However, in some of the municipalities the foreign-born entrepreneurs are employed in their own limited company to the same extent as the Sweden-born group (see figure 7).

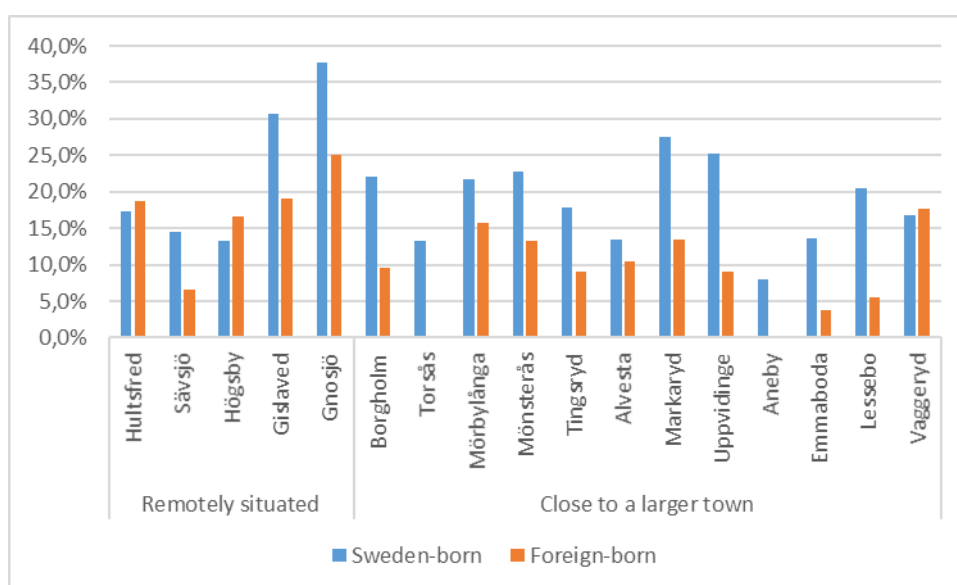


Figure 7 Shares of women entrepreneurs that are employed in their own limited company, Sweden-born and foreign-born respectively, among the rural municipalities

3.8 Lessons learned and questions emerging from the pilot study

From the pilot study, we learn that women in rural areas seem to run businesses to a larger extent than among the average population of women. With regard to the size of the businesses, the number of employees, legal form of business etc., the results are of no surprise given previous studies of women's entrepreneurship.

With regard to industries, the results from the pilot study in the region of Småland deviates from what one would expect from research so far on women's entrepreneurship and/or rural entrepreneurship. Compared to women's entrepreneurship on a national level, women in rural areas run businesses in male gender-coded industries to a higher extent. What stands out are the industries of Forestry and Mixed farming.

In the literature on *rural* entrepreneurship however, focus is primarily on farming and farm related businesses. In this perspective, it is clear from our pilot study that women's rural entrepreneurship is by no means solely farm related. Out of the women active in the 10 largest industries for rural women entrepreneurs, 51.5 per cent are active in non-farm related industries.

The most profitable businesses are however neither in female gender coded industries, nor in specific rural industries. Rather, the most profitable businesses are in industries such as manufacturing, wholesale and supermarkets.

In line with the trend that young people move to urban areas, and that women are often older than men when they start their businesses, we also find that the rural women entrepreneurs are of mature age. When comparing Swedish- or foreign-born rural women entrepreneurs, a significant difference concerns the industries in which they are involved. Our results confirm that foreignborn business owners are underrepresented in land based industries, such as agriculture and forestry.

Discussion and conclusions

Both the literature review and the quantitative pilot study elicit further questions in need of empirical investigation and theoretical analysis. Based on the above, we here present propositions and hypotheses for such inquiry, by means of quantitative and qualitative methods, which we will be employing within the next few years.

With regard to the industries rural women engage in, expectations from previous studies in gender and entrepreneurship would predict female gender coded areas, while studies in rural entrepreneurship would predict agriculture and forestry. From the pilot study, we see that women are engaged in agriculture and forestry (i.e. male gender coded operations), but also in other industries that are female gender coded. Hence, with regard to the industries we hypothesize:

H1a: Small businesses in rural areas of Sweden are less gender-segregated than the country average.

H1b: Women's small businesses in rural areas are less agriculture-centered than male businesses.

Expressed differently, the pilot study suggests that women are represented in a combination of traditionally rural industries, and in traditionally female industries. Previous studies have

shown that industries where women are overrepresented are seldom the most profitable industries. The pilot study suggest that this might be the case also for rural women entrepreneurs. Hence, we hypothesize:

H2: The most profitable women-owned small businesses in rural areas of Sweden are neither agriculture-based nor female gender coded.

In spite of the aging rural population, we found no studies on the age of rural women entrepreneurs in the literature review. From the pilot study, we make the following hypothesis regarding rural women entrepreneurs.

H3a: Rural women entrepreneurs are older than the national average, especially in remote areas

H3b: Rural women entrepreneurs are on average older than rural male entrepreneurs.

The pilot study also renders support for the idea that rurality is classed and raced in the sense that agriculture and forestry is primarily Swedish. Land is inherited in generations, and even though all women are disadvantaged in this process, this is even more true for the foreign-born. We hypothesize the following:

H4a: Sweden-born women are more likely to be land owners and engaged in agriculture and forestry than foreign born women.

H4b: Foreign-born women are more likely to be engaged in traditionally female gendered industries than are Swedish women.

H4c: Foreign-born women are more likely to be business owners in municipalities with high unemployment.

The literature review and the pilot study also gave rise to themes for further research with qualitative methods. We are, for example, intrigued by the following themes.

We propose that gender is done differently in the rural, in two simultaneous but contradictory ways. The women in the pilot study transcend the gendering of industries more often than in the urban, presumably due to the proximity of farming and forestry. At the same time, the literature review revealed that traditional gender-contracts/division of labor prevail in many areas, and also that gender stereotypes were drawn upon for marketing purposes. There is still a lack of studies taking a ‘doing gender’ perspective, which is needed to understand the complex, contextualized processes involved in the simultaneous enactment of rurality, gender and entrepreneurship.

The literature review also revealed the connection between women’s entrepreneurship and public welfare services, such as childcare and elderly care. Interview studies are needed to further understand the connection between the local availability of such services and women’s entrepreneurship. In international comparison, the Swedish public welfare services are relatively available also in the rural areas. In a rural-urban comparison within Sweden, the situation might be different. *We propose that the availability of public welfare services in the (remote) rural areas may have an impact on women’s entrepreneurship – for example*

regarding its extent, the age of women entrepreneurs and the industries they are able to engage in.

The importance of collective processes of entrepreneurship in rural areas is another theme in need of investigation. The reviewed literature displays more collective processes and discussions about co-preneurship than mainstream entrepreneurship studies do. As associations are not included in the database, other methods are needed to explore the extent of such entrepreneurship. Interactive research involving organizations such as Coompanion and LRF¹⁰ will be used in the continuation of this project for these research questions.

When it comes to other power dimensions, such as class and race/ethnicity, there is a whole range of issues, that need further inquiry. Where do these women run businesses in the rural areas? What are the constraining and enabling aspects? How does race/ethnicity affect their business and its development? And what is the role of women's entrepreneurship in providing employment for new immigrants?

Besides the research outlined above, there are a number of other important lines of inquiry, including other forms of non-business-related entrepreneurship. The value created by entrepreneurs is much more than profit and employment, and the organizational forms can be many and varied. Here, we have however focused entrepreneurship in the form of businesses.

¹⁰ LRF is the national farmers' association, with local offices in the whole country. Coompanion is a national network of advisors in cooperative entrepreneurship.

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