

Department of Social Research
University of Helsinki
Finland

WHO IS SERVING WHOM?

**AN AGENCY-FOR PERSPECTIVE ON ENTERPRISE
PROMOTION IN RURAL FINLAND**

Miira Niska

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences of
the University of Helsinki, for public examination in lecture room 10,
University main building, on September 11th, at 12 noon.

Helsinki 2015

Publications of the Department of Social Research 2015:13
Social Psychology

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Cover: Jere Kasanen
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Distribution and Sales:
Unigrafia Bookstore
<http://kirjakauppa.unigrafia.fi/>
books@unigrafia.fi
PL 4 (Vuorikatu 3 A) 00014 Helsingin yliopisto

ISSN-L 1798-9140
ISSN 1798-9132 (Online)
ISSN 1798-9140 (Print)
ISBN 978-951-51-1017-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-951-51-1018-3 (Online)

Unigrafia, Helsinki 2015

ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship is expected to serve a multitude of societal interests. It is assumed to enhance competitiveness, create jobs and services, and contribute to social and ecological development. As such, enterprise promotion has become an integral part of Finnish policymaking. In the rural context, enterprise promotion is an essential part of regional, agricultural and rural policies. Considering the governmental interests in entrepreneurship, a problem noted by both scholars and policy actors is that business owners do not make the most of public enterprise promotion. The present dissertation studies enterprise promotion in rural Finland from a *relational social psychological* perspective, by focusing on agency and interests.

Previous studies have commonly assumed that interests—conceptualised as goals, values or motives—are internal and fairly stable dispositions which, at least partly, guide peoples’ agency. It is commonly assumed that business owners’ agency needs to be driven by economic interests in order to serve society. Public enterprise promotion, thus, aims at encouraging small business owners and potential business owners to adopt an *entrepreneurial mind-set* and work towards business growth. Recently, however, policy actors have also noted the importance of social entrepreneurs, whose agency is driven by societal common good—not economic profit. Although commercial, growth entrepreneurs serve their own self-interests and social entrepreneurs serve the common good, both entrepreneur types are considered to serve society, with the former type contributing to economic development and the latter to social and ecological development.

One problem recognised by scholars and policy actors is that business owners’ interests in doing business do not necessarily align with the interests of policy actors. For example, in the rural context, empirical studies have demonstrated that small business owners’ agency is driven by interests such as personal autonomy, modest upkeep and the continuation of the family farm. Furthermore, studies have suggested that small business owners’ internal dispositions—especially an interest in personal autonomy—make them withdraw from public enterprise promotion.

The present dissertation takes a different approach on business owners’ agency and interests, and studies them from a relational social psychological perspective, drawing on Goffmanian frame analysis and social constructionism. Instead of individual dispositions, business owners’ agency and interests are approached as situated and embedded phenomena. Social scientific research on agency has mainly focused on the issue of *how* agents make things happen, while the question *‘for whom* do agents make things happen’ has been largely ignored. Unlike social scientists, economists have widely discussed the *agency relationships* between agents and their

principals. This dissertation adopts a relational social psychological perspective to elaborate economists' ideas of agency relationships and the concept of *agency-for*.

The dissertation consists of four independent sub-studies that examine rural business owners' *agency-for* with a special focus on its relation to societal interests and public enterprise promotion. Both quantitative survey data as well as qualitative interview and group discussion data are analysed. The empirical results demonstrate that rural business owners, as modern agents, are both capable and willing to adopt a multitude of principals. Besides their self-interest in personal autonomy and (modest) upkeep, rural business owners seem keen on framing their business actions as *agency for* various local principals, such as their employees, nature and rural vitality. However, they do not seem keen on the growth entrepreneurship framing.

Regarding public enterprise promotion—when viewed as an interaction process—business owners' principals may pose a problem. The functional interaction between policy actors and business owners requires a mutual understanding of the principal that is being served. However, public enterprise promotion is legitimate only when it serves the interests of society, be they economic, social or ecological development. Since rural business owners seem eager to frame their business actions as *agency for self*—but not in the sense of business growth—it might be difficult for policy actors to serve business owners' self-interests without losing the legitimacy of public enterprise promotion.

Furthermore, when adopting external principals, rural business owners seem to prefer local over national ones. Unless policy actors are authorised to serve local sustainable development, it may be difficult to negotiate over a shared principal. The dissertation suggests that rural business owners' *agency-for* aligns better with public enterprise promotion conducted within rural policy (with an emphasis on rural vitality) and multifunctional agricultural policy (with an emphasis on environmental and rural wellbeing), than within new regional policy or neoliberal agricultural policy—which both emphasise competitiveness.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Yrittäjyyteen kohdistuu nykyisin monenlaisia odotuksia. Yrittäjyyden toivotaan edistävän taloudellista kilpailukykyä, luovan työpaikkoja ja palveluita sekä edesauttavan kestävästä kehitystä. Onkin ymmärrettävää, että yrittäjyyden edistämisestä on tullut tärkeä poliittinen tehtävä, jota toteutetaan muun muassa alue-, maatalous- ja maaseutupolitiikalla. Edistämisyrittäjyydestä huolimatta poliittiset toimijat ja tutkijat ovat huomanneet, että yrittäjät hyödyntävät varsin heikosti julkisen sektorin tarjoamia edistämispalveluja. Tässä väitöskirjatutkimuksessa tarkastellaan maaseutuyrittäjyyden edistämistä *relationistisen sosiaalipsykologian* näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat toimijuuteen ja intresseihin liittyvät kysymykset.

Intressit ymmärretään usein yksilön sisäisinä ominaisuuksina, jotka ohjaavat – ainakin osittain – ihmisten toimijuutta. Yleinen oletus on, että mikäli yrittäjiä ohjaavat taloudelliset intressit, he tuottavat taloudellista voittoa, joka hyödyttää paitsi yrittäjiä itseään myös laajemmin yhteiskuntaa. Tästä syystä yrittäjyyden edistämispolitiikka pyrkii tyypillisesti rohkaisemaan pienyrittäjiä kasvuun. Viime aikoina on kuitenkin kiinnitetty yhä enemmän huomiota *sosiaalisiin, yhteiskunnallisiin ja ekologisiin yrittäjiin*, joita eivät ohjaa taloudelliset vaan sosiaaliset ja ekologiset intressit. Vaikka nämä yrittäjät eivät tuottaisi taloudellista voittoa, he hyödyttävät yhteiskuntaa sosiaalisen ja ekologisen kehityksen kautta. Poliittiset toimijat ja tutkijat ovat kuitenkin varsin tietoisia siitä, että taloudellisten, sosialisten ja ekologisten intressien sijaan maaseutuyrittäjiä ohjaavat ennemminkin pyrkimys itsenäisyyteen ja perheyrittäjien jatkuvuuteen. Aikaisemmissa tutkimuksissa on myös esitetty, että tällaiset intressit, erityisesti itsenäisyyden tavoittelu, tekevät ymmärrettäväksi yrittäjien kieltäytymisen ulkopuolisesta avusta.

Tässä väitöskirjatutkimuksessa yrittäjien toimijuutta ja intressejä lähestytään aikaisemmasta tutkimuksesta poikkeavalla tavalla. Toimijuutta ja intressejä ei tarkastella yksilön sisäisinä ominaisuuksina, vaan vuorovaikutustilanteissa rakentuvina ilmiöinä. Sosiaalitieteellinen tutkimus on tyypillisesti kiinnostunut kysymyksestä, miten toimijat saavat asioita tapahtumaan. Kysymykseen, kenen asialla toimijat ovat, on puolestaan kiinnitetty varsin vähän huomiota. Taloustieteissä sen sijaan on laajasti keskusteltu toimijan ja hänen päämiehensä välisestä suhteesta. Väitöskirjatutkimuksessa ajatusta toimijan ja päämiehen suhteesta kehitetään relationistisen sosiaalipsykologian avulla. Samalla osoitetaan päämiesnäkökulman hyödyllisyys tarkasteltaessa poliittisten toimijoiden ja yrittäjien välistä vuorovaikutusta.

Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä osatutkimuksesta, joissa yrittäjien toimijuutta tarkastellaan päämiesnäkökulmasta suhteuttaen sitä niin

yhteiskunnallisiin intresseihin kuin yrittäjyyden edistämispolitiikkaan. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan sekä kyselytutkimusaineistoa että haastattelu- ja ryhmäkeskusteluaineistoa.

Empiiriset osatutkimukset osoittavat, että maaseutuyrittäjät ovat halukkaita ja kykeneviä ottamaan monenlaisia päämiehiä. Itsenäisyytensä ja toimeentulonsa lisäksi tutkimuksiin osallistuneet maaseutuyrittäjät ilmoittivat palvelevansa yritystoiminnallaan erityisesti työntekijöidensä, luonnon sekä maaseudun etua. Perheyrietyksen jatkuvuus puolestaan ei kuulunut suosittujen päämiesten joukkoon.

Vaikka maaseutuyrittäjät kykenevät ottamaan monenlaisia päämiehiä, heidän suosimansa päämiehet voivat olla ongelmallisia yrittäjyyden edistämispolitiikan kannalta. Yrittäjyyden edistäminen edellyttää vuorovaikutussuhdetta poliittisten toimijoiden ja yrittäjien välillä. Toimivassa vuorovaikutussuhteessa toimijat jakavat käsityksen päämiehestä, jota vuorovaikutussuhde palvelee. Julkisella sektorilla toimivat yrittäjyyden edistäjät ovat velvoitettuja palvelemaan yhteiskunnan etua, oli kyse sitten taloudellista tai sosiaalisesta kehityksestä. Osatutkimukset kuitenkin osoittavat, että taloudellisen kasvun sijaan maaseutuyrittäjät ilmoittavat palvelevansa omia intressejään itsenäisyyden ja toimeentulon turvaamisen hengessä. Lisäksi ulkoisten päämiesten suhteen maaseutuyrittäjät vaikuttavat suosivan paikallisia päämiehiä kansallisten sijaan. Tämä tarkoittaa, että maaseutuyrittäjyyden kontekstissa kilpailukykyyn ja kansalliseen etuun tähtäävä yrittäjyyden edistäminen joutuu oletettavasti ratkomaan enemmän päämiestä koskevia vuorovaikutusongelmia kuin maaseudun elinvoimaan tähtäävä edistäminen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before starting to write these acknowledgements, I read about an ongoing Finnish study on dissertation acknowledgements. According to the study, such texts commonly present the dissertation process as a 'lonely journey'. I was baffled; a lot could be said about this journey, but it, most definitely, has not been a lonely one.

Above all, I am deeply indebted to my excellent main supervisor, Dr. Kari Mikko Vesala. I cannot thank you enough for the, sometimes lengthy, discussions we have had during this process. I am very privileged that you have invested so much time in supervising my work. Truly, you have been instrumental in developing my thinking and, for that, I am extremely grateful. (Any remaining flaws of this dissertation are naturally due to the thick-headedness of the student).

I am also deeply grateful to my second supervisor, Professor Darren Halpin. Not only did you give me constructive comments on my work but you also encouraged me when encouragement was truly needed. The fact that you agreed to be my second supervisor meant much more to me than you realise.

My utmost gratitude goes to the external examiners of this dissertation, Professors Sarah Jack and Mustafa Emirbayer, for their insightful suggestions and heartening comments. It was an honour that you agreed to examine my work.

During this dissertation process I have had the opportunity to be part of a brilliant research team, headed by Kari Mikko Vesala. I am thankful to my co-author Hannu Vesala for his collaboration on two articles included in this dissertation. Soili Peltola's defence last year was an important proof that dissertations can be successfully finalised—even though at times we had our doubts about it! My most long-term colleague in the team has been Jarkko Pyysiäinen. For years your office was the Goffmanian 'back stage', where I was able to step out of the character of a doctoral student. Thanks for putting up with me all those years! Besides being a great colleague, you are also a dear friend.

The discipline of Social Psychology at the Department of Social Research has been, at times, like a second home for me. I am grateful to the long term head of the discipline, Professor Anna-Maija Pirttilä-Backman, and the Department of Social Research for the opportunity to have an office space at Unioninkatu 37. The ability to work here has been important for several reasons, one of them being the smart, funny and inspiring colleagues around me: Salla Ahola, Päivi Berg, Jose Cañada, Katrina Jurva, Eeva Koltola, Hanna Konttinen, Tuuli Anna Mähönen, Anneli Portman, Florencia Sortheix and Annukka Valkeapää, among others. Katrina Jurva and Anneli Portman deserve extra acknowledgements for their outstanding work editing the

language of this dissertation. It has been a privilege to work with such awesome people!

I started my studies in Social Psychology 15 years ago in 2000. Since the beginning I was fortunate to become friends with Liisa-Maria Harju, Maarit Lankinen-Kivimäki and Heidi Löflund-Kuusela. Your friendship and social support during these years have been invaluable!

This dissertation has been funded in different stages by the Rural Policy Committee (YTR), Research Foundation of the University of Helsinki, Kyösti Haataja Foundation, Finnish Entrepreneurs' Foundation, and Oskar Öflund Foundation. I am grateful for your faith in this project.

Finally I want to thank family and friends, without whom this dissertation would not have been completed. My dear mother Eila Niska I thank for the wise words during this process. These words were especially appreciated when things did not go as the do in 'Strömsö'. My fantastic friends Laura Ahola, Tuomas Brock, Hanna Kuustie, Outi Olakivi and Saku Tiainen have made sure I also have a life outside Unioninkatu 37. You guys rock! Last but definitely not least I want to express my sincerest gratitude to my all time favourite colleague and best possible partner Antero Olakivi. Thank you for everything but most of all for believing in me.

Unioninkatu 37 (second floor), August 3, 2015
Miira Niska

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation is based on the following publications:

- I Niska, M., Vesala, H.T. & Vesala, K.M. (under review). Rural development and orientation of small business owners. Two social psychological readings of agency and values.
- II Niska, M., Vesala, H.T. & Vesala, K.M. (2012). Peasantry and entrepreneurship as frames for farming: reflections on farmers' values and agricultural policy discourses. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 52(4), 453–469.
- III Niska, M. & Vesala, K.M. (2013). SME policy implementation as a relational challenge. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 25(5–6), 521–540.
- IV Niska, M. & Vesala, K.M. (2015). New entrepreneurship policy and the encounter between policy implementers and entrepreneurs – a case study from Finland. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, 14(3), 321–339.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
ELY	The Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment
EU	European Union
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
LAG	Local Action Group
LEADER	Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFBD	On-farm business diversification
OSKE	The Centre of Expertise Programme
POMO	Programme of Rural Development Based on Local Initiative
R&D	Research and Development
SHOK	Strategic Centres for Science, Technology and Innovation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
YTR	Rural Policy Committee
WTO	World Trade Organization

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the largest newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat, published an interview with the world-famous social scientist Manuel Castells. In the interview Professor Castells argued that Finnish left-wing parties should finally accept that entrepreneurship is a leftist value (Saarikoski 2013, November 8). One might say that Castells was late; entrepreneurship was already in 2013 an important part of Finnish leftist rhetoric. In fact, in their Small Business Owner Programme, the Left Alliance of Finland states that self-employed and small business owners have always been an important part of the left-wing movement (Left Alliance of Finland 2010). In present-day Finland, entrepreneurship is endorsed by all political parties. This is understandable considering that there is no consensus on what entrepreneurship means or which interests it serves.

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as an ambiguous concept (e.g., Anderson & Starnawska 2008; Dodd, Jack & Anderson 2013; Hart 2003, 5–7). Vesala (2004, 7–8) demonstrates this ambiguity by identifying four different types of definitions of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship can be understood as (a) starting or (b) owning and managing a business enterprise. According to these definitions, everyone who starts, owns and manages an enterprise is an entrepreneur. These definitions are, however, also criticised. Some scholars argue that not everyone who starts and manages a business truly embodies entrepreneurship. Business enterprises may be managed in modest or conservative ways, whereas entrepreneurship should be understood as (c) dynamic, innovative and growth-oriented business behaviour (e.g., Carland et al. 1984; also Licht & Siegel 2006, 512). This third definition links entrepreneurship to a specific type of ‘tuned up’ or ‘super’ business agency (Pyysiäinen 2011, 14). Finally, entrepreneurship can be understood as (d) agency that is not restricted to the business context. During the last few decades, entrepreneurship has become a cultural discourse used in various contexts. Schools and universities offer entrepreneurship education to generate comprehensive entrepreneurial attitudes and a course of action that may lead to business ownership but also wage-work intrapreneurship or corporate entrepreneurship (see e.g., Jack & Anderson 1999; Komulainen et al. 2010; Korhonen 2012). The generation of entrepreneurship outside the business context is nowadays recognised as a solution to various societal problems, such as academic unemployment and the resource shortage of the public sector.

The ambiguity of the definition of entrepreneurship has been widely discussed by scholars. However, the ambiguity regarding the interests entrepreneurship serves has been less discussed. The common assumption is that by serving their own interests, entrepreneurs also serve the interests of society (Brandl & Bullinger 2009). According to the ideals of economic

liberalism, entrepreneurs act to maximise their own self-interested utility but the profit they produce also leads to economic development, which is of overall benefit to society (Kanniainen 1998; Venkataraman 1997; also Berglund & Wigren 2012). Economic liberalism, thus, suggests that societal interests are best served by growth-oriented business owners who maximise profit.

The interpretation of economic liberalism has also been challenged. Heelas and Morris (1992, 10–12) argue that individual profit-seeking behaviour does not enhance collective wellbeing. Rather, competition and self-interest seeking increase inequality and adversity of the poor. Besides being portrayed as engines of economic development, entrepreneurs who pursue profit are also portrayed as selfish predators who exploit other people (European Commission 2009; also Anderson, Dodd & Jack 2009; Dodd et al. 2013). Against the ideals of economic liberalism, the common good might not be achieved by focusing on self-interests but rather by striving for the common good (cf. Thévenot 2011). In recent decades, scholars and policy actors have become increasingly interested in entrepreneurs who are driven by environmental concerns and desire to benefit society (e.g., Anderson 1998; Berglund & Wigren 2012; Jutila & Vanhapiha 2012; Mair & Martí 2006; Parrish 2010; Steinerowski, Jack & Farmer 2008). These entrepreneurs are commonly called *social entrepreneurs*.

The discussion of traditional, commercial entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship highlights the ambiguity surrounding the interests entrepreneurs serve. The common assumption is that some entrepreneurs are driven by economic values and motives, whereas others are driven by social and environmental values and motives (see e.g., Berglund & Wigren 2012, 12; Steinerowski et al. 2008). Both entrepreneur types are, however, considered to serve society; the former contributes to economic development, the latter to social and ecological development. The common assumption is that for society, most problematic are business owners who pursue their own upkeep, personal autonomy and a pleasant lifestyle. These business owners are commonly called *lifestyle entrepreneurs*. Although lifestyle entrepreneurship, for example, provides services for local communities (e.g., Korsgaard & Anderson 2011), it is not society's favourite entrepreneurship type (e.g., Henderson 2002). Actually, governments invest considerable sums of money into making small business owners more 'entrepreneurial'—i.e., dynamic, innovative and growth-oriented. According to one recent estimate, in 2011, Finland granted approximately one billion euros to direct business support and more than 4 000 people were employed within public enterprise promotion (Pietarinen 2013).

In relation to governmental interest in entrepreneurship and investments in public enterprise promotion, a widely noted problem is the lack of enthusiasm among business owners in terms of public sectors' efforts (e.g., Audet & St-Jean 2007; Bosworth 2009; Phillipson et al. 2004, 33). Business owners' reluctance to take advantage of public enterprise promotion has

garnered attention from scholars and a great deal of research has discussed the issue (e.g., Audet & St-Jean 2007; Dalley & Hamilton 2000; Dyer & Ross 2007; Mole 2002; Quinn et al. 2014; Storey 2008). One interesting explanation for business owners' aversion towards public enterprise promotion relates to the interests entrepreneurship serves. Scholars have argued that business owners' interests are often antithetic to those of society. Instead of business growth and societal common good, small business owners are considered to value a modest upkeep, personal autonomy and pleasant lifestyle (e.g., Getz & Petersen 2005; van Gelderen & Jansen 2006; Reijonen 2008). These interests are considered to be reflected in the relationship between business owners and public enterprise promoters; since business owners have an interest to stay autonomous, they tend to withdraw from promotion relationships (e.g., Curran & Blackburn 2000; Curran 2000; North & Smallbone 2006). Other scholars suggest that business owners withdraw from promotion relationships because they are not convinced that enterprise promoters serve their interests (e.g., Bosworth 2009; Dyer & Ross 2007; Perren & Jennings 2005). What seems to be happening is that society wants to adjust small business owners' interests so that businesses would better serve society. At the same time, business owners' unwanted interests impede the successful implementation of public enterprise promotion policy.

The question of interests is crucial for understanding the relations between society and business owners. Entrepreneurship and small business studies have time and again adopted psychological and social psychological concepts such as goals, motives and values to explain what drives business owners' agency. Studies that discuss entrepreneurship, specifically growth, lifestyle and social entrepreneurship, have rather one-sidedly assumed that interests are business owners' internal properties or 'private states in individuals' (cf. Mills 1940). This dissertation takes part in the discussion on business owners' interests and how they relate to societal interests and public enterprise promotion. The topic is approached from the perspective of *relational social psychology*. Instead of internal properties, interests are viewed as constructions created within interaction processes (cf. Spillman & Strand 2013, 96). In line with Mills (1940, 904), human actors 'vocalize and impute motives to themselves and to others.' A profits motive is not the only 'vocabulary of motives' for business behaviour (Mills 1940, 908). For example, the emergence of social entrepreneurship highlights the fact that the common good has become appropriate motive for doing business. The dissertation elaborates the relational social psychological perspective on interests and agency by focusing on the *agency-for* aspect of agency. It demonstrates that in order to understand the problematic relation society has with business owners, one needs to pay attention to the various interests actors adopt for themselves and indicate to others.

This dissertation is comprised of four empirical sub-studies and the present summary, which comprehensively presents the theoretical framework used in the sub-studies. First, Chapter 2 provides the empirical

context of the dissertation, that is, enterprise promotion in rural Finland. Chapters 3 and 4 elaborate on the theoretical and meta-theoretical approaches to agency and interests in enterprise promotion policy. Chapter 5 presents the data and methods used in sub-studies. Chapter 6 summarises the main results of the sub-studies. The results are further discussed, contextualised and evaluated in Chapter 7.

2 RURAL ENTERPRISE PROMOTION AS PUBLIC POLICY

This chapter introduces the empirical context of the dissertation: rural enterprise promotion in Finland. Although there is a general agreement that entrepreneurship needs to be promoted, there is no consensus on how entrepreneurship should be promoted or who the optimal entrepreneurs are. These issues are discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2. Section 2.1 focuses on the distinction between SME policy and entrepreneurship policy. Public enterprise promotion can place emphasis on either one of them (cf. Storey 2008, 7). Section 2.2 focuses on enterprise promotion that takes place within Finnish regional, agricultural and rural policy making. These policies contain varying notions of how entrepreneurship should be promoted. In addition, they carry competing interpretations of the optimal entrepreneur. The last Section 2.3 focuses on the relationship between policy actors and business owners, and the challenges of public enterprise promotion that rise from the question: who is serving whom?

2.1 FROM SME POLICY TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICY

According to the ideals of economic liberalism, the best way for the government to promote entrepreneurship is to keep out of entrepreneurs' way. In practice this principle has been consistently broken, especially when it comes to small businesses. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)¹ have commonly been 'considered to be at a disadvantage compared with large firms' (Storey 2003, 475). A common justification for governmental intervention has been the 'market failure' caused by imperfect information, namely that: (a) individuals do not realise the benefits of starting a business, (b) small business owners do not realise the benefits of taking certain courses of action, or (c) financial institutions do not accurately assess their risk in lending to small businesses (Storey 2003). In order to overcome these market failures, the public sector has organised awareness campaigns, and provided training, advisory services and funding for small business owners (Storey 2003; 2008; also e.g., Hjalmarsson & Johansson 2003; Robson &

¹ The precise definition of SME varies between countries. In the European Union the term 'medium-sized enterprise' refers to a business with 50–249 employees, while a 'small firm' has 10–49 employees and a 'micro-firm' has less than 10 employees (e.g., Storey 2003, 474).

Bennett 2000).² This type of public enterprise promotion is commonly called *SME policy*.

In today's Europe, SMEs are valued 'as key sources of job creation and competitiveness'; thus, the justification for public intervention is not only 'market failure' but also the societal benefits SMEs produce (Storey 2003, 486). The emphasis on business growth has refocused enterprise promotion policy; SME policy today is not so much focused on the survival and maintenance of an inefficient SME sector (cf. Gilbert, Audretsch & McDougall 2004), as it is on the growth and success of SMEs (e.g., European Commission 2005; Robson & Bennett 2000, 193). The importance of SMEs has been increasing since the mid-1970s, a fact that has been explained, for example, by globalisation and international competition (e.g., Audretsch & Beckmann 2007; Audretsch & Thurik 2006, 27–29; Gilbert et al. 2004). In a globalised economy, it is difficult for high-wage countries to compete in large-scale production. Countries like Finland have high production costs, and because of this, 'companies have downsized the number of employees in their home countries' (Audretsch & Beckmann 2007, 40). These changes have led to high unemployment rates, which in turn have made policymakers look for new ways of creating jobs. Instead of merely promoting existing enterprises and encouraging them to grow, policy actors have also started to stimulate new, innovative and dynamic entrepreneurial activity (e.g., Audretsch & Beckmann 2007, 40–41; Audretsch & Thurik 2006). This type of public enterprise promotion is commonly called *entrepreneurship policy*.

Scholars have widely discussed the distinctions and confluences of SME policy and entrepreneurship policy. Among the main distinctions is the policy target. SME policy applies to existing enterprises, whereas entrepreneurship policy focuses on potential entrepreneurs—individuals who have not yet started, or have only recently started their businesses (e.g., Lundström & Stevenson 2005; Storey 2003, 2006).³ Another distinction between the policies is the means. Classic methods of implementing SME policy are training, funding and advisory services. Since entrepreneurship policy does not focus on existing enterprises but rather on potential entrepreneurs, its first goal is the promotion of an *entrepreneurial mindset* (see e.g., Lundström & Stevenson 2005, 57). There are, however, two ways of understanding this goal: the aim of the entrepreneurship policy is either to maximise the amount of high-growth businesses or to promote 'self-oriented' entrepreneurship in several fields of life—also beyond the business context

² Naturally entrepreneurship is also affected by governmental decisions on taxation, labour legislation, etc. However, in this study, the focus is on actions specifically done in the name of enterprise promotion (cf. North & Smallbone 2006).

³ Some scholars like Hart (2003, 6) emphasise business growth as an important distinction; traditional SME policy promotes small businesses regardless of their intentions to grow, whereas entrepreneurship policy is specifically interested in novelty, dynamism and continuous growth. However, today also SME policy generally recognises the importance of business growth.

(Lundström & Stevenson 2005, 44). Depending on the more specific goal, different techniques are applied. High-growth start-ups are promoted with *enabling environments*, such as high-technology clusters and science parks. In this sense, Finnish entrepreneurship policy is highly intertwined with innovation policy (Heinonen & Hytti 2008). An entrepreneurial mindset or orientation is produced, above all, with the help of entrepreneurship education (see e.g., Audretsch & Beckmann 2007; Jack & Anderson 1999; Komulainen et al. 2010).

One overarching theme between SME policy and entrepreneurship policy is networking, which is commonly viewed as essential for entrepreneurial success (Aldrich & Zimmer 1986). Networking has been traditionally understood as cooperation between firms (joined marketing, research and development [R&D], etc.) that enhance firm competitiveness (e.g., Barkley & Henry 1997). Networking between small and large businesses is sometimes called *symbiotic entrepreneurship* (Dana et al. 2008). However, besides promoting networks between firms, entrepreneurship policy explicitly promotes networks between businesses and public sector actors. This kind of network is sometimes called a *public-private-partnership* or a *social partnership*.

In Finland, enterprise promotion is not a sector policy but it intertwines, for example, with regional, innovation, education, agricultural and industrial policies. In addition to the more traditional SME policy, entrepreneurship policy has been part of Finnish enterprise promotion since the 2000s (Nordic Council of Ministeries 2010, 42). The final part of the current section introduces crucial agencies and stakeholders that implement enterprise promotion in Finland.

Like all over Europe, public enterprise promotion in Finland takes place at the supranational, national, regional and local levels (see e.g., Heinonen & Hytti 2008; Suutari, Mustakangas & Suvanto 2011; also North & Smallbone 2006). On the supranational level, EU structural funds—the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF)—as well as the supplementary rural development programme LEADER are, for example, widely used for enterprise promotion. On the national level, efforts such as The Regional Centre Programme, Strategic Centres for Science, Technology and Innovation (SHOKs) and The Centre of Expertise Programme (OSKE) have established innovations, businesses and jobs. On the regional and sub-regional level, important actors in enterprise promotion are, for example, the regional councils, the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres) as well as the Employment and Economy Offices (TE Offices). Cooperation between the public and private sectors in enterprise promotion is especially active on the regional and sub-regional levels, where enterprise promotion takes place also through the network of *Enterprise Agencies in Finland*, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and *Pro Agria*. On the local level, enterprise promotion has traditionally been the duty of municipalities that have implemented

industrial policy, first by creating physical prerequisites for enterprises and later also by providing funding, training and advisory services for local business owners. During the last decades, municipalities have started to collaborate more in enterprise promotion and sub-regional livelihood development companies owned by consortiums of municipalities have been established to take charge of sub-regional enterprise promotion. The programmes and actors differ, among other ways, in how they give emphasis to either SME policy or entrepreneurship policy. The complex system of Finnish enterprise promotion is discussed, for example, by Heinonen and Hytti (2008), Palm and Groop (2013), and Suutari et al. (2011).

2.2 ENTERPRISE PROMOTION IN RURAL FINLAND

Finland has been described as the most rural country in Europe⁴ (Uusitalo 1998, 125). This means that the problems that rural areas face (e.g., out-migration, declining economy and ageing population) are anything but trivial for the country. Internationally, enterprise promotion has become an important rural development strategy (Robinson, Dassie & Christy 2004). Also in Finland, enterprise promotion is an integral part of regional, agricultural and rural policies. This dissertation focuses on enterprise promotion that takes place within these policies.⁵ Despite the common expectation of entrepreneurship, the policies have defined in different ways how and why rural entrepreneurship should be promoted.

The following sections discuss the changes that have taken place within Finnish regional, agricultural and rural policies, and the ways in which enterprise promotion intertwines with these policies. A common denominator for many policy changes is the rise of neoliberalism⁶ and Finland's turn from a planned economy to competitive economy (see e.g., Alasuutari 2004; Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2006; Patomäki 2015). Finland was a country of state control and large public sector until the 1980s. However, during the last decades, the new discourse of an ineffective public sector and effective free market has been obediently adopted (see Patomäki 2015). Regional, agricultural and rural policies have all dismantled state control and started to rely more heavily on entrepreneurship.

⁴ In 2013, the average density of Finland was 18 inhabitants per square kilometre. For the sake of comparison, the population density of the Netherlands was 447 inhabitants per square kilometer (Statistics Finland 2014). In this study, possible meanings of 'rural' are not discussed (cf. Moseley 2003). Rural refers to municipalities defined as rural by the Ministry and Agriculture and Forestry (see Malinen et al. 2006).

⁵ Despite the outline, rural entrepreneurship is naturally also affected by policies that target business owners in general regardless of where they live.

⁶ With the term neoliberalism I refer to a doctrine that frames societal problems with market-based ideals like efficacy and competitiveness (cf. Patomäki 2015, ii).

2.2.1 REGIONAL POLICY AND ENTERPRISE PROMOTION

In Finland, the political discussion on ‘problematic areas’ began already in the 1950s (Uusitalo 2009, 205; Vartiainen 1998, 3). Post-war economic development and structural change centralised economic activity and population to large towns and cities. Agricultural employment decreased rapidly, and fast industrialisation and urbanisation processes of the 1960s and 1970s created excessive challenges for regional development (Tervo 2005). Scholars have identified various stages in Finnish regional policy development (see e.g., Eskelinen 2001; Moisio 2012; Vartiainen 1998), with one of them being the move from the old ‘welfare state policy’ to a new ‘competitiveness policy’ (see Moisio & Vasanen 2008).

The old welfare state policy emphasised economic growth, strong nation and national ownership. The focus was on infrastructure building, the industrialisation of the nation and the creation of a welfare state (e.g., Moisio 2012; Tervo 2005). In the 1960s, an important means of regional development was the decentralisation of national industrial plants (Moisio 2012, 80). The regional policy of the time emphasised regional and social equality but it generally served national interests (e.g., Moisio 2012). However, in the 1990s, Finland turned towards programme-based regional development and a ‘new regional policy’ (e.g., Moisio 2012). An integral part of this policy is the competitiveness rhetoric: nations and regions of the global world compete with each other, and the fittest will survive (Bristow 2005, 286). According to the rhetoric, regional competitiveness is best created by promoting knowledge-based economic activities, innovations and partnerships (e.g., Bristow 2005; Moisio 2012).

The turn to programme-based regional development preceded Finland’s accession to the European Union (Vartiainen 1998). After Finland became a member of the EU in 1995, the new regional policy has combined national regional development with the EU’s supranational regional policy. The structural funds ESF and ERDF have become important regional policy instruments (Silander, Tervo & Niittykangas 1997; Tervo 2005). However, for nearly ten years (2001–2009), the flagship of the new Finnish regional policy was the national Regional Centre Programme (cf. Eskelinen 2001, 65; see also Tervo 2005, 278). The programme had a goal of creating approximately thirty to forty competitive city regions alongside the Helsinki metropolitan area⁷ (Uusitalo 2009, 212; also Rosenqvist 2002).

The new regional policy and the Regional Center Programme have been guided by the idea of regional vitality; regions are expected to identify their key business sectors—either those currently deemed as important or those

⁷ The latest phase of regional policy has a tendency to focus more on a few metropolis areas (Moisio 2012). This ‘metropolis-policy’ emphasises international competition and national economy; the survival of Finland is portrayed to rely mainly on the competitiveness of the Helsinki area (Moisio & Vasanen 2008).

with the greatest potential to be—whose promotion and development the public sector is involved in (see Barkley & Henry 1997; Silander et al. 1997). Ideally the sectors have national, perhaps even global, significance (cf. Tervo 2005, 278). Instead of direct support for individual enterprises, resources have been allocated for the development of local business environments (e.g., Uusitalo 2009, 228). The Regional Centre Programme has developed, for example, networks and partnerships, industry clusters, centers of excellence, and science parks (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2010). The Finnish new regional policy has, thus, clearly become intertwined with the entrepreneurship policy; both stimulate new, innovative and dynamic entrepreneurial activity (cf. Audretsch & Beckmann 2007).

2.2.2 AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND ENTERPRISE PROMOTION

Before the 1950s, Finland was an agrarian society characterised by agriculture and forestry. Land ownership was the main socio-political question and settlement policy was a crucial feature of governmental efforts; the Finnish government distributed land to a landless population, creating a settlement structure based both on small family farms and a group of autonomous peasantry (Granberg & Peltonen 2001; Moisio & Vasanen 2008). After the wars of the 1940s, Finnish agriculture was in poor condition. Finland strived for self-sufficiency in food and public interventions were created to secure increase in food production (e.g., Alasuutari 1996). Finnish farmers took up the baton of producing food for the nation. In the 1950s, an increase in productivity was obtained through agricultural modernisation strategies of scale-enlargement, intensification and specialisation (van der Ploeg et al. 2002). Besides securing food production for the nation, the national agricultural policy aimed at securing farmers' income levels (e.g., Granberg & Cside 2003; Silvasti 2010, 26–27). The system of agricultural subsidies initiated in 1956 solidified farming as national food production, protected by the government (Katajamäki et al. 2001).

Finnish agricultural policy has been criticised since the agricultural overproduction of the 1960s. Despite the criticism, until the 1990s there was a consensus on the goals of agricultural policy: production must be supported, subsidies are acceptable and farmers are a special case among rural entrepreneurs (Alasuutari 1996; Granberg & Cside 2003; Katajamäki et al. 2001). When Finland started the negotiations over its accession to the European Union, the pressure of neoliberal agricultural policy proliferated. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU is geared towards competition and an open market; European farmers should be able to compete in the global market, especially when disadvantageous circumstances are compensated (Alasuutari 1996, 72). Although neoliberalism is considered to be the dominant ideology of the CAP, the EU has continued to practice productionist agricultural policy. Finland, for

example, receives support from the EU but is also allowed to support national agriculture with national funds. According to Harvey (2005, 71), Europeans protect their agriculture while insisting upon free trade in everything else. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is constantly pressuring the EU to end intensive collaboration between agriculture and the public sector.

One justification for the collaboration between agriculture and the public sector has developed around the concept of *multifunctionality*. Besides the function of food and fiber production, agriculture also shapes the landscape, provides environmental benefits, and contributes to the socio-economic viability of rural areas (e.g., OECD 2001; Renting et al. 2008; Zander et al. 2007). According to multifunctionalism, the public sector needs to support agriculture because farms are supplying public good, not in order to reward production (Jordan & Halpin 2006, 33).

Researchers have widely discussed CAP's competing ideologies of neomercantilism, neoliberalism and multifunctionalism (e.g., Dibden et al. 2009; Erjavec and Erjavec 2009; Potter and Tilzey 2005). An interesting commonality is that they all endorse entrepreneurship on farms (e.g., Pyysiäinen 2011). The commonly accepted chant is that the only way for farmers to survive is by becoming entrepreneurial (Alsos et al. 2011; North & Smallbone 2006; Phillipson et al. 2004).

According to neoliberal ideals, farms should not depend on public subsidies to exist but rather should rely on the profitability of farming. If farming is not profitable, farmers need to find a way to make it profitable or quit farming altogether (see e.g., Phillipson et al. 2004). Neoliberalism, thus, endorses the entrepreneurial farmer as an independent risk-taker who does not rely on state support (cf. Halpin & Guilfoyle 2004). Neomercantilism endorses the entrepreneurial farmer as a competitive producer. Both ideologies advocate the intensification of production, cost-reduction and economies of scale, but differ in their ideas of the relationship between agriculture and the public sector; neoliberalism wants to cut ties, neomercantilism wants to keep them.

Multifunctionalism differs from the other two ideologies in that it endorses entrepreneurial farming as on-farm business diversification (OFBD). Entrepreneurial farmers add value by processing their products or engaging in new business ideas, such as farm tourism. These multifunctional farmers are also called *new peasants* (van der Ploeg 2009) or *ecological entrepreneurs* (Marsden & Smith 2005). Although in line with neomercantilism, multifunctionalism wants to keep the ties between agriculture and the public sector; multifunctionalism does not emphasise primary production as the basis for subsidising farmers. Instead of being instruments within the national food strategy, farmers are seen as agents who deliver public policy objectives such as environmental protection, countryside management and animal welfare (Phillipson et al. 2004, 37).

Although there is no consensus on the nature of the entrepreneurial farmer, there does seem to be agreement that farmers are not sufficiently entrepreneurial (e.g., Phillipson et al. 2004). Agricultural policy has, thus, pursued the promotion of entrepreneurship on farms. Traditionally the public sector has provided technical advice to farmers; experts have provided advice on how to increase the quality and quantity of their production. Nowadays, training and advisory services focus even more on entrepreneurial and managerial skills; farmers learn, for example, about marketing and business thinking (Pyysiäinen 2011, 21; also e.g., Phillipson ym. 2004; North & Smallbone 2006). SME policy is therefore also implemented in the farm context; experts provide advisory services, training and funding⁸ for existing farm businesses in order to enhance competitiveness. However, entrepreneurship policy is also implemented in the farm context. Pyysiäinen and Vesala (2013; also Pyysiäinen 2011) studied enterprise promotion in the farm context and noted that Finnish agricultural experts did not describe their work primarily as training and consulting the farmers, but rather as activating and encouraging the farmers. The goal was to change the *mindset* of the farmers rather than increase farm productivity. The experts talked about generating entrepreneurial thinking and mindset (also Niska, Olakivi & Vesala 2014). The creation of an entrepreneurial mindset has been a current topic in Finnish farm context. However, the discussion on partnerships and knowledge and innovation systems has only recently become more frequent in the farm context (see Lehto 2014; Vihinen & Vesala 2007; YTR 2009, 111).

2.2.3 RURAL POLICY AND ENTERPRISE PROMOTION

Finnish rural policy emerged and matured in the 1980s. The roots of the policy lie in the Finnish village action movement and the Rural Planning Society (Granberg & Csirtes 2003; OECD 2008, 93; Uusitalo 2009, 20). The early rural policy of the 1980s had a strong national character (see e.g., Hyyryläinen & Rannikko 2000, 21). Its mission was to diversify the rural production structure and improve living conditions in rural areas (e.g., Granberg & Csirtes 2003). Although the ideas of social and regional equality were present, the interests of the state—e.g., national defense, industrialisation and construction of the welfare state—played ‘a major factor behind rural issues’ (Ruuskanen 1999, 224; see also Moisio 2012). The crucial role in the rural policy of the 1980s was played by the state government and municipalities (Granberg & Csirtes 2003). In the 1990s, the

⁸ Agricultural subsidies represent funding provided by the public sector but they are not part of SME policy. The legitimacy of agricultural subsidies is based on the notion that farmers are not—and cannot be—truly entrepreneurial in the sense of neoliberalism. Besides their own interests, farmers also serve national and rural interests.

EU brought new principles to rural development; Finnish rural development work became programme based, a bottom-up approach replaced top-down development, and partnership concept encouraged public sector to collaborate with the third and private sectors (see e.g., Katajamäki et al. 2001; Mustakangas & Vihinen 2003).

Finnish rural policy is commonly divided into ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ rural policy. Broad rural policy brings the rural perspective into governmental decision-making and sector policies (e.g., Katajamäki et al. 2001, 16). An important tool of broad rural policy is the national Rural Policy Programme compiled by the Rural Policy Committee (YTR). From 2014 to 2020, the sixth national Rural Policy Programme is being implemented in Finland. Narrow rural policy refers to rural development work (e.g., Katajamäki et al. 2001, 17). Finland’s accession to the EU has increased and diversified rural development instruments (Katajamäki et al. 2001). In particular, the integration of the EU’s LEADER programme⁹ with national narrow rural policy has been a success (Hyyryläinen 2007; OECD 2008, 130; Pylkkänen & Hyyryläinen 2004). LAGs—which are in charge of local LEADER development—have become crucial actors of rural development work in Finland.¹⁰

According to the OECD (2008, 91), Finland is one of the pioneer countries in building a rural policy that is detached from the agricultural perspective (also e.g., Jordan & Halpin 2006, 38). This kind of a rural policy represents the ‘new rural paradigm’; instead of agriculture, farm income and subsidies, new rural policy focuses on competitiveness, rural enterprises and investments (OECD 2006). Since the aim is competitiveness, the renewal of the rural economic structure, and new sources of livelihood, the importance of rural enterprises and entrepreneurship is highlighted (Granberg & Csité 2003; Ruuskanen 1999; also Uusitalo 2009, 45–46). Today’s rural development leans heavily on enterprise promotion (see e.g., Robinson et al. 2004). However, in rural policy, the focus is not merely in growth entrepreneurship. As Moseley (2003, 60–61) states, local development needs *community entrepreneurs* as well as *business entrepreneurs*. While business enterprises turn profits and create jobs, community enterprises have both commercial and social purposes; namely, they provide local services and contribute to local sustainable development (Moseley 2003, 61; also e.g., Jutila & Vanhapiha 2012; Phillipson et al. 2004, 36). Both lifestyle entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs could, thus, represent community entrepreneurs.

⁹ At the end of the 1980s, the EU realised that in addition to agricultural policy, there is a need for a more comprehensively ‘rural’ policy. The LEADER Programme was launched at the beginning of the 1990s to fill this void. LEADER highlights area-based and bottom-up approaches to development work, innovative projects and local partnerships (e.g., Hyyryläinen 2007; Moseley 2003, 11–14).

¹⁰ In Finland LAGs are one-third municipal officials, one-third associations and enterprises, and one-third rural residents (see OECD 2008, 131; Uusitalo 2007).

According to Moseley (2003, 64), there are two ways to promote rural entrepreneurship: enhance the 'context for enterprise' and deliver assistance to business people. Although Moseley lists some tools of entrepreneurship policy, namely public private partnerships, the emphasis is clearly on SME policy (cf. North & Smallbone 2006). The tools include awareness raising, education, training and business support services (Moseley 2003, 64–66). In Finland rural policy includes features of both SME policy and entrepreneurship policy. According to the fifth national Rural Policy Programme (YTR 2009, 83), rural entrepreneurship should be diversified and developed mainly through training and advice services (i.e., SME policy). However, entrepreneurship policy is also present, especially when intertwined with innovation policy. The fifth national Rural Policy Programme (YTR 2009) stated that innovations and innovation policy are crucial for rural development. Since cluster development is considered to be easier in urban, as compared to rural, areas (see e.g., Anttiroiko et al. 2006), the Rural Policy Programme suggests that rural business might want to adopt innovations instead of creating them (YTR 2009, 75). Scholars such as Barkley and Henry (1997) state that rural communities and local policy actors have difficulty identifying good industries and firms to target development efforts. For this reason, the likelihood of a rural cluster being successful is small (Barkley & Henry 1997). However, the Rural Policy Programme acknowledges the potential of rural micro clusters and enabling environments (e.g., YTR 2009, 76). For example, Finnish LAGs have contributed to a generation of new entrepreneurship by improving the operational environment of small businesses (e.g., Hyyryläinen 2007; Pylkkänen & Hyyryläinen 2004, 28; Vesala & Vihinen 2011).

2.2.4 COMPETING INTERESTS OF RURAL ENTERPRISE PROMOTION

Although regional, agricultural and rural policies all promote entrepreneurship, the relationship between the policies is far from clear. According to Uusitalo (2009), Finnish rural policy developed from the inadequacies of both regional and agricultural policies in securing the vitality of rural areas. The interest conflict between regional policy and rural policy can be seen as a debate over urban and rural development, and national and local interests. 'Old' regional policy focused on the decentralisation of national industrial plants and municipalities competed over the geography of manufacturing. Scholars suggest that this policy not only favoured urban over rural areas, but also served national interests above local ones (Moisio 2012; Uusitalo 2009, 15). 'New' regional policy has highlighted the development of clusters and regional centers, and scholars like Rosenqvist (2002; see also Murray 2011, 43) argue that again regional policy favours

urban over rural areas¹¹. In regional policy, rural entrepreneurship serves regional but also national interests; in rural policy, rural entrepreneurship serves above all the interests of rural areas.

The interest conflict between agricultural policy and rural policy can be viewed as a debate over agriculture versus non-farm, rural small business sector (e.g., Hyyryläinen & Rannikko 2000). Rural policy was, for a long time, synonymous with the development of agriculture (e.g., Phillipson et al. 2004, 35). This is peculiar, considering that the development—that is, modernisation—of agriculture from the 1950s onwards meant that agriculture employed dramatically fewer people than before and, thus, sped up migration to cities (Hyyryläinen & Rannikko 2000, 25). In 2007, agriculture provided employment for 3.1 per cent of Finns; in rural areas the percentage varied between 4.6 and 12 per cent (Niemi & Ahlstedt 2012, 84). The relationship between agricultural policy and rural policy has been problematic due to their different ethos. Neoliberalist agriculture policy is commonly perceived to be harmful for rural areas (e.g., Potter & Tilzey 2007). Neomercantilist agricultural policy is based on subsidies and safeguarding agricultural production, whereas rural policy is based on renewal of the rural economic structure (e.g., Hyyryläinen 2007, 32; OECD 2008, 135). However, multifunctionalist agricultural policy with its emphasis on OFBD and rural vitality is, in many ways, compatible with the ethos of rural policy. This, however, might not please everyone (see e.g., Jordan & Halpin 2006, 36).

2.3 INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE ON ENTERPRISE PROMOTION

The preceding section discussed the competing interests entrepreneurship serves at the policy level. The issue of interest becomes even more problematic when focus is shifted from policymaking to policy implementation. From the *interpretive perspective* (Grin & van de Graaf, 1996; Patton et al. 2003; Yanow 1996; see also Häikiö & Leino 2014), policy implementation can be viewed as an interactive relationship that takes place between three actor groups: policymakers, policy implementers and policy targets.¹² Grin and van de Graaf (1996) argue that functional interaction between these groups enhances policy implementation—while dysfunctional interaction impedes it. The functionality of the interaction is influenced by the interpretations different actor groups make of public policies and their implementing actions (Grin & van de Graaf 1996). The interpretive approach,

¹¹ Scholars naturally also argue that the metropolis-policy, which mainly targets the Helsinki region, belittles the role and interests of rural areas (see e.g., Saartenoja, Suutari & Jumppanen 2001).

¹² The interpretive approach on policy implementation applies, for example, the ideas of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology (Yanow 1996, 4).

thus, focuses on the meanings of policies, as well as the processes where these meanings are communicated and interpreted (e.g., Grin & van de Graaf, 1996; Häikiö & Leino 2014; Patton et al. 2003; Yanow 1996, 8–9).

Research on enterprise promotion has often been interested in the perspective of policy actors (e.g., Quinn et al. 2014, 206). However, it is not just policy actors (i.e., policymakers and policy implementers) who make sense of policies and their implementation processes. Instead of being passive recipients of political influencing, policy targets (in this case rural business owners or potential business owners) are also active meaning makers whose interpretations have an effect on the interaction process. Considering the competing or even conflicting interests that entrepreneurship serves on the policy level, interesting questions include: (a) *how do rural business owners interpret their business actions in relation to policies introduced in the Section 2.2?*, and (b) *how do these interpretations affect the implementation of public enterprise promotion when viewed as an interactive relationship?*

Previous studies suggest that small business owners and, specifically, *rural* small business owners interpret their business actions in ways that are antithetic to policy discourses. Instead of growth entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs, non-farm business owners represent lifestyle entrepreneurs driven by the need for subsistence, personal autonomy and an independent lifestyle (e.g., Anderson & Ullah 2014; Audet & St-Jean 2007; Reijonen 2008). In line with non-farm small business owners, it has been suggested that farmers interpret farming as ‘traditional peasantry’ driven by lifestyle and the continuation of the family farm (e.g., Hangasmaa 2011; Katila 2000; Silvasti 2001). These studies suggest that policy discourses might not translate into grass-roots level interpretations. However, especially in the farm context, this notion has also been challenged. Some scholars argue that instead of traditional peasantry, farmers interpret their actions more and more in line with agricultural policy discourses. Although neomercantilism and productionist interpretations are often emphasised (e.g., Burton & Wilson 2006), farmers are also found to interpret their actions as entrepreneurship (e.g., Vesala & Vesala 2010).

It has been discussed in some previous studies that business owners’ interpretations of their business actions might have an effect on their relationship with public enterprise promoters. Some have argued that business owners withdraw from the relationship precisely because they are so concerned about their autonomy and independence (Curran & Blackburn 2000; Curran 2000; North & Smallbone 2006; Dyer & Ross 2007). Others, however, assert that the real problem in the relationship is not the way in which business owners interpret their *own* interests but the way that they interpret enterprise promoters’ interests in relation to their own interests. Instead of serving the interests of the business owners, enterprise promoters are interpreted to serve values and missions alien to business owners; for

example, they are interpreted to serve their own employment (e.g., Bosworth 2009, 672; Dyer & Ross 2007, 133; also Perren & Jennings 2005).

Based on previous research, the matter of who serves whom in enterprise promotion policy seems highly ambiguous. Firstly, business owners are viewed as business agents who serve their own self-interests by procuring their subsistence and maintaining their autonomy. Secondly, public enterprise promoters are viewed as agents who implement promotion policy so that business owners would better serve the interests of society that is business growth and common good. Thirdly, the fact that business owners have interests deemed as undesirable by society has been suggested to impede enterprise promotion policy designed to address these interests.

In this dissertation, this paradox is discussed by using the concept of *agency-for*. The concept draws from the agent–principal relationship discussed mainly in economics, but also in sociology. The next two chapters introduce the theoretical concept of *agency-for* and the meta-theoretical perspective from which *agency-for* is discussed in this dissertation. In Chapter 3, *agency-for* is observed in the work of economists and sociologists; in Chapter 4, *agency-for* is dealt with in the light of relational social psychology.

3 FROM AGENCY PROBLEM TO ACTING ON BEHALF OF SELF AND OTHERS

Although agency is among the key concepts of the social sciences, it is a cryptic one. Campbell (2009) clarifies the muddled discussion on agency by distinguishing between two conceptions of the phenomenon. According to the first conception, agency refers to actor's capacity and willingness to act; agents have the power to 'engage in actions' and 'realize their chosen goals' (Campbell 2009, 408; also Fuchs 2001). The second conception defines agency through its relationship with social structures; agents act independently of structural constraints and even alter social structures (Campbell 2009; also Fuchs 2001). This second conception highlights the fact that agents do not act in a vacuum but rather in relation to structures. Some scholars emphasise structural power and 'insist that acting occurs under structural conditions', others work to bridge the gap between agency and structure (Fuchs 2001, 25). Giddens' (1984) structuration theory is one famous attempt to deal with the duality of structure and agency¹³; although structure is viewed as a formative position in social action, agents' ability to modify structures is also acknowledged (see also e.g., Bandura 2001; Heiskala 2000).

Both conceptions of agency have been used in entrepreneurship and small business studies. The first conception is adopted, for example, in studies that explain successful entrepreneurship by internal features or traits of the entrepreneur, such as the need for achievement, locus of control and overconfidence (e.g., Koellinger, Minniti & Schade 2007). The second conception is adopted in studies that discuss the relationship between entrepreneurs (i.e., agents) and the structure in which they operate. Structural power over agency is the focus, for example, in the discussion on *necessity entrepreneurship* or *forced entrepreneurship*, where people have 'started their businesses after a previous period of unemployment and due to a lack of better work alternatives' (Block & Koellinger 2009, 193). For these business owners, entrepreneurship is not a choice but an end result of structural duress. However, instead of structural power over agency, entrepreneurship and small business studies commonly focus on an agent's power over structures (e.g., Berglund & Wigren 2012). According to Berglund and Gaddefors (2010, 140) 'we usually think of entrepreneurs first of all as an effort, which one way or another, changes structures.' Furthermore, scholars like Jack and Anderson (2002) refer to structuration theory, and bridge the gap between agentic entrepreneurs and their structure using the concept of *social embeddedness*. By embedding—or becoming part of the social

¹³ Another famous attempt is Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus (see e.g., Sewell 1992).

structure—rural entrepreneurs are able to both identify and realise business opportunities (Jack & Anderson 2002)¹⁴.

The common thread between all of the above-mentioned conceptions of agency is that they focus on *agency over something*. According to the first conception, agents are driven by explicit, controlled and conscious cognitive processes, and not, for example, by addictions or instincts.¹⁵ Agents, thus, have power over inner ‘instinctual’ forces (Campbell 2009). According to the second conception, agents have power over external social structures (Campbell 2009). Agents are able to act independently of structural conditions or even change them. When discussing entrepreneurship and enterprise promotion, the focus has been, nearly completely, on the agency-over aspect of agency. Both entrepreneurs and policy implementers are viewed as agents ‘who make it happen’ (Sarasvathy 2004; Yanow 1996, 13). However, besides posing the common question ‘how do agents make it happen?’, one might also ask ‘for whom do agents make it happen?’. This latter aspect of agency is called *agency for something* or someone. Interestingly, in the social sciences, the agency-over aspect of agency has been far more popular than the agency-for aspect of agency (Shapiro 2005; Vesala, Halpin, Niska & Pyysiäinen 2015). This chapter introduces this underused aspect of agency and demonstrates its usefulness in studying the relationship between public enterprise promoters and business owners.

3.1 THE CLASSIC FORMULATION OF AGENCY THEORY

The most influential formulation of the agency-for is Agency Theory in economics (see Shapiro 2005). The theory discusses agency relationships that refer ‘to a contract in which one party is designated as the principal, and the other, the agent’ (Perrow, 1986; also e.g., Ross 1973). Principals delegate authority to agents to act on their behalf and agents are somehow rewarded for these actions (Kiser 1999; Perrow 1986; Shapiro 2005). The classic version of Agency Theory deals specifically with the relationship between owners (i.e., shareholders) and managers of large companies. A business owner is a principal who hires a manager to work as his/her agent. However, this relationship is far from trouble-free. Firstly, managers’ interests may differ from those of owners and, secondly, owners know less about managers’ actions than managers themselves (e.g., Kiser 1999). It is, thus, possible that managers serve their own interests instead of owners’ interests (e.g., Shapiro 2005). The relationship between two agents can become an agency relationship only if the agents make a contractual arrangement in which one of them is the principal and the other is his/her agent.

¹⁴ For more on Bourdieu’s (1984) ideas in entrepreneurship and small business studies, see e.g., Tatli et al. (2014).

¹⁵ On the relationship between unconscious and agency, see e.g., Hollway and Jefferson (2005).

Agency Theory is based on the assumptions of Rational Choice Theory and homo economicus; individuals are rational but narrowly self-interested actors (Jensen & Meckling 1976). Besides owners, also managers are striving to maximise their profit. Since managers' profit-maximising behaviour threatens owners' profit maximisation, owners try to find ways to overcome this *agency problem*. Owners can, for example, be highly selective and aim at hiring only 'high productivity agents' with high levels of ability, effort and honesty (Kiser 1999). Owners may also carefully formulate the contracts they make with managers and closely monitor managers' actions (Perrow 1986, 12). Furthermore, owners may try to steer managers' actions with positive and negative sanctions, such as bonuses and the threat of dismissal (Kiser 1999).

In addition to economics, the ideas of Agency Theory have spread to other disciplines. Political scientists have taken the theory outside the market setting and studied agency relationships in political systems and state policy implementation (Shapiro 2005; Kiser 1999). Policy implementers have an agency relationship with policymakers who hire implementers to carry out their political preferences (cf. Shapiro 2005, 271). However, as in business context, policymakers cannot be sure that policy implementers are actually carrying out their will and are not just serving their own interests (Shapiro 2005; also Kiser 1999). In order to overcome the agency problems in policy implementation, all sorts of evaluations on the effectiveness of policy have been designed.

People employed by public enterprise promotion have an agency relationship with policymakers; they are hired by organisations like the ELY Centres that are responsible for the policy implementation of central government. Public enterprise promoters should, thus, serve the interests of their employers. However, it is always possible that a hired policy implementer is a self-interested utility-maximiser who is, for example, only interested in earning a salary with the least amount of effort. This would be an example of the classic agency problem; the principal needs to make sure that the agent is serving the interest of the principal—not his/her own. However, the context of enterprise promotion engenders also another type of agency problem; instead of policymakers' interests the public enterprise promoters may be serving the interest of the business owners. Scholars have acknowledged that 'agency relations exist in a wide variety of social contexts involving the delegation of authority, including clients and various service providers' (Kiser 1999, 146). Thus, besides having an agency relationship with policymakers, public enterprise promoters also have an agency relationship with their clients, that is, business owners.

The original formulation of Agency Theory assumes a static solitary principal and a static solitary agent. According to the theory, there is always only one principal and one agent. However, public enterprise promotion is an example of a situation where the agent, the public enterprise promoter, has at least two potential principals: the employer (i.e., the government) and

the client (i.e., the business owner). Agency relationships naturally become much more complicated if agents have several principals. Agency Theory has been widely criticised by psychologists and sociologists (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson 1997); in particular, one problem relates to the theory's dismissal of possibility of multiple principals and multiple agents (see Shapiro 2005). Criticism and reformulations of Agency Theory are discussed in the next section.

3.2 REFORMULATING AGENCY THEORY

Shapiro (2005) discusses Agency Theory's problematic presumption of a static solitary principal and a static solitary agent. Unlike in the original formulation of Agency Theory, Shapiro (2005) acknowledges that there may be multiple principals and multiple agents in a particular circumstance. In the case of multiple principals and a single agent, the agent has to deal with potentially conflicting and competing interests of the principals. However, it is naturally also possible that the principal has several agents. According to Bandura (2006), most human pursuits involve other participating agents and effective group performance is guided by collective intentionality. In line with Agency Theory, Bandura (2006) assumes that agents are driven by self-interests. However, in order to effectively serve some principal, agents have to accommodate their own self-interests (cf. Bandura 2006).

Agency Theory's assumption that individuals are self-interested utility maximisers has been criticised (Shapiro 2005, 266). Collaboration—or co-agency—is difficult if all agents merely serve their own self-interests. According to Perrow (1986), Agency Theory disregards the fact that individuals can also be other-regarding or altruistic team players (see also Emirbayer & Goodwin 1994; Spillman & Strand 2013, 90). Besides self-interests, agents can also serve external principals. This criticism is addressed in Stewardship Theory, which focuses on agency relationships where the interests served by managers are aligned with the interests of the principal. Instead of being opportunistic and self-serving, the agents are pro-organizational and collective-serving (e.g., Davis et al. 1997).

The original formulation of Agency Theory acknowledges only the perspective of the principal. It is focused on the question of how the principal can make sure that the agent is not behaving opportunistically but that it is harnessed to serve the principal. Perrow (1986) has justly noted that the relationship between the principal and the agent may also be threatened by the principals' opportunistic behaviour. It is, of course, possible that the agent, for example, misrepresents his/her willingness and abilities to serve the interests of the principal. However, it is just as possible that the principal, for example, misrepresents the reward agent will receive for his/her actions (Perrow 1986). Thus, instead of perceiving agency relationships only from

the perspective of the principal, the perspective of the agent also needs be included.

Finally, Agency Theory has been accused of dismissing the importance of context—or structures. Critics of the theory have argued that agents and principals do not interact in a vacuum; rather the setting or context has an effect on the emergence of self-interests and other-interests (see Perrow 1986; also Spillman & Strand 2013). Furthermore, the setting needs to be acknowledged because agent and principal are not fixed positions. ‘Actors are not just principals or agents, but often both at the same time—even in the same transaction or hierarchical structure’ (Shapiro 2005, 267). A policy implementer may be an agent for the policymaker, but he/she may also be a principal for an intern working at the office.

An interesting contribution to the theorisation of agency relationships comes from Meyer and Jepperson (2000), who broaden the typical usage of the principal–agent relation defined in Agency Theory. Meyer and Jepperson (2000, 101) view modern agency as the ‘legitimated representation of some legitimated principal.’ For Meyer and Jepperson, agency relationships are more than *contracts* between principals (e.g., employer) and agents (e.g., employee). Agency is also *authorised* with a legitimate principal recognised by the cultural system. According to Meyer and Jepperson (2000, 101) the ‘cultural system constructs the modern actor as an authorised agent for various interests (including those of the self).’ The authors, thus, acknowledge that individuals may be self-interested (i.e., acting as both agents and principals) as well as other-interested (i.e., acting as agents for external principals). Meyer and Jepperson (2000, 106) distinguish between four ‘different sorts of agency that constitute modern actors’: agency for self, agency for other actors, agency for nonactor entities¹⁶ and agency for abstract principles. Agency for the self is considered as a stipulation of agency; entities that cannot serve their own interests—like ecosystem, fetuses and dying languages—are not considered agents (Meyer & Jepperson 2000, 105).¹⁷ Besides agency for the self, Meyer and Jepperson (2000, 107) note that ‘a striking feature of the modern system is the extreme readiness with which its actor participants can act as agents for other actors,’ either in exchange for resources (cf. the Agency Theory) or as a free good.

Since Meyer and Jepperson (2000) acknowledge the crucial role of the cultural system, unlike in the original formulation of Agency Theory, their perspective takes structure into consideration. Actually, Meyer and Jepperson’s theory has been criticised for neglecting agency in the sense of

¹⁶ One might, of course, wonder how one serves the interests of a nonactor that is unable to communicate its interests. According to Meyer and Jepperson (2000, 108), agents actually serve ‘the imagined interests of nonactor entities recognized in the cultural system.’

¹⁷ The definition of agency, thus, differs significantly from theoretical perspectives like Actor-Network Theory, where agency is partly credited to entities like zippers or scallops (see e.g., Callon 1986; Paju 2013).

agency-over (e.g., Hitlin & Elder 2007). This is understandable considering that the contribution of Meyer and Jepperson (2000) has been interpreted from the structuralist perspective as highlighting structure over agency. The assumption is that, since structures legitimise agency, they determine agency (e.g., Weik 2011). However, the contribution of Meyer and Jepperson can also be interpreted as an argument that agency is not ‘excluded by’ but ‘constructed within’ the structure (cf. Giddens 1984). A cultural system enables a variety of legitimate principals but it is agents who make choices between these plausible principals (see Vesala et al. 2015). In line with Zelditch (2001, 14), the legitimation process depends on, and is constrained by, its pre-given structure which is, in this case, the cultural system. However, the structure is too abstract, general and incomplete to define specific situations of action; in specific situations the legitimation of agency—that is, the principal—is always constructed interactively (Zelditch 2001, 14). If the principal is constructed in an interaction situation, it makes sense to argue that the actors have agency over whom they serve. This notion combines Meyer and Jepperson (2000) and the relational social psychologists discussed later in Chapter 4.

3.3 AGENCY-FOR IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS STUDIES

In entrepreneurship and small business studies, the ideas of Agency Theory are used, for example, by Shane (1995), who discusses the concept of the *independent entrepreneur*. According to Shane (1995), the independent entrepreneur is both the agent and the principal of his/her business actions (also e.g., Parry 2010, 380). In this view, both growth entrepreneurs and lifestyle entrepreneurs represent independent entrepreneurs; both serve their own self-interests. However, Shane (1995) also recognises that some business owners serve external principals. These business owners include, for example, CEOs who serve the interests of shareholders and investors (see Shane 1995). What makes the difference between these two entrepreneur types is contract; the latter has made a contract that defines the business owner as an agent for an external principal.¹⁸ Another example of the *dependent entrepreneur* is a farmer who has a classic agency relationship with the government and serves the interests of society in return for agricultural subsidies.¹⁹

¹⁸ Since Shane doubts the existence of social entrepreneurs (e.g., Shane et al. 2003), he does not bother to discuss the agency relationship in social entrepreneurship.

¹⁹ It is precisely this agency relationship between the EU and national governments, and farmers that displeases the WTO. Neoliberal agricultural policy wants to annul the agency relationship and, thus, withdraw both the authorisation and compensation provided for farmers by the public sector.

Mole's (2002) study is an example of a study that explicitly applies Agency Theory on enterprise promotion. It follows the idea of the *independent entrepreneur* and views business owners as principals and business advisers as their agents. According to the study, the starting point of the encounter between business adviser and business owner is the business owner's interests; some want to make money, while others do not (Mole 2002, 154). The study highlights that in order to be good agents for their principals, business advisers' need to be able to differentiate lifestyle entrepreneurs from growth entrepreneurs. The agent needs to know the principal's interests but the principal also needs to know that the agent is capable of serving these interests. Mole (2002) discusses the classic agency problem in the enterprise promotion context. Specifically, the principal (i.e., business owner) cannot be sure that the agent (i.e., enterprise promoter) is a 'high productivity agent' (cf. Kiser 1999). In line with the original formulation of Agency Theory, both Shane (1995) and Mole (2002) view agency-for as an unambiguous issue; some business owners do not have contracts and, thus, serve their own self-internal interests and others have contracts and, thus, serve external principals.

However, as noted in Section 2.3, the problem in the relationship between public enterprise promoters and business owners might not be that public enterprise promoters are not 'high productivity' agents for business owners. The problem may be that public enterprise promoters are not business owners' agents in the first place. A surprising feature in the study by Mole (2002) is that, although he adopts the original formulation of Agency Theory, he views public business advisers as agents for their clients, the business owners. Mole (2002) disregards the fact that public sector business advisers have a contract that assigns them to serve societal interests, not business owners' interests—regardless of what they are. If business owners' interests diverge from societal interests, public enterprise promoters should not serve these interests but work to change them so that they align with societal ones.

The fact that public enterprise promoters might serve the interests of society rather than the interests of business owners is discussed by Perren and Jennings (2005), who argue that governments want small businesses to grow and, thus, they disregard business owners' freedom to pursue personal aspirations. According to Perren and Jennings (2005, 181), public enterprise promotion actually hinders business owners' personal agency, that is, the ability to serve their own interests.

Shane (1995) and Mole (2002) assume that the interests agents serve are somehow inherent. Perren and Jennings (2005) assume that structures, like discourses, hinder business owners' ability to serve their 'true interests.' In this dissertation, however, I assume that (a) interest is not a stable internal entity, and (b) actors, both policy actors and business owners, have agency over the principals they serve (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000). The dissertation elaborates this perspective by drawing on relational social psychology, which is discussed in the next chapter.

4 A RELATIONAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON 'AGENCY-FOR'

According to Emirbayer (1997, 281), social scientists 'conceive of the social world as consisting primarily in substances or processes.' In this view, the social world is either viewed as consisting of static 'things' or dynamic relations. Emirbayer (1997) calls the former broad meta-theoretical viewpoint substantialism and the latter one relational. According to substantialist meta-theory, the social world consists primarily in things, beings and essences, such as cognitions and institutions. There are, however, two forms of substantialism. In *self-action substantialism*, 'things' act independently of other 'things'; either individual actions explain social life, as in rational choice theory, or social systems are the sources of action as in structuralism (see Emirbayer 1997, 283–285). In *inter-action substantialism*, entities do not generate their own actions but actions take place among 'things'; social life consists, then, of complex interaction between 'things' as in different variable-centred approaches (see Emirbayer 1997, 285–286).

Relational meta-theory takes dynamic, unfolding processes as the primary unit of analysis; 'the units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction' (Emirbayer 1997, 287). 'Things' such as cognitions and institutions, thus, receive their nature and meaning in transaction processes—they are not viewed as entities that interact with each other.

Emirbayer (1997, 290) notes that substantialism and relationalism are ideal-typical approaches that 'rarely correspond with exact precision to any one school of thought or individual's life work.' Nevertheless, it is clear that the positivist approach to policy analysis and the original formulations of Agency Theory both follow substantialist meta-theory. Namely, positivist policy analysis focuses on variables that affect the policy implementation process (e.g., Schofield 2001, 249), while Agency Theory focuses on variables that affect managers' actions (e.g., Kiser 1999). The common denominator between these approaches and mainstream social psychology is the substantialist framework. Mainstream social psychology, which emphasises variable-centred quantitative methods, is clearly engaged with the inter-action version of substantialism. The interpretive approach to policy analysis discussed in Section 2.3 represents the relational rather than substantialist viewpoint, as the focus is on meaning-making processes. Since the approach taps into, for example, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology (Yanow 1996), it is associated with the relational social psychology

represented by scholars such as George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman (cf. Emirbayer 1997).

Social scientific concepts, such as attitude, value and agency, can be viewed from both substantialist and relational perspectives; from the substantialist viewpoint they are concepts of substance, whereas from relational viewpoint they are concepts of relationship (Emirbayer 1997, 291). Attitude, for example, can either be a disposition that correlates with other dispositions, or a concept describing a relation between individual and the social world (see e.g., Vesala & Rantanen 2007, 19–29). In the same way, agency—both agency-over and agency-for—can be viewed from either a substantialist or relational social psychological perspective.

From the perspective of mainstream social psychology, agency is not a discrete entity (Bandura 2001), as self-action substantialism would conceive. Rather, agency embodies a complex nexus of cognitions such as beliefs and self-regulatory capabilities, as well as structural factors (Bandura 2001; 2006; Baumeister & Vohs 2003). Social psychological studies on agency commonly focus on entities, such as values, self-efficacy, attitudes and motivation, that affect individuals' ability to make things happen—either through goal setting or performance accomplishment (e.g., Schwartz 1992; Bandura 2001; 2006). It is complex sets of variables, like values and norms that guide people's behaviour (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Sörtheix, Olakivi & Helkama, 2012).

Mainstream social psychology has mainly focused on agency in the sense of agency-over. However, the agency-for perspective is also acknowledged by Bandura (2000; 2001; 2006), who defines the concept of *proxy agency* as a socially mediated mode of agency where people take other people 'to act at their behest to secure the outcomes they desire' (Bandura 2001, 13). In line with Agency Theory, proxy agency, thus, means that one person is the principal and takes another person to be his/her agent.

From the relational social psychological perspective, agency—both agency-over and agency-for—is a situated and embedded phenomenon. Agency is defined and constructed in transactions that take place between individuals and their environment (Emirbayer 1997).²⁰ Further, the authorisation of agency is a crucial part of agency construction (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000).

When describing the perspective of relational sociology, Emirbayer (1997) refers to the work of Mead and Goffman, both classic scholars of social psychology. In this dissertation, I draw on Goffman as well as work

²⁰ In this dissertation 'relational' refers to the meta-theoretical perspective from which agency is approached. However, some scholars use the concept 'relational agency' to argue that people are not autonomous agents but action is accomplished in relation to other people and material objects (see e.g., Honkasalo, Ketokivi & Leppo 2014; Juvonen 2015, 41–43; Ketokivi & Meskus 2015). This latter understanding of relational agency rules out an individualist perspective on agency but does not necessarily rule out substantialist assumptions.

conducted by scholars that Burr (2003) calls micro social constructionists. Mead's relational conception of agency-over and agency-for is discussed, for example, by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Gillespie (2012) and Vesala et al. (2015). In the following sections, I discuss in more detail how agency-over and agency-for are present in the relational social psychology of Goffman and micro social constructionism.

4.1 ERVING GOFFMAN AND THE NOTION OF AGENCY

Interpreting Goffman's work as relational is not self-evident. Goffman's work has been labelled, for example, as symbolic interactionism (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue 2006, 218; Cahill 1995, 186), ethnomethodology (Alasuutari 1995, 177; Peräkylä 1990, 157) and structuralism (Gonos 1977; Denzin & Keller 1981). Furthermore, some scholars view his work as a halfway between symbolic interactionism and structuralism (Heiskala 1991; Manning 2000). Rather than engaging in the discussion on the most appropriate reading of Goffman, I align with Manning (2000, 285), who states that Goffman's 'work can be read in different ways, producing diverse uses for his ideas.' There are several ways to frame Goffman's work (cf. Heiskala 1991) and in this study—following Emirbayer (1997, 295–296; see also Vesala et al. 2015)—I frame Goffman's work as relational social psychology.

Goffman offers interesting theorisations for the concept of agency. His work has been accused of both overplaying agency and undervaluing structures, and overplaying structures and undervaluing agency (see e.g., Denzin & Keller 1981; Heiskala 1991; Puroila 2002b, 25). This demonstrates that several scholars read Goffman's work from the substantialist perspective, even though throughout his career Goffman focused on social interaction and its dynamic *processes*. In all encounters, participants seek to acquire information about other participants in order to define the situation correctly, as well as to know what is expected of them and others (Goffman 1959, 1). Goffman (1959) notes that, because everyone knows that others are forming impressions, participants seek to manage others' impressions by giving performances. This means that participants present themselves and the situation in specific ways. From relational perspective, Goffman's (1959, 1974/1986) agency is defined and constructed in relational processes of situation definition and self-presentation (Vesala et al. 2015). I will clarify this definition in the next paragraphs referring, in particular, to Goffman's frame analysis.

Frame Analysis (Goffman 1974/1986) is commonly viewed as Goffman's magnum opus (see e.g., Luhtakallio 2012, 8; Puroila 2002a, 13). In his book, Goffman focused on the organisation of social experience in terms of the question 'what is going on in here?' Whenever an individual enters a social situation, he/she needs to determine the nature of the situation in order to

act accordingly. According to Goffman (1974/1986), frames define situations, both events and actions. The key to correct situation definition is, thus, correct framing.

Goffman (1974/1986) distinguishes between two kinds of primary frameworks: natural and social. He calls them primary because the 'application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to prior or 'original' interpretation' (Goffman 1974/1986, 21). The natural framework identifies occurrences that are purely physical; it is raining, for example. The social framework, in contrast, identifies occurrences guided by an agent whose motives and intents are involved; an interview is taking place, for example (see Goffman 1974/1986, 22). Agency in this view becomes, above all, a matter of framing; action is interpreted to be induced by an agent.

The dynamic nature of social reality becomes apparent in Goffman's (1974/1986) discussion of frame transformations: keyings and fabrications.²¹ Although primary frames are considered to be culturally embedded, individuals are able to alter and transform them. A classic example of frame transformation, which Goffman (1974/1986, 40–41) borrowed from Bateson (1972), is one of fighting and play-fighting. Bateson noted that animals are able to differentiate real fights and play-fights. For a play-fight, a real fight serves as a model. However, what is happening in a play-fight situation is play, not a fight. Goffman (1974/1986, 43–44) calls these transformations keyings: an activity that is meaningful in terms of some primary frame is transformed into something that is patterned on this activity but still interpreted as something else. 'What appears to be something isn't quite that, being merely modeled on it' (Goffman 1974/1986, 45). In addition to the experience of socially framed action, agency lies in the framing process itself (Vesala et al. 2015). For Goffman, individuals are active beings who have control over what takes place in interaction; they frame events and actions, and make performances (Cahill 1995, 190). Agency is, thus, the outgrowth of social framing, a role indicated to an actor in some situation. At the same time, individuals have agency over the framings they provide and presentations they make; actors use frames to give others a specific impression of themselves or the situation²² (Verhoeven 1985, 72; also e.g., Heiskala 1991).

²¹ The main difference between keyings and fabrications is that, while in keying everyone in a social situation is meant to know about the frame transformation, in fabrication some participants are kept uninformed of the true nature of the situation.

²² The interpretation of framing as an interactional process is not self-evident. A structuralist reading of frame analysis views frames as social structures that determine individuals' actions and experiences (e.g., Gonos 1977). A cognitive reading of frame analysis views frame as a psychological structure that presents itself in the behaviour of individuals (e.g., Ensink 2003; see also Jerolmack & Khan 2014). Both structuralist and cognitive perspectives, thus, interpret substantially that a frame is an entity, a structure that determines individuals' actions.

Goffman is also well aware of the agency-for aspect of agency. In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974/1986, 47–77) discusses various types of keyings, but the one touching agency-for is called regrounding. According to Goffman (1974/1986, 74) ‘what is involved is the performance of an activity more or less openly for reasons or motives felt to be radically different from those that govern ordinary actors.’ This means that some motives for action are considered ordinary, whereas others are considered extraordinary. For example, entrepreneurship understood in the sense of classic economics is a social primary frame; entrepreneurial action is induced by the entrepreneur. The ordinary reason or motive for the action is self-interest; entrepreneurial action is motivated, for example, by profit or a sense of achievement. There are, however, several regroundings from the entrepreneurship frame. Social entrepreneurship is one of these keyings; now entrepreneurial action is motivated by other-interests, such as environmental and societal concerns (cf. Mair & Marti 2006). Ecological entrepreneurship is another keying; the entrepreneurial action that takes place in farm context is motivated by the vitality of rural areas (cf. Marsden & Smith 2005).

The question of credibility is crucial when individuals frame actions in social encounters. The problem is that frame transformations—like regroundings—are a source of conflict and misunderstanding (e.g., Puroila 2002a, 64). Social life includes a great deal of actions and events that can be framed in multiple ways, which leads to the possibility that participants of a social encounter do not share an interpretation of what is happening or for whom it is happening (see Goffman 1974/1986, 321–338). Frame dispute is an interactional conflict; frames define the characteristics, duties and rights of the participating individuals (Peräkylä 1990, 22). If the participants of a social encounter do not share a frame, they do not necessarily share a view on proper and acceptable behaviour in that situation.

So far, agency-for framing has been viewed as an interpretation of action as induced by an agent serving some specific interests. However, the next question might be whose interests are served with a specific framing. Goffman (1969) notes, that besides serving the individual him/herself, framings and presentations may also serve external principals. In *Strategic Interaction*, Goffman (1969, 86) reflects on the assumptions of Rational Choice and Game Theory, and notes that, even if one accepts that individuals are calculating decision-makers, it is quite another matter to understand whose interests are served by this individual intelligence. Goffman’s work, thus, reflects agency relationships or agency-for; ‘the interests of a party are promoted by action taken on the party’s behalf by individuals who are authorised to act for it and are capable of doing so’ (Goffman 1969, 86–87).²³

It is of course possible that the acting agent—or in Goffman’s terms the player—‘acts for a party of which he himself is the acknowledged sole member’ (Goffman 1969, 86). In this case, the individual is both the principal

²³ Instead of a principal, Goffman talks about a party.

and the agent (cf. Shane 1995). For example, social rejection of a frame or presentation is always a potential threat for one's *face*.²⁴ Thus, when it comes to social situations, giving impressions serves the interests of the agent in the sense of face-saving (Vesala et al. 2015). It is, however, also possible that with a specific framing the player is serving the interests of an external party. The player suggesting a framing may not even be aware of the value the framing has for furthering the interests of some party—or principal (cf. Goffman 1969, 88). A business owner can frame his/her business actions as charity (i.e., agency for an external principal). It is, however, by no means self-evident whose interests this regrounding type of keying serves. In the case that the framing is generally accepted, it might end up serving the interests of the business owner, if perhaps more customers begin coming in. However, in the case that framing is generally declined, it might actually end up serving the interests of the competitors. When the credibility of a regrounding is denied, individuals assume that instead of the given motive there is actually an ulterior motive that is hidden (see Goffman 1969, 85). Such experience of a fabrication (Goffman 1974/1986) may easily drive customers away.

4.2 AGENCY IN MICRO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism is anything but a consistent and unambiguous approach (see Holstein & Gubrium 2008). Considering that virtually all social scientists agree that 'social life is somehow constructed', it is crucial to specify what is actually meant with social constructionism (Harris 2008, 232). Researchers generally agree that social constructionism is not a unitary paradigm but rather includes different constructionist forms (e.g. Burr 2003; Edley 2001a; Hosking & Hjort 2004, 255). Important differences can be found between *objective* and *interpretive social constructionism* (see Harris 2008) and *macro* and *micro social constructionism* (see Burr 2003).

Interpretive social constructionism focuses on the construction of meanings and knowledge; it is not concerned with what things 'really' mean but rather considers how some meanings are made more real than others (Harris 2008, 232–233). Objective social constructionism is not interested in the meaning-making process but in the construction of real states of affairs. The assumption is that social phenomena are constructed in complex interactions between entities such as individual actors and social structures (see Harris 2008, 234). Interpretive constructionist research would focus on the meanings entrepreneurship receives in different situations, whereas objective social constructionist research would focus on the production of the real social phenomena of entrepreneurship. Since some forms of social constructionism are interested in causal interactions between separate

²⁴ According to Goffman (1955), face is 'the positive social value a person effectively claims from himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact'.

entities (e.g., Elder-Vass 2012), it is clear that not all forms of social constructionism represent relational meta-theory. However, especially within psychology and social psychology, social constructionist research has had a relational flavor, focusing on processes rather than entities (Burr 2003, 9; see also Harré 2009; Hosking & Hjort 2004). Gergen (1985), for example, defines social constructionism as an approach that is ‘concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves).’

Burr (2003) further divides the field of social constructionism into micro and macro social constructionism. Micro social constructionism focuses on construction processes that take place in everyday interaction, whereas macro social constructionism focuses on the constructive power of language that derives from, or relates to, structures and institutionalised practices (Burr 2003, 21–22). Micro social constructionism is represented by psychologists and social psychologists such as Harré, Potter, Wetherell and Billig, whereas macro social constructionism is represented by philosophers and sociologists like Foucault and Rose (Burr 2003, 21–22). The social constructionist approach adopted in this dissertation represents interpretive micro social constructionism²⁵ adhering to relational meta-theory.

Micro constructionism includes social psychological approaches of discursive psychology, critical discursive psychology, positioning theory and rhetorical social psychology (cf. Burr 2003, 21–22). The relationship between these approaches is somewhat controversial. Critical discursive psychology has been called ‘strand one in the development of discursive psychology’ (see Potter 2012), but it is also presented as a discourse tradition clearly distinct from discursive psychology (see Wetherell, Taylor & Yates 2001, 6). Furthermore, the ideas of positioning theory (e.g., Davis & Harré 1990) and rhetorical social psychology (e.g., Billig 1996) have been connected with both discursive psychology (see Billig 2009) and critical discursive psychology (see Reynolds & Wetherell 2003). This dissertation adopts analytical concepts from critical discursive psychology, positioning theory and rhetorical social psychology.

Both discursive psychology and critical discursive psychology have their roots in a classic book *Discourse and Social Psychology*. In the book, Potter and Wetherell developed a discursive approach to social psychology under the general title of discourse analysis (see also e.g., Wetherell & Potter 1988). On a very general level, discourse analysis is concerned with what people do with their talk and the ‘resources that people draw on in the course of those practices’ (Potter & Wetherell 1995, 81). Critical discursive psychology has, in some ways, remained more faithful to the original ideas of discourse analysis than discursive psychology. Firstly, the discourse analysis of Potter and Wetherell (1987; 1995 also Wetherell & Potter 1988) focuses on the identification of interpretative repertoires; resources or building blocks that

²⁵ From this moment on this is referred to as micro constructionism

people draw upon while constructing intelligible accounts²⁶. While discursive psychology has discarded the concept of interpretative repertoire, critical discursive psychology has not (Edley 2001b, 189). Secondly, the discourse analysis of Potter and Wetherell (1987; 1995; also Wetherell & Potter 1988) uses open-ended interviews as research data. While discursive psychology favours naturalistic materials, critical discursive psychology continues to analyse interviews.

The differences between discursive psychology and critical discursive psychology are understandable given that, unlike critical discursive psychology, discursive psychology has become deeply engaged with the ideas of conversation analysis (see Potter 2012). Since critical discursive psychology is not engaged with conversation analysis, it is able to 'violate a central conversation analytic-inspired imperative; namely, that we must at all times restrict our analytic attention to what is going on, for the participants themselves, within any given interactional sequence' (Edley 2001b, 190). Rather, drawing from macro social constructionism, critical discursive psychology sees interactional sequences as embedded within a context; while talking, people use resources available for them and different resources are available at different times and places (see e.g., Potter & Wetherell 1995, 81; Wetherell 1998).

Following critical discursive psychology, agency can be viewed as a feature of the position adopted or indicated in an interaction situation. For example, Reynolds, Wetherell and Taylor (2007) analyse single women's accounts of their relationships and reasons for being single. The study demonstrates how women construct both agentic and non-agentic positions in relation to singleness and marriage. In an interview context, women were able to position themselves as victims of structural constraints and agents who have chosen the single lifestyle (Reynolds et al. 2007; see also Reynolds & Wetherell 2003). While constructing the agency-over position in relation to their singleness, the interviewed women highlighted that being single serves their own interests; they had, for example, been able to decorate the house as they like, and move to another country for a great job opportunity (see Reynolds & Wetherell 2003). The women in the study of Reynolds et al. (2007; also Reynolds & Wetherell 2003) positioned themselves as agents who serve their own interests (i.e., agency for self). However, it is clear that also other principals could have been adopted. For example, while adopting a position of an agentic career woman, some of the interviewed women emphasised that being single has enabled their self-development and

²⁶ The relationship between the concepts of discourse and interpretative repertoire is discussed, for example, by Edley (2001b, 202). The concept of discourse may refer to talk and text in general but it may also refer to a similar building block as the concept of interpretative repertoire. In the latter case, the concept of discourse is commonly preferred in the macro social constructionist tradition, whereas the concept of interpretative repertoire is preferred in the analysis of everyday interaction (Edley 2001b; Potter & Wetherell 1987, 6-7).

achievement in work. The women could have, thus, argued that besides their own interests, their decision to be single has also served the interests of their employers.

An agency position is what Goffman (1959) calls *persona*; an agent is a character constructed in an interaction situation. However, as agency in Goffman's work is both a product of framing and the ability to frame, agency in micro constructionism is both a construction and the ability to construct. The distinction Burr (2003) makes between micro and macro social constructionism is, in an important sense, a distinction between an agency framing and a structure framing (cf. Fuchs 2001). Micro constructionism focuses on the constructive work of individuals, whereas macro constructionism conceptualises individuals as outcomes of discursive and societal structures (Burr 2003, 23). Social scientists can focus either on (a) linguistics, material and social structures that define social and psychological life or (b) agents who use language to do things. According to the latter perspective, besides being *personas*, people are also *performers*; they actively construct versions of themselves (and the world). People have agency over constructions they make of themselves and the world.²⁷ Also in this view, the question of 'whose interests are served with these constructions' becomes relevant.

In micro constructionism, agency-for is present, for example, in discussions on stake and accountability (e.g., Potter & Wetherell 1995; Potter 1997; Edley 2001b). Different discursive formulations serve some interests, and both speakers and observers are commonly aware of this. According to Burr (2003, 23), 'accounts must be constructed to suit occasions and are crafted in such a way as to further the speaker's current agenda.' Similarly, Harré and Moghaddam (2003, 6) argue that positioning is a conscious act that takes place in relation to the interests of the person doing the positioning. Since the speaker's agenda or interest may be either to serve himself/herself or some other people, groups or ideas, social scientists are often interested in the question 'whose interests are best served by different discursive formulations' (Edley 2001b, 190). However, besides social scientists also lay people recognise the issue of stake. According to Potter and Wetherell (1995, 82), 'people treat each other, and various kinds of collectives, as agents who have a stake or interest in their actions.' Reference to stake is an 'important way of discounting the significance of an action or reworking its nature' (Potter & Wetherell 1995, 82; also Potter 1997, 153). If an offer of service—for instance a business advisory service—is discounted as an attempt to influence, the service is easily turned down (cf. Potter & Wetherell 1995).

²⁷ Naturally agency-over is not unlimited; social and cultural forces, or structures, set limits to agents' abilities to credibly construct the world (and agency). For example, Reynolds et al. (2007) discuss the problems single women have in constructing a positive single identity.

4.3 AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP OF GOFFMAN AND CONSTRUCTIONISM

The relationship between Goffman's work and social constructionism has generated a wide and diverse debate. While Goffman himself declared that his work does not represent social constructionism (see Verhoeven 1993, 324, 343), scholars nevertheless often perceive that it does (see e.g., Alasuutari 1995, 184; Helkama, Myllyniemi & Liebkind 1999, 69; Lehtinen 2014, 15). This confusing fact is explained by the various, sometimes conflicting, ways of interpreting both Goffman's work and social constructionism. Since it is possible to define social constructionism in various ways, it is interesting to consider how Goffman himself defines social constructionism while evaluating it against his own work.

In distancing his work from social constructionism, Goffman defines it as a view that 'anybody can, at any moment, define the world around them' (see Verhoeven 1993, 343). Goffman seems to suggest that, according to social constructionism, anyone can construct anything at anytime and that there are no restrictions in doing so, such as 'reality' or 'structures' (also e.g., Ratner 2009; Watson 2013, 19). When social constructionism is defined this way, it makes sense to argue that Goffman is not a social constructionist (cf. Puroila 2002a, 28). Goffman (1974/1986), for example, argues that every situation has a correct definition and several possible false definitions. If you look through a window and see water drops, it might be raining or it might be that someone is just washing the roof of the house. What is happening in that situation is most definitely one or the other; thus, some definitions are correct and others false. Goffman himself has described his work as 'structural social psychology'; instead of the assumption that individuals construct the world as they please, he emphasises cultural structures and an established social world (Verhoeven 1993, 322–323). As discussed in Section 4.2, there are various ways to define social constructionism. Since this dissertation adheres to micro constructionism, in particular critical discursive psychology, it is interesting to reflect on how well Goffman's definition of social constructionism coheres with the form of social constructionism used in the current work.

Firstly, micro constructionism is often misconceived to deny the existence of reality or material world. Rather, in line with Kenneth Gergen, micro constructionism is mute when it comes to questions of what the reality is *really* like (see Aceros 2012; also e.g. Hosking & Hjort 2004, 259). Viewing things as literary constructions is not synonymous with denying their existence (Potter & Hepburn 2008, 287; also Edwards, Ashmore & Potter 1995). It is one thing to study framing and construction processes, and another thing to claim knowledge of which frame or construct best represents reality. Micro constructionists neither assert nor deny any particular way of accounting for the world (see Aceros 2012). This is in a way in line with Goffman (1974/1986, 324–326), who admits that even though

some framings or constructions *might* in theory represent ‘reality’ better than others, it may also be impossible for individuals—even social scientists—to pick out the correct one from the false ones.

Secondly, micro constructionism does not claim that people can, at any moment, define the world around them as they please. Constructionism in general is highly aware of the historical and cultural specificity of the construction process (e.g., Burr 2003, 3–4). Constructionist approaches, like critical discursive psychology, are especially interested in those historical and cultural resources that individuals can use to make sense of the world around them.

The relationship between the basic concepts of frame analysis and discourse analysis is, of course, also debateable. In line with Bateson, a frame is sometimes understood as the meta-message that signals the meaning of discourse²⁸; without a frame, utterances are incomprehensible (e.g., Tannen & Wallat 1987; also Scheff 2005, 372). For example, in one frame an utterance is an insult and in another it is a joke. According to micro constructionism, discourse is situated and does not move from one frame to another unaltered (e.g., Wiggins & Potter 2008). People are assumed to talk differently in an interview frame than, for example, in an informal conversation frame. This is one reason why discursive psychology favours naturalistic data (Wiggins & Potter 2008). However, from the perspective of critical discursive psychology, situations are always framed one way or another; what individuals do in an interview frame can be just as interesting—or uninteresting—as what they do in another frame.

Although going against Goffman’s own claims, his basic ideas are perhaps not that far from critical discursive psychology and positioning theory, especially when Goffman is read from the relational meta-theoretical perspective. Frames and interpretive repertoires are culturally embedded resources that give meaning to events, actions and things. Framing and positioning are processes that take place in an interactional context. Both frames and interpretive repertoires are, thus, located in the relational sphere instead of, say, individuals’ minds. In addition, both frames and positions define the characteristics, duties and rights of the participants, and participants negotiate over acceptable framings and positionings (see e.g., Harré & van Langenhove 1999; Peräkylä 1990, 22).

Similarities in the understanding of agency are apparent: for both Goffman and micro constructionists, agency is defined and constructed in relational processes, and is both the product of the process as well as the ability to produce. People have agency within a frame or position, but they also have agency over frames and positions. Agency-for is an aspect of both the product and the production of agency. Action can be defined as agency for self and the ability to make this definition may serve the agent’s own interests. Although Goffman distanced himself from social constructionism,

²⁸ Here the concept of discourse refers to talk and text in general.

micro constructionists explicitly cite Goffman and elaborate his ideas and concepts (e.g., Davis & Harré 1990; Edwards & Potter 1993; Potter 1997).

4.4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this dissertation is to develop the relational social psychological perspective on agency, especially on agency-for, and demonstrate its usefulness in understanding the, sometimes troubled, relationship between business owners and policy actors. The previous sections focused on introducing relational social psychological perspective on agency. The following chapters will adopt this perspective to study how rural small business owners construct their agency, as well as how these constructions relate to policy actors' constructions and how they possibly affect the public enterprise promotion process. The construction of agency is studied using the analytic units provided by frame analysis and critical discursive psychology, namely frames and positions. The empirical part of the dissertation explores the following questions:

1. How do rural small business owners frame and reground their business actions in a context where public enterprise promotion is not discussed? How are these framings and regroundings related to regional, agricultural and rural policy discourses?
2. How do rural business owners and enterprise promoters position themselves and each other in relation to public enterprise promotion? How do the relationships constructed by these positionings either enhance or impede policy implementation?

5 DATA AND METHOD

The data used in this dissertation originates from two larger data corpuses from two separate research projects. The first data corpus is quantitative; the second one is qualitative. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is a common way to categorise research into two distinct camps (see e.g., Lamont & Swidler 2014, 153). What is sometimes forgotten is that there are various ways to approach both qualitative and quantitative data sets (Peräkylä 1995, 39). Substantialist qualitative research aligns better with substantialist quantitative research than with relational qualitative research, and vice versa. A researcher cannot approach the social world as consisting in entities while arguing that the social world does not consist in entities (cf. Emirbayer 1997). In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data are approached from the relational perspective focusing on processes of positioning and framing. Section 5.1 introduces the data and the projects in which the data were originally generated. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 explain how the data were analysed.

5.1 PROJECTS AND DATA

The research project *Changing Rural Entrepreneurship* was first conducted in 2000–2002 by MTT Agrifood Research Finland and the University of Helsinki (Ruralia Institute Mikkeli and Department of Social Psychology). Nation-wide postal survey questionnaire data gathered in 2001 (N=1093) include responses from conventional farmers, business diversifiers and non-farm rural small business owners.²⁹ The questionnaire consisted of 71 questions or series of questions, and the themes included, for example, identity and OFBD (see Rantamäki-Lahtinen 2004; also Vesala & Peura 2002). The project was continued in 2006–2008 and 2011–2013 by MTT Agrifood Research Finland, the University of Helsinki (Department of Social Psychology; later Department of Social Research, Discipline of Social Psychology) and the Work Efficiency Institute. Nation-wide postal survey data equivalent to that of 2001 was collected in 2006 and 2012. Although the questionnaires of 2006 and 2012 were largely in line with that of 2001, some questions were deleted and others added. The sub-studies of this dissertation were started in 2008 and 2012, and both of them used the latest data-set. This means that the 2001 data was not analysed in this dissertation.

²⁹ Rural small business owner was defined as a business owners who employs less than 20 people and whose business is located in an area with a population density less than 50 inhabitants per square kilometre (see Rantamäki-Lahtinen 2004).

The data generated in 2006 (N=871) consist of two data sets. The first set is follow-up data from the 2001 survey and the second is an additional random sample. The average response rate was 30 per cent. However, the rate was higher in the follow-up sample (48%, N=520) than in the additional sample (20%, N=351). Farmers, both conventional and diversified, answered the survey more frequently than non-farm small business owners; the response rates were 38 per cent for diversified farmers, 33 per cent for conventional farmers and 17 per cent for non-farm small business owners (Rantamäki-Lahtinen et al. 2008; also Vesala & Vesala 2010).

The data generated in 2012 (N=922)³⁰ also consist of two data sets: the first is follow-up data from the 2006 survey and the second is an additional random sample. The average response rate was 24 per cent and again the rate was higher in the follow-up sample (57%, N=458) than in the additional sample (16%, N=464). The farmers' response rate was again higher than that of non-farm small business owners; the response rates were 27 per cent for diversified farmers, 27 per cent for conventional farmers and 17 per cent for non-farm small business owners³¹ (Vesala 2013).

The surveys of 2001, 2006 and 2012 all included a section concerning the principles guiding farmers' and business owners' business actions. The questions were: *What are the guiding principles of your business? How important do you consider these values/principles to be in your business?* In 2006, the respondents evaluated the importance of 15 principles and, in 2012, the importance of 16 principles. The principles included are commonly connected with farming and entrepreneurship (see Chapters 1 and 2). In 2006, the principles were the following: financial independence, autonomy in work, vitality of rural areas, continuing families' traditions, continuing parents' work, maximising profit, respect for nature, equality of all workers, taking care of the Finns' needs, earning a better living for oneself and one's family, economic profitability, common good of the nation, well-being of employees, rural development and employing others. In 2012, the principle of production efficiency was added to the list. The importance of each principle was rated with a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all important, 2=somewhat important, 3=moderately important, 4=fairly important, 5=extremely important). Each value variable was rated individually and the respondents were not asked to rank the variables.

The second research project, *Narratives of successful firms and enterprise promotion – a case study of entrepreneurs, developers, and policy discourses in the Suupohja sub-region*, was conducted in 2009–2010

³⁰ After removing the blank questionnaires, 892 filled-in questionnaires were returned in 2012 (Vesala 2013).

³¹ Respondents in both surveys were men and women of different age groups. The background variables, and dropout and missing data analysis are discussed by Rantamäki-Lahtinen et al. (2008) and Vesala (2013). The samples represent Finnish farmers and rural non-farm business owners, for example, in terms of gender, age and annual revenue (see Vesala 2013).

by the University of Helsinki (Department of Social Research and Ruralia Institute Seinäjoki) and MTT Agrifood Research Finland. The project focused on the evolution of entrepreneurship policy, and the relations between rural business owners and enterprise promotion policy in Suupohja, which is a sub-region in South-West Finland (see Vesala & Vihinen 2011). Suupohja was selected as the case region because it was part of the Regional Centre Programme (see Section 2.2.1), even though it does not include a major city but rather consists of four rural municipalities. This sub-region has been a somewhat rare example of a rural area implementing the new regional policy and the new entrepreneurship policy (e.g., OECD 2008, 210–211).

The data generated in the project consist of individual interviews and group discussions.³² The interviewees included regional and sub-regional policy implementers (N=10) and rural small business owners (N=19). The policy implementers represented, for example, the Regional Centre Programme, LAGs, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, and the sub-regional livelihood development company (see Section 2.1). The small business owners represented 15 rural enterprises that operate, for example, in the food, metal and furniture industries, retail, tourism, interior design and consultancy. The participants of group discussions (N=3) were policy implementers, other stakeholders (e.g., representative of a private financial institution) and one business owner. Two discussions had only policy implementers and other stakeholders participating. One was a mixed group discussion including two policy implementers, a stakeholder and a business owner.

The data collection followed the principles of the Qualitative Attitude Approach (Vesala & Rantanen 2007; also e.g., Nousiainen et al. 2009; Pesonen, Niska & Vesala 2013; Pyysiäinen 2010). Both interviews and group discussions were stimulated with the help of prompts; statements and questions were presented to the interviewees or groups one by one (Vesala & Rantanen 2007; also e.g., Speer 2002). The participants, excluding the interviewers, were asked to freely comment on the presented prompts. All prompts concerned entrepreneurship and enterprise promotion in the sub-region. Business owners commented on eight prompts, while policy implementers and group discussants commented on nine prompts (see Appendix 1). All interviews and discussions were recorded and transcribed in Finnish. Since the analysis focuses on interpretative repertoires and positionings, verbatim transcription was considered to be sufficient (cf. Nikander 2010, 433).

³² In addition, policy documents and news clippings from the regions' info-leaflet called Suupohja-info and the local paper called Kauhajoki-lehti were analysed (see Vesala & Vihinen 2011). Furthermore, discussions that took place on the internet were analysed as secondary data. The internet discussion threads (N=17) were retrieved from Suomi24, one of the largest public online social networking website in Finland. The analysis of the discussion threads follows the basic principles of the Qualitative Attitude Approach (e.g., Vesala & Rantanen 2007).

5.2 RELATIONAL READING OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Quantitative survey data are normally read from the substantialist perspective and results are viewed as ‘windows onto the world of what people believe and want’ (van den Berg, Wetherell & Houtkoop-Steenstra 2004, 3). The assumption is that (a) people have properties like attitudes, values and identities, and (b) these properties can be measured with questionnaires (Harré 1998, 130–131; see also Jerolmack & Khan 2014). Unless the data are biased, the answers given to survey questions reflect the respondents’ inner dispositions.

Survey data can also be approached from relational perspective. When answering survey questions people engage in communicative acts with researchers³³ (e.g., Ahola 1998; Burr 2003; Harré 1998, 131). The presenting of a question and the formulation of a response (e.g., checking off options on a survey questionnaire) are both discursive acts (Wetherell et al. 2001, 4). From a relational perspective, survey responses are not reflections of inner dispositions, but communicative acts where respondents construct themselves and their lives (cf. Harré 1998, 131).

The survey question posed to rural business owners concerned the principles that guide their business actions. Answers to this type of a question are commonly read from the substantialist perspective as reflecting business owners’ internal values. Both entrepreneurship and small business studies, as well as mainstream social psychology, commonly use the concept of value to refer to a relatively permanent and stable inner characteristic of a person, which can be measured with a survey questionnaire (see e.g., Austin et al. 1996; Austin et al. 2006; Harré 1998; 130; Maybery et al. 2005; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992, 2012; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987, 1990).

However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the concept of value can also be approached from a relational perspective. For Billig (1996), values are cultural commonplaces, which actors utilise to generate arguments and accounts. Billig’s view is in line with Goffman, who sees values as one of the resources available for actors when presenting themselves (e.g., Goffman 1974/1986, 74–77). A list of principles, together with a request to evaluate their importance for the respondents’ business actions, equals a request to frame one’s business actions to the researchers in terms of the principals the actions serve. Instead of trying to *explain* business behaviour with values, Studies I and II focus on the ways rural business owners frame their business actions in a survey study context (cf. Jerolmack & Khan 2014; Lamont & Swidler 2014, 159, 163). These framings are discussed in these studies in relation to policy discourses that promote rural entrepreneurship.

³³ It is of course possible that in addition to researchers, these communicative acts are directed to the readers of the future research and, thus, to society in general.

5.3 RELATIONAL READING OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Like quantitative data, also qualitative data (such as interviews and group discussions) can be approached from different perspectives. On the one hand, language can be viewed ‘as a mere technical means of communication’; that is, the idea that what people say reflects their true opinions, experiences, attitudes, etc. (van den Berg et al. 2004; also e.g., Alasuutari 1995; Jerolmack & Khan 2014; Lamont & Swidler 2014, 162; Peräkylä 1995; Wetherell & Potter 1988). In this case talk reflects talker’s inner dispositions—unless for some reason the talker wants to mislead his/her audience. For example, an attitude expressed in a group discussion might either reflect that person’s ‘true’ attitude well or poorly.

On the other hand, interview and group discussion data can be viewed as discursive acts. In this case, the focus is on the action orientation of language use, on the things done by talking (e.g., Peräkylä 1995; Wetherell & Potter 1988). For example, an attitude expressed in a group discussion setting may be formulated to construct an image of a tolerant and sophisticated person. Of interest here are the resources and functions of talk, not whether talk accurately reflects the talker’s inner dispositions.

The former approach on qualitative data reflects substantialist meta-theoretical assumptions and the latter one, relational meta-theoretical assumptions (see Chapter 4). This study adopts the latter, the relational approach on qualitative data. More specifically, the analyses use the basic analytic units of critical discursive psychology (see Section 4.2), interpretative repertoires and subject positions (Edley 2001b; Wetherell & Potter 1988). As discussed already in Section 4.2, the concept of interpretative repertoire refers to a consistent, bounded language unit that people draw upon while constructing their accounts (Wetherell & Potter 1988, 172). The concept of subject position refers to a ‘location’ within a conversation made relevant by these specific ways of talking (Edley 2001b). Interpretative repertoires construct versions of the social world and, at the same time, enable positions for actors. For example, the neoliberalist discourse in agriculture enables the position of an *independent entrepreneur* (cf. Shane 1995) for farmers (see also Section 3.3).

Positioning processes are the common denominator between critical discursive psychology and positioning theory formulated by Harré together with Davis, van Langenhove and Moghaddam (e.g., Davis & Harré 1990; Harré & van Langenhove 1999; Harré & Moghaddam 2003). Interpretative repertoires enable positions that people adopt for themselves and indicate for other people. Within positioning theory, the former process is called *reflexive positioning* and the latter one *interactive positioning* (e.g., Davis & Harré 1990). The analysis of positioning is one way to study the construction of agency (e.g., Hydén 2005). Positions adopted and indicated can be agentic or non-agentic (e.g., Reynolds et al. 2007). A business adviser working in the public sector may position him/herself as an agentic expert or as a victim of

policymakers' steering. However, these positions both enable and constrain actions that are possible in a given interaction situation. Positions generate local systems of rights and duties, and, thus, construct relationships between the participants of the interaction situation (Harré & van Langenhove 1999). For example, the position of an expert enables advice giving, but only as far as other participants are positioned as non-experts (cf. Niska et al. 2014). The position of non-expert normally constrains people from giving advice to others.

Positioning takes place in an interaction situation. People do not necessarily agree on adopted and indicated positions. At the beginning of an interaction situation, people normally locate—or position—themselves and other participants. The positioning theory calls this *first order positioning* (e.g., van Langenhove & Harré 1999, 20). However, it is not self-evident that participants agree with each other's first order positionings. In *second order positionings*, the first order positioning can be called into question (van Langenhove & Harré 1999, 20). One aspect that people negotiate is the principal that their actions (e.g., positionings) serve (e.g., Potter 1996; 1997). For instance, adopting the position of a bad cook is easily called into question when a group negotiates who should do the cooking for everyone. Agency is not only enacted when people use repertoires, and adopt and indicate positions, but also when meanings and positions are resisted and negotiated.

The analysis of interpretative repertoires is sometimes conducted to 'discover' all interpretative repertoires used in the data (e.g., Suoninen 1992). According to Antaki et al. (2003), this type of a data-driven analysis 'runs the risk of circularity.' In this case, the interpretative repertoires are first extrapolated in the data, and then the same repertoires are cited as an explanation for the utterances. The analysis conducted in this dissertation does not represent a data-driven but rather a theory-driven one. With theory-driven approach, I mean that the analysis focuses on interpretative repertoires recognised and discussed in previous studies, in different contexts and data sets. Both SME policy and entrepreneurship policy are well-known discourses or repertoires, which enable positions for both enterprise promoters and policy targets, and construct a relationship between these groups. In addition, in line with Vesala (1992, 1996), *individualism* and *relationalism* are viewed as repertoires that business owners use while talking about entrepreneurship. Both of these entrepreneurship discourses or repertoires also enable positions for both enterprise promoters and business owners, and construct a relationship between these groups. Studies III and IV focus on rural non-farm business owners' and public enterprise promoters' positionings in interview and group discussion contexts. The studies also discuss these positionings in relation to each other.

6 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the main results of the four sub-studies referred to in this dissertation as Studies I–IV. Section 6.1 summarises the results of Studies I and II, which focused on rural business owners’ interpretations of their business actions by analysing quantitative survey data. Section 6.2 summarises the results of Studies III and IV, which focused on the interaction and relationship between rural business owners and public enterprise promoters by analysing qualitative interview and group discussion data.

6.1 MULTIPLICITY OF POTENTIAL PRINCIPALS

Entrepreneurship is commonly interpreted as agency for self. Debate has mainly concerned whether business owners serve their own self-interests in the sense of profit maximisation or in the sense of autonomy and self-actualisation (see e.g., Hamilton 2000; Henderson 2002; van Gelderen & Jansen 2006). Agency for external principals—such as environmental well-being, the wellbeing of the community or fair trade—has been perceived as a special type of entrepreneurship: that is, social entrepreneurship (see e.g., Austin et al. 2006; Mair & Martí 2006; Peredo & McLean 2006). Unlike non-farm small business, farming is commonly perceived as agency for external principals; farmers are assumed to be *peasants* and *producers*, who serve, above all, the continuity of the family estate or national food self-sufficiency (see e.g., Burton 2004; Burton & Wilson 2006; Salamon 1992). Agency for self, especially in terms of financial profit, is often connected with neoliberalism and ‘entrepreneurial agency’ on farms (see e.g., Austin et al. 1996; Salamon 1992; van der Ploeg 2009). However, as discussed in Section 2.2.2, multifunctional agricultural policy discourse has enabled new principals, and scholars talk about farming as agency for rural and environmental wellbeing. These farmers have been called *ecological entrepreneurs* or *new peasants* (e.g., Marsden & Smith 2005; van der Ploeg 2009).

Previous studies have widely discussed types of entrepreneurship, including growth entrepreneurship, lifestyle entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, ecological entrepreneurship, etc. In line with substantialist meta-theory (see Chapter 4), it has been assumed that business owners have internal interests and, based on these interests, they can be categorised into these groups. Contrary to these assumptions, Studies I and II view the discussion on the above-mentioned entrepreneur and farmer types as an indication that various ‘vocabularies of motives’ for doing business are appropriate (cf. Mills 1940). Besides commercial entrepreneurship and

peasantry, rural business owners can also frame their business actions as social or ecological entrepreneurship. Within frame analysis, this kind of a shift to an atypical motive is called a regrounding (see Goffman 1974/1986, 74–77; also Section 4.1). From the relational perspective, business owners and farmers cannot be categorised into distinct groups based on interests—or principals—they serve. If business owners and farmers represent modern agents (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000), they should be able to take multiple principals and serve various external principals besides their self-interests. However, considering regional, agricultural and rural policies, an interesting question is how rural business owners frame their business actions in relation to these policies. Studies I and II answer this question by analysing the results of a value survey (see Section 5.2).

In Study I, we analysed survey results from non-farm rural small business owners. The study illustrated two alternative readings of the value survey data; the relational reading is outlined by way of comparison with the alternative substantialist reading (see Section 5.2). In the study, business owners were asked to evaluate the importance of 16 principles in their business actions. The mean importance, standard deviations of value variables and percentages of small business owners who rated the variable as fairly (4) or extremely (5) important are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of individual variables, percentage of small business owners who rated the variable as fairly (4) or extremely (5) important (Source: Study I: Niska, Vesala & Vesala, under review)

	<i>M (Std.)</i>	% (4 or 5)
Autonomy in work	4.45 (.70)	91.9
Economic profitability	4.37 (.68)	90.8
Financial independence	4.25 (.85)	83.7
Well-being of employees	4.17 (.95)	82.2
Vitality of rural areas	4.17 (1.08)	79.7
Earning a better living for oneself & one's family	3.95 (.89)	75.1
Respect for nature	3.91 (1.03)	72.1
Production efficiency	3.89 (.99)	71.7
Equality of all workers	3.83 (1.13)	71.8
Rural development	3.73 (1.16)	64.1
Taking care of the Finns' needs	3.52 (1.17)	57.7
Employing others	3.33 (1.27)	49.0
Maximising profit	3.07 (1.20)	37.1
Common good of the nation	2.91 (1.18)	32.7
Continuing family traditions	2.29 (1.37)	21.7
Continuing parents' work	2.07 (1.29)	17.4

Note: *N*=201–208

To study the relationships among variables, a principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted with orthogonal rotation (varimax). Sum-variables were formed on the basis of the analysis. These sum-variables were autonomy, economic values, societal values and family traditions. Based on the mean expressed importance, business owners rated autonomy as the most important value, followed by economic and societal values. Family traditions were the least important value (see Table 2). Interestingly, unlike other differences, the difference between the importance of economic and societal values was not statistically significant (see Appendix 2, Table 5). Thus, when it comes to business actions, business owners rated economic values almost precisely as important as societal values.

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha, means and standard deviations of the sum-variables (Source: Study I: Niska, Vesala & Vesala, *under review*)

	Sum-variables			
	Autonomy	Economy	Societal	Tradition
Cronbach's alpha	.65	.72	.87	.87
Mean (Std.)	4.35(.67)	3.80(.76)	3.75(.80)	2.17 (1.25)

Note: N= 207–208.

From the substantialist perspective, the factors could be seen as referring to the two basic dimensions of Schwartz's theory of basic human values: self-enhancement versus self-transcendence, and conservation versus openness to change (e.g., Schwartz 1992; 2012). Economic values represent self-enhancement and societal values represent self-transcendence. Furthermore, autonomy represents openness to change, and tradition represents conservation values (cf. Schwartz 1992; 2012). The results of the survey could be read to indicate that, in line with previous studies, the value profile of Finnish rural small business owners highlights openness to change (i.e., autonomy) above conservation (i.e., tradition). However, previous substantialist studies (e.g., Licht & Siegel 2006) also suggest that business owners' value profile emphasises self-enhancement (i.e., economy) over self-transcendence (i.e., societal values). The survey results do not fully support this notion: economic values were evaluated to be as important as societal values (see Appendix 2, Table 5).

Although economic values were evaluated to be as important as societal values, the correlation between these sum-variables was negative ($r=-0.38^{***}$) (see Study I: Niska, Vesala & Vesala, *under review*). Interpreting this result is beyond the scope of Study I, which focuses on relational reading of the results. However, the result could be interpreted to implicate that besides traditional, commercial entrepreneurs, the data also included

responses from a number of social entrepreneurs. Another explanation would be that the data is biased.

From the relational perspective, a questionnaire is a medium of interaction, and the responses are communicative acts, framings. The survey results indicate that nearly all respondents purported that their business actions serve their own interests in the sense of economic profitability or autonomy (see Table 1). Still, business actions were rarely framed as growth entrepreneurship; employing others and maximising profit were among the least valued principles (see Table 1). Regarding agency for self, the respondents framed their business actions more in line with lifestyle entrepreneurship than growth entrepreneurship (see Chapter 1).

However, business owners were also keen on purporting that, besides their own interests, their business actions serve the interests of their employees or the vitality of rural areas. Eight out of ten respondents were willing to frame their business actions as agency for employees or agency for rural areas. Somewhat surprisingly, only half of the respondents were willing to frame business actions as agency for Finnish citizens and only one-third as agency for the nation (see Table 1). The preferred external principals were, thus, local rather than national.

From the point of view of enterprise promotion within regional and rural policy, the results can be both vexing and encouraging. Most challenging from the substantialist perspective is the indication that Finnish rural small business owners are driven by their personal autonomy and the pursuit of subsistence, and not by business growth. On the other hand, according to the substantialist view, it may be seen as encouraging that rural policy highlights the importance of community entrepreneurs who contribute to sustainable rural development (see Section 2.2.3), and societal values seem to guide a number of respondents.³⁴

From the relational perspective, the survey results indicate that rural small business owners are modern social agents capable of, and willing to, adopt various principals and, thus, present themselves and their business in varying ways. Instead of one-sidedly serving self-interests (i.e., traditional entrepreneurs) or external principals (i.e., social entrepreneurs), small business owners were able and willing to frame their business actions as both agency for self and agency for external principals. The fact that business owners were (a) not keen on the growth entrepreneurship framing and (b) more willing to adopt local rather than national external principals highlights the fit between their framings and rural policy, but not regional policy.

Study II analysed survey responses of farmers. Contrary to Study I, the survey results are read only from the relational perspective. The substantialist reading is not discussed. The study takes a frame analytic perspective on the popular peasant–entrepreneur typology (e.g. Austin et al.

³⁴ However, from the substantialist perspective, the critical question would be how accurately the results portray Finnish small business owners' 'true inner' value profile.

1996; Davis-Brown & Salamon 1987; Salamon 1992) and gives specific attention to the keyings (see Section 4.1) of *new peasantry* (van der Ploeg 2009) and *ecological entrepreneurship* (Marsden & Smith 2005). The data analysed in Study II is similar to the one analysed in Study I; farmers evaluated the importance of 15 principles³⁵ in their business actions. The mean importance and standard deviations, and the percentages of farmers who rated the principle as fairly (4) or extremely (5) important are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of individual variables, percentage of farmers who rated the variable as fairly (4) or extremely (5) important (Source: Study II: Niska, Vesala & Vesala 2012).

	M (Std.)	% (4 or 5)
Economic profitability	4.33 (.77)	86.9
Vitality of rural areas	4.27 (.96)	81.3
Autonomy in work	4.26 (.79)	85.5
Respect for nature	4.05 (.84)	77.2
Earning a better living for oneself & one's family	4.01 (.85)	75.2
Financial independence	3.99 (.90)	72.6
Rural development	3.89 (.99)	68.5
Well-being of employees	3.86 (.99)	69.5
Equality of all workers	3.54 (1.13)	54.8
Taking care of Finns' needs	3.52 (1.10)	54.6
Continuing families' traditions	3.34 (1.23)	48.3
Continuing parents' work	3.25 (1.29)	46.4
Maximising profit	3.19 (1.03)	39.8
Common good of the nation	3.01 (1.08)	33.6
Employing others	2.99 (1.25)	36.4

Note: N=638

As in Study I, the relationships among the variables were studied with principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (varimax) and sum-variables were formed on the basis of the analysis. The sum-variables were autonomy, economic values, societal values and family traditions, like in Study I. Like the non-farm small business owners of the Study I, the farmers of Study II also rated autonomy as the most important value, followed by economic and societal values. Family traditions were again the least important value (see Table 4). However, unlike in Study I, the difference between the importance of economic and societal values was statistically significant (see Appendix 2, Table 6). Whereas non-farm business owners

³⁵ Study II used the survey data of 2006. The 2006 questionnaire included one variable less than the 2012 questionnaire used in Study I. This variable was 'production efficiency'.

evaluated economic and societal values as equally important, farmers evaluated economic values as more important.

Table 4: Cronbach's alpha, means and standard deviations of the sum-variables (Source: Study II: Niska, Vesala & Vesala 2012).

	Sum-variables			
	Autonomy	Economy	Societal	Tradition
Cronbach's alpha	.66	.75	.87	.93
Mean (Std.)	4.13(.73)	3.85(.73)	3.64(.76)	3.29 (1.22)

Note: N= 637–638.

The relational reading of the survey results illustrates the ambiguity of the peasant–entrepreneur typology. Based on the results, it is possible to argue that respondents frame farming as (a) peasantry, not entrepreneurship, (b) entrepreneurship, not peasantry, (c) neither peasantry nor entrepreneurship or (d) both peasantry and entrepreneurship. This is due to the keyings of the new peasantry and ecological entrepreneurship. If peasantry is understood as agency for traditions and continuity, and entrepreneurship as agency for profit-maximisation, both frames are unpopular among respondents. However, if peasantry and entrepreneurship are understood to be in line with the keyings of new peasantry and ecological entrepreneurship as agency for environmental and rural wellbeing, both frames are highly popular.

Both non-farm business owners and farmers are modern social agents who are both capable of, and willing to, adopt various principals, and, thus, present themselves and their business in varying ways. Considering that farming is commonly perceived to be agency for external principals, someone might find it surprising that nearly all farmers in the study framed their farming as agency for self, in terms of economic profitability or autonomy in work. From the relational perspective this result should not be interpreted simply as a product of neoliberalism. Rather, the result indicates that farmers construct themselves as agents capable of serving their own interests (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000). Perhaps not so surprisingly, farmers were also keen on adopting external principals. Eight out of ten respondents framed their farming as serving rural or environmental wellbeing. As discussed above, the results do not fall neatly and exclusively within the frames of peasantry and entrepreneurship. However, Finnish farmers seem to be especially sensitive to the multifunctionality discourse of agricultural policy (see Section 2.2.2), which highlights interests like natural values and rural vitality (e.g., OECD 2001; Renting et al. 2008; Zander et al. 2007).

The results of Studies I and II indicate that rural business owners are willing to frame their business actions as both agency for self and as agency for external principals. However, the results also indicate that rural business

owners are not keen on the growth entrepreneurship frame, and prefer local to national principals. A somewhat surprising finding was that neither non-farm business owners nor farmers were eager to portray their business actions as agency for continuity and family tradition. Previous studies from Finland have argued that, instead of the multifunctionalist discourse, farmers' conceptions of their actions follow the traditional discourse of peasantry (e.g., Hangasmaa 2011; Katila 2000; Silvasti 2001). The empirical findings of this dissertation challenge this assumption.

Notably, a survey is, of course, a specific interaction situation. In the survey context the business owners interact with researchers, and were not asked to consider their business actions in relation to public enterprise promotion. Studies III and IV focus on the question of how rural business owners' interpretations of their business actions relate to policy actors' interpretations and how these interpretations possibly affect enterprise promotion policy implementation. Instead of frame analysis, these studies use the analytic concepts of critical discursive psychology (see Section 5.3).

6.2 PROBLEMATIC GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL INTERACTION

As discussed in Studies I and II, business owners frame their actions as both agency for self and agency for others. This result is compatible with previous studies, which argue that business owners make sense of their business actions with individualist and/or relationalist entrepreneurship discourse (e.g., Vesala 1992, 1996; Niska et al. 2011). Individualist entrepreneurship discourse emphasises business owners' own actions and autonomy; relationalist entrepreneurship discourse emphasises interdependencies and interaction with other actors—such as customers, employees and enterprise promoters. Individualist discourse enables agency for self, while relationalist discourse also enables agency for external principals.

For the business owner, individualist entrepreneurship discourse allows the position of an autonomous agent who 'makes it happen' on his/her own. Furthermore, while 'making it happen', the business owner serves his/her own self-interests. Thus, from the perspective of agency-over, this discourse enables the position of a *personal agent* (cf. Bandura 2000). From the perspective of agency-for, it enables the position of an *independent entrepreneur* (cf. Shane 1995), where the business owner is both agent and principal. Relationalist entrepreneurship discourse allows the position of a proficient networker who 'makes it happen' in relation to others. Thus, from the perspective of agency-over, this discourse enables the position of a *co-agent* (cf. Bandura 2000). However, the agency-for perspective is more ambiguous. The business owner may adopt relationalist entrepreneurship discourse and still position him/herself as the principal. In this case, the business owner 'makes it happen' in relation to others, but the action still

serves his/her own self-interests. It is also possible that the business owner adopts relationalist entrepreneurship discourse as well as adopts external principals. In such an instance, the business owner 'makes it happen' in relation to others, and the action serves multiple interests or principals.

The position indicated to other actors, such as public enterprise promoters, depends on the adopted discourse—or repertoire (cf. Harré & van Langenhove 1999). Individualist entrepreneurship discourse positions enterprise promoters as insignificant actors. Business owners are autonomous, and business actions do not need agents other than business owners. Relationalist entrepreneurship discourse positions enterprise promoters as potentially useful co-agents. The question, then, is whether enterprise promoters are interpreted as useful or not. Following Vesala (1992), enterprise promoters can be seen as either supportive or threatening.

As discussed in Section 5.3, SME policy and entrepreneurship policy can be viewed as enterprise promotion policy discourses—solid versions of enterprise promotion—that enable positions for both enterprise promoters and their targets, and construct a relationship between these agents. Public enterprise promoters can adopt either one of the discourses to make sense of their work. However, as discussed in Section 2.2, some policy contexts stress one discourse more than the other.

For enterprise promoters, SME policy discourse enables a position of a business expert whose job is to make sure that SMEs and farms are successful. However, the discourse positions enterprise promoters as agents for society; public employees' agency is authorised by societal interests. Instead of the position of a business expert, entrepreneurship policy discourse enables the position of a business facilitator. This differs substantially from the position enabled by SME policy discourse. Now the duty of the public enterprise promoter is not merely to make SMEs successful, but to create new business action together with potential business owners. Instead of merely assisting in realising business opportunities, enterprise promoters also take part in recognising business opportunities. Since recognising and realising business opportunities is one main entrepreneurial skill (Vesala & Pyysiäinen 2008), the position enabled by the entrepreneurship policy discourse is more 'entrepreneurial' than what is made possible by SME policy discourse. The new rights—or duties—include, for example, risk-taking: what if enterprise promoters make wrong decisions and invest public money in unprofitable businesses? From the agency-over perspective, entrepreneurship policy discourse allows the position of a co-agent (cf. Bandura 2000). Enterprise promoters 'make it happen' in relation to, for example, potential business owners. From the agency-for perspective, the discourse offers the position of an agent for society, much like SME policy discourse.

The position indicated to business owners depends on which enterprise promotion policy discourse is adopted (cf. Harré & van Langenhove 1999). SME policy discourse positions business owners as imperfect agents who

need the assistance of enterprise promoters. They can be imperfect agents in two ways. Either business owners are bad in ‘making it happen’ (i.e., agency-over), or they serve the wrong interests (i.e., agency-for). In the latter case business owners, for example, settle for low-level subsistence and it is the enterprise promoters’ duty to whet business owners’ appetite for growth and profit maximisation. As discussed in Section 2.1, SME policy nowadays focuses mainly on business growth. Enterprise promoters position themselves as mediators between society and the business owner; they make sure business owners are good agents for society.

The entrepreneurship policy discourse positions (future) business owners as necessary co-agents. Enterprise promoters are often unable to create new business action without future business owners.³⁶ However, (future) business owners may be incompetent or may serve the wrong interests. Instead of changing the problematic agency-over or agency-for (cf. the SME policy discourse), the duty of enterprise promoters is to differentiate between potential business owners and non-potential ones—and then focus on the potential ones (cf. Niska et al. 2014; Pyysiäinen & Vesala 2013).

Studies III and IV analyse qualitative interview and group discussion data, and consider how rural business owners’ interpretations of their business action may either enhance or impede enterprise promotion policy implementation, which is understood as communicative interaction between public enterprise promoters and business owners (see Section 2.3). Both individualist and relationalist entrepreneurship discourse were widely adopted by the interviewed business owners. SME policy discourse was also widely adopted by the interviewed enterprise promoters, whereas entrepreneurship policy discourse was mainly adopted by enterprise promoters who implemented new regional policy. This is understandable considering that the discourse is new and especially intertwined with new regional policy discourse (see Section 2.2.1).

Study III demonstrates the interactional pitfalls that take place when an enterprise promoter who adopts the SME policy discourse, encounters a business owner who positions him/herself as the principal of business actions (i.e., agency for self). As discussed earlier, this position can be constructed with both individualist and relationalist entrepreneurship discourse. Since individualist discourse positions other agents as irrelevant, the adoption of individualist discourse foretells withdrawal from interaction with any enterprise promoter—public or private. However, agency for self, constructed with relationalist entrepreneurship discourse also foretells interactional problems. Study III considers an interaction situation called *contradictory proxy agency*. In this situation, the business owner, using relationalist entrepreneurship discourse, positions him/herself as the principal of business actions and the enterprise promoter as a useful co-

³⁶ However, as demonstrated in Study IV, in some cases the enterprise promoter him/herself can become the business owner.

agent. However, the enterprise promoter, using SME policy discourse, positions him/herself as the business expert who mediates society's interests, and the business owner as an imperfect agent for society. Thus, from the perspective of the business owner, the enterprise promoter is an agent for the business owner; from the perspective of the enterprise promoter, the business owner is an agent for society (see Figure 1). In this situation, the encounter is not only threatened by the question of who is competent (i.e., agency-over), but also by the question whose interests are being served (i.e., agency-for).

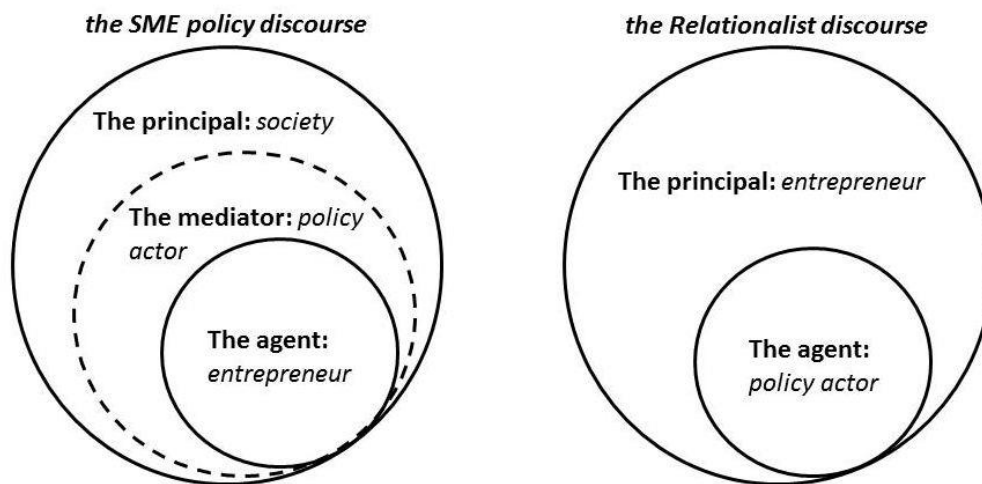


Figure 1: The contradictory proxy agency: the SME policy discourse and the relationalist entrepreneurship discourse from the principal-agent -perspective (Source: Study III: Niska & Vesala 2013).

Study III focuses on the problematic encounter between enterprise promoters, who adopt the SME policy discourse, and business owners, who position themselves as principals. Nonetheless, as discussed in Study I, business owners are also capable of adopting external principals. Business owners can position themselves, for example, as agents for their customers or economic development. The problematic contradictory proxy agency can be avoided if (a) a rural business owner adopts a suitable external principal or (b) an enterprise promoter adopts a business owner as his/her principal. These options are further discussed later in this chapter.

As mentioned above, entrepreneurship policy discourse was mainly adopted by enterprise promoters who implemented new regional policy. Study IV focuses on enterprise promotion within new regional policy and reflects on the construction of co-agency—or social partnership—between public enterprise promoters and a CEO.

In Study IV, we analysed a case of food industry cluster development. Instead of traditional food production and processing, the cluster represents

high technology and produces ingredients with nutritional and functional effects from plants and berries. The food industry cluster was an interesting case of co-agency between public enterprise promoters and business owners. In this case, enterprise promoters positioned themselves and the business owner as co-agents for society in the sense of regional competitiveness. The CEO positioned himself and the enterprise promoters as co-agents for the stockholders and investors (see Figure 2).

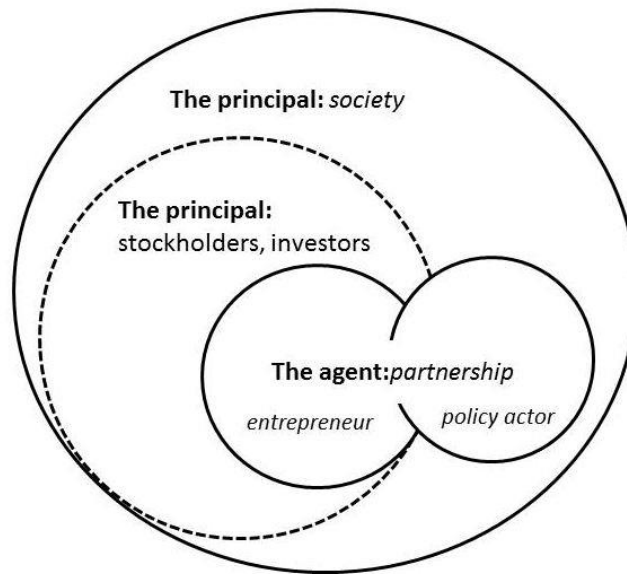


Figure 2: The construction of the co-agency from the agent–principal -perspective (Source: Study IV: Niska & Vesala 2015).

The common denominators between these principals are the principles of growth and profit maximisation. By serving the interests of stockholders and investors, the business owner also serves the interests of society, narrowed down to regional competitiveness. Similarly, by serving regional competitiveness, which calls for business growth, enterprise promoters also serve the interests of stockholders and investors. Co-agency can be achieved if participants are willing to negotiate over whom they serve, and seek common principals. The common principal is not necessarily an actor or a group; it may also be some abstract principle (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000).

Study IV focuses on the encounter between enterprise promoters who adopt entrepreneurship policy discourse and a business owner—a CEO—who adopts relationalist entrepreneurship discourse and positions himself as an agent for external principals. Had the CEO positioned himself as the principal, co-agency would have been more difficult to achieve. In this case,

the interaction situation would have been constructed more in line with the contradictory proxy agency; from the perspective of enterprise promoters, co-agency would serve society; from the perspective of the business owner, co-agency would serve himself (i.e., co-agency for self).

However, besides asking ‘whose interests are being served’ one should, of course, also pay attention to what these interests are. It is, of course, easier to negotiate a common principal if the business owner serves his/her self-interest in the sense of profit-maximisation and the policy implementer serves the interests of society in the sense of economic development, than if the business owner serves his/her self-interest of a pleasant lifestyle and the policy implementer nevertheless serves economic development. The reason why it is often difficult for policy implementers to adopt business owners as their principals (cf. Mole 2002) is that business owners’ self-interests do not align with societal interests. Public enterprise promotion is legitimate when it serves societal interests—not when it serves the interests of business owners regardless of what they are. The agency relationship that public enterprise promoters have with the policymakers is not solely based on contracts and salary paid for promotion work (cf. Agency Theory). The agency relationship is also based on the legitimisation of promotion actions (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000). It is fairly easy to come up with arguments where business owners’ interests do not align with the interests of society (see Chapter 1). As Studies I and II demonstrate, rural business owners are keen on framing their business actions as agency for self in the sense of autonomy and profitability—not in the sense of profit maximisation and business growth. Agency for business owners potentially jeopardises the legitimacy of public enterprise promotion.

Besides the interview data, in Study IV we also analysed internet discussion threads where local inhabitants discussed public enterprise promotion in their sub-region (see Section 5.1). The analysis demonstrates how legitimacy of public enterprise promoters’ actions is called into question by the local community. The argument presented on the internet was that instead of society, public enterprise promoters serve either their own interests (i.e., agency for self) or the interests of particular business owners (i.e., agency for business owners). The follow-up argument was that tax money should not be used for action that does not serve societal interests (i.e., common good), but the interests of *some* business people and policy actors.

The results of Studies I and II indicate that rural small business owners who participated in the surveys frame their actions as both agency for self and agency for external principals. The results of Study III indicate that, in interaction with policy actors, business owners’ agency for self foretells problems. Especially when the self-interest of the business owner is autonomy and subsistence, and not profit and growth. However, even if business owners adopt external principals, the interaction with policy implementers is not necessarily trouble-free. Some external principals

naturally align better with societal interests than others. This issue is further discussed in the next chapter.

7 DISCUSSION

In this dissertation, I have elaborated a relational social psychological perspective on agency, in particular, the *agency-for* aspect of agency. Besides posing the common question ‘how do agents make it happen?’, it is also important to ask ‘for whom do agents make it happen?’. By taking the relational social psychological perspective on agency-for in the rural enterprise promotion policy context, I have reflected upon the question *who is serving whom in rural enterprise promotion policy*. In this chapter, I reflect on the empirical findings and their contributions, as well as discuss the contribution the dissertation makes to relational social psychology. The remaining part of the discussion chapter considers the ethical questions of the research and evaluates the dissertation.

7.1 WHO IS SERVING WHOM IN ENTERPRISE PROMOTION POLICY?

Previous studies have argued that business owners do not take advantage of public enterprise promotion measures because they value their personal autonomy (e.g., Audet & St-Jean 2007; Dyer & Ross 2007; North & Smallbone 2006), and question public enterprise promoters’ ability to serve their interests (e.g., Bosworth 2009; Dyer & Ross 2007; Mole 2002). This dissertation contributes to the discussion by noting that (a) besides the substantialist perspective, business owners’ agency can also be approached from the relational perspective, and (b) besides agency-over, scholars should also pay attention to agency-for.

Previous studies have commonly approached business owners’ agency from the substantialist perspective and discussed factors such as goals, values and motives that—at least partly—explain business actions. Business owners’ interest in autonomy has been understood as an internal disposition that affects their behaviour; in this case, the autonomy value is considered to cause business owners’ withdrawal from public enterprise promotion.

In this dissertation, I have adopted a relational social psychological perspective on agency and interests. Interests are not viewed as dispositions that guide agency. Rather, interests are resources used to frame business actions in suitable ways. Business owners have agency over the interests they serve. There are various appropriate ‘vocabularies of motives’ for doing business (Mills 1940) and rural business owners are able to present their business actions as serving both their self-interests and other-interests. This variation is not a sign of dishonesty (cf. Shane et al. 2003), but rather a sign of rural business owners’ modern agency (cf. Meyer & Jepperson 2000; Vesala et al. 2015).

Although business owners are able to present their business actions in varying ways, survey studies suggest that agency for personal autonomy is a popular framing. Autonomy is a crucial feature of both individualistic entrepreneurship and traditional peasantry; it is, thus, understandable that both non-farm business owners and farmers are accustomed to making sense of their actions by referring to the value of autonomy. However, in interaction with policy actors, agency for self in the sense of personal autonomy is a problematic framing. Policy actors should adopt the position of an agent for business owner in order to avoid the interaction situation of *contradictory proxy agency*. However, if the business owner serves his/her own personal autonomy, the policy actor cannot adopt this position without jeopardising the legitimacy of his/her actions. As noted throughout the dissertation, public enterprise promotion is legitimate only when it serves the interests of society and business owners' autonomy is not necessarily seen as doing so.

Previous studies have also noted that business owners question public enterprise promoters' ability to serve their interests. This problem has been commonly discussed in line with Agency Theory (e.g., Jensen & Mecklin 1976; Ross 1973; Shapiro 2005), referring to the agency-over aspect of agency. The question has been whether public enterprise promoters *are* competent or not, and whether business owners *realise* their competence or not (cf. Mole 2002). This dissertation contributes to the discussion by highlighting the agency-for aspect, which has been touched upon by Perren and Jennings (2005). The question is not merely, whether policy actors are capable of 'making things happen,' the question is also whose interests are served by 'making things happen.' Instead of questioning public enterprise promoters' *ability* to serve their interests, business owners may question public enterprise promoters' ability to serve *their* interests. This is, of course, a reasonable consideration. Public enterprise promoters serve the interests of society, and within regional and agricultural policies these interests are often specified as economic development and a national common good. However, survey studies suggest that rural business owners prefer agency for self in the sense of autonomy and subsistence over profit maximisation and business growth. In addition, they seem to prefer local external principals over national ones.

In interaction between public enterprise promoters and rural small business owners, the question of *who is serving whose interests* is crucial. This dissertation suggests that rural business owners' agency-for creates interactional pitfalls for new regional policy implementation rather than rural policy implementation, and neoliberal agricultural policy implementation rather than multifunctional agricultural policy implementation. Rural business owners' agency for employees and rural areas may foretell functional interaction with rural policy implementers. However, these principals would be much more troublesome for regional policy implementers. Similarly, agency for rural areas and nature may

foretell functional interaction with policy implementers of multifunctional agricultural policy. However, for policy implementers of neoliberal agricultural policy, these principals would present a problem. All in all, the common assumption of economic liberalism—that is, by serving their own self-interests, entrepreneurs also serve the interests of society—seems far from self-evident.

7.2 ELABORATIONS ON RELATIONAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Besides contributing to the discussion on public enterprise promotion, this dissertation contributes to the relational social psychological perspective on agency. The relational perspective on agency-over aspect of agency has been discussed by social scientists, including social psychologists (e.g., Burr 2003; Pyysiäinen 2011; Reynolds et al. 2007). However, the agency-for aspect of agency has received substantially less attention (however, see e.g., Gillespie 2012; Vesala 2012; Vesala & Niska 2013; Vesala et al. 2015). This dissertation elaborates the relational social psychological perspective on agency-for by demonstrating that, although the concept is not used, the idea of agency-for is present both in the work of Goffman and the micro constructionists.

Although the relationship between Goffman's work and micro constructionism is somewhat ambiguous (see Section 4.3), their ideas regarding agency construction are congruent; agency is defined and constructed in relational processes, in which agency can be viewed as both a product of the process (i.e., agency within a frame or position), as well as the ability to produce these products (i.e., agency over frames or positions). The agency-for aspect of agency is present on both levels. Actors are capable of portraying themselves as agents for various interests. However, the ability to make these various portrayals also serves various interests (see also Mills 1940, 905). For example, a business owner may portray his actions as agency for self. His ability to make this portrayal may end up serving his own interests, but it may also end up serving the interests of his competitors.

The empirical context of this dissertation is enterprise promotion in rural Finland, and the empirical part demonstrates how agency-for can be empirically studied by drawing on the analytic units of frame analysis and critical discursive psychology. This is not to say that this is the *only* interesting empirical context or that these are the *only* possible analytic units. Agency-for can be highly useful concept also in other empirical contexts. This issue is further discussed in Section 7.4. In addition, agency-for could be empirically approached, for example, using the analytic unit of *ideological dilemmas* discussed by Billig et al. (1988). Ideological dilemmas could be viewed as negotiation over agency-for.

On a methodological level, the dissertation contributes to the discussion of the relational reading of quantitative data (see e.g., Ahola 1998; Harré

1998, 131; Wetherell et al. 2001, 4). Research that represents relational meta-theory, for example, micro social constructionism, tends to be overwhelmingly qualitative. This is not because quantitative data cannot or should not be used in relational research. Rather, the reason is that researchers commonly, and rather one-sidedly, combine quantitative data with substantialist meta-theory and qualitative data with relational meta-theory. A substantialist interpretation of survey results ‘obscures the activity done with talk and text’ (Potter 1997, 147). However, as demonstrated in Studies I and II, quantitative survey data can also be approached from a perspective that focuses on interaction processes.

7.3 RESEARCH ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Following Kuula (2006), I will now consider the ethical issues regarding (a) the research topic and the knowledge interest that guides the study, (b) the chosen approach of relational social psychology, and (c) the use of qualitative data.

The first ethical consideration concerns the research topic. Within the social sciences there are, of course, ethically challenging topics. Apparent examples are studies that strengthen negative stereotypes of certain social groups, or studies that produce knowledge to be used in the exploitation of powerless social groups. Research on rural entrepreneurship and enterprise promotion has sometimes been accused of promoting entrepreneurship that is considered to subjugate powerless social groups, such as farmers (e.g., Silvasti 2009, 21). This kind of argument assumes that all studies on rural enterprise promotion adopt a *functionalist paradigm* of entrepreneurship research. This dissertation does not.

Grant and Perren (2002; see also Jennings, Perren & Carter 2005) follow Burrell and Morgan (1979/2003) in making a distinction between *functionalist*, *interpretive* and *radical* entrepreneurship research. The vast majority of research on entrepreneurship and enterprise promotion has represented the functionalist paradigm, with a realist ontology, positivist epistemology and interest in making enterprises successful. However, instead of functionalist research which endorses enterprise promotion or radical research which focuses on power and subjugation in enterprise promotion (cf. Perren & Jennings 2005), this dissertation represents the interpretive paradigm. The purpose is to *understand* enterprise promotion and its difficulties—not to endorse it (cf. functionalist paradigm), nor resist it (cf. radical paradigm).

The second ethical consideration concerns the approach, that is, relational social psychology. Especially discursive approaches are from time to time deemed unethical. Willig (2012, 60), for example, argues that because discursive research focuses on the action orientation of talk, it does not pay attention to the ‘true inner experiences’ and ‘material restrictions’ of the

interviewed people. From this view, discursive approach thus ‘serves to silence participants’ (Willig 2012, 60). It is, of course, difficult to study ‘true inner experiences’ using an approach that is *mute* on the existence of ‘true inner things’ (see e.g., Aceros 2012; Hosking & Hjort 2004). This muteness, however, does not silence participants. Discursive approaches take people’s narratives and self-presentations very seriously. Individuals are considered competent users of discourse also in relation to their own experiences.

The third ethical consideration concerns the data and methods. The key challenges relate to anonymity and informed consent. According to Vainio (2012, 685), ‘anonymity is one of the core principles of research ethics and is usually regarded as the mechanism through which privacy and confidentiality are maintained.’ However, anonymity is especially challenging when qualitative case studies are carried out in small towns (Vainio 2012). Since the dissertation includes a case study carried out in a rural sub-region, some consideration needs to be given to anonymity issues.

The qualitative data used in the dissertation include interviews and group discussions with local policy implementers and business owners. Although names are not revealed, it is possible that someone would be able to deduce who the participants were. The question of anonymity traditionally divides qualitative researchers within the social sciences (Vainio 2012). Some researchers argue that individuals who speak from a professional position (e.g., experts and politicians) *should* be identified, as a public position means that their words are also public (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 18). Researchers, who adhere to radical paradigm of entrepreneurship study, might even argue that non-anonymity empowers the participants (cf. Vainio 2012). Despite these arguments, I have tried to protect both business owners’ and policy implementers’ anonymity, even if I cannot completely guarantee it. From an ethical perspective, I follow the consequentialist approach: the key issue for me is that the data presented in this dissertation does not include content that might be harmful for the participants, even if someone could possibly guess who some of the participants were (cf. Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 17).

Another ethical question to be considered regarding the data used in the dissertation is the demand of informed consent. Although people who participated in surveys, interviews and group discussions were well informed of the study and its purpose, I also used internet discussion data (Study IV). Internet data collection and analysis have been a topic of heated ethical debate. *Privacy in public* refers to the idea that the internet contains publicly available information, which might still be ethically questionable to use for research purposes (Kuula 2006, 14). Although people are aware that the information they put in the internet is public, this does not automatically lead to the conclusion that researchers can use the information as data. Researchers do not have the informed consent of the research subjects (Kozinets 2010). Among the important ethical questions are: (a) whether online data is private or public, (b) whether the researcher participated in the

online discussion or not, and (c) whether the studied group is somehow vulnerable (e.g., Kozinets 2010, 140).

In the dissertation, I analysed anonymous discussions that took place within the open forum *Suomi24*. The forum is open and anyone can anonymously participate. People who took part in the analysed discussions did not use their real names, nor did they give any information about themselves, such as age, gender or occupation. The pseudonyms that were used (e.g., ‘Story’, ‘Poor guy’ or ‘Expensive stuff’) did not give hints about participants’ identity. As a researcher, I did not take part in any of the discussions. The topic of the analysed discussion, enterprise promotion in the area, does not represent a particularly ethically challenging topic. Policy implementers and business owners are not a particularly vulnerable group. It is not surprising that some people criticise promotion policy which takes place within the area. Therefore, bringing up the issue will not be likely to harm the participants. Furthermore, the analysis of the justifications given for discontent expressed in the forum does not harm the subjects or the objects of the discussion. The purpose of the analysis is to understand, not judge, the argumentation and its roots. However, regardless of these reflections, informed consent was not achieved.

7.4 EVALUATION OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND FUTURE STUDIES

Research is commonly evaluated by considering issues of validity, reliability and generalisability. These issues are traditionally discussed differently in quantitative and qualitative research (see e.g., Goodman 2008; Peräkylä 1995, 1997). In quantitative research, validity ‘refers to the research showing what it is claiming to show’, reliability to the reproducibility of the findings and generalisability to the extent to which findings can be generalised to other settings or the wider population (Goodman 2008, 265–266). Qualitative research has been more concerned with questions, such as *how well the selected method fit the research questions* and *how carefully is the data both generated and analysed* (see e.g., Mason 1996; Peräkylä 1997). The issue of generalisability has been widely discussed. Some scholars tend to think that qualitative research is inherently un-generalisable; others highlight the possibility of theoretical generalisations (Goodman 2008; Mason 1996).

As discussed in Chapter 5, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is commonly made without giving much consideration to how the data sets are approached (cf. Peräkylä 1995, 39). Quantitative research is commonly assumed to represent substantialism. Validity, for example, is discussed in terms of whether responses to questionnaires are more or less valid representations of *inner dispositions* like values (see Peräkylä 1997, 207). However, as this dissertation makes clear, quantitative

data can also be approached from the relational perspective. If quantitative data is approached from the relational perspective, the research cannot be evaluated with substantialist principles. In what follows, I evaluate first the quantitative Studies I and II and then the qualitative Studies III and IV.

From the substantialist perspective a crucial question concerning the validity of the quantitative study would be *how well the used questionnaire actually measures the true inner values of rural business owners*. From the relational perspective, the questionnaire is *not* a passage to the inner world of respondents. Rather, it is a communication medium through which respondents present themselves and their actions to the researchers. Since the intention is not to measure any inner dispositions, the question of how widely the questionnaire is used is irrelevant.³⁷ However, the fact that the variable 'production efficiency' was missing from the 2006 questionnaire might present a validity problem; that year, farmers were given a somewhat imperfect opportunity to present their business actions in line with productionism.

Reliability commonly refers to the reproducibility of the findings and generalisability to the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other settings or wider population. In this dissertation, I am not arguing for or against the randomness of the empirical findings, which forms the usual criteria of substantialist claims for reliability. Perhaps in a different survey situation, respondents would frame their actions in a different way. However, in line with the qualitative tradition, I argue that the interpretations made from the empirical findings are not random. Empirical findings can be interpreted from various perspectives, and this dissertation argues that the relational perspective produces credible and useful interpretations. Furthermore, it should be noted that the aim of the dissertation is not to generalise the findings to Finnish rural business owners nor does it try to claim that the findings could be generalised to other settings; rather, the study focuses on the survey setting as a specific interaction situation.

According to Mason (1996, 188), the reliability and validity of qualitative research refer to appropriate data generation and analysis regarding the set research questions. Research is reliable and valid if recordings, transcriptions and analysis are carefully made (Mason 1996; also Peräkylä 1997, 203). In addition, validity means that interpretations made from the data are not random, but understandable and justifiable. The qualitative data used in this dissertation was based on high-quality recordings and the analysis was made with the help of transcriptions and the original audio data. The analysis is described in the original articles, from which the care taken can be evaluated.

In qualitative research, reflections on generalisability refer to reflections on the wider resonance that the results may have outside the analysed cases

³⁷ Substantialist social psychological value studies commonly adopt widely-used value questionnaires, such as the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) or the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ).

(Mason 1996). One might wonder, for example, whether the dissertation tells us anything beyond the Suupohja sub-region. The present study does not aim at 'telling how things are, but rather, how things can be' (cf. Hosking & Hjort 2004, 259; also Peräkylä 1995). Based on this dissertation, we cannot know, for example, whether contradictory proxy agency is a rare or common interactional pitfall. However, we can say that it is a *possible* pitfall. Contradictory proxy agency does not always happen, but it *can* happen and this is something public enterprise promoters might want to take into consideration.

The empirical context of the dissertation is enterprise promotion in rural Finland. Although quantitative data covered both non-farm business owners and farmers, qualitative data was not gathered in the farm context. In the future, it would be interesting to study the positioning processes of farmers and policy implementers. The qualitative data were able to answer the research questions, but the data set could have included more group discussion among public enterprise promoters and rural business owners. The data mainly consisted of individual interviews, so the interaction takes place between the researcher and the interviewee. In the future, it would be interesting to study the interaction, preferably naturally occurring, between the above-mentioned groups.

Although the rural context is highly relevant, it would also be interesting to study enterprise promotion and agency-for in other contexts. The interest in entrepreneurship and its promotion has been increasing, for example, at universities (e.g., Jack & Anderson 1999). Enterprise promotion conducted at Finnish universities would be an excellent target for future research using the relational social psychological perspective on agency construction.

7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to Watson (2013, 16), entrepreneurship and small business studies 'have been dominated by the disciplines of economics and psychology', which commonly follow substantialism. For the last decade, scholars have called for alternative perspectives to the substantialist, realist, positivist and individualist ones (e.g., Jennings et al. 2005). Although the relational perspective is becoming more popular in entrepreneurship and small business studies, the bulk of existing relational research represents *relational sociology* and refers, above all, to the work of pragmatists, Giddens and Bourdieu (see e.g., Jack & Anderson 2002; Tatli et al. 2014; Steinerowski et al. 2008; Watson 2013). This dissertation contributes to entrepreneurship and small business research by elaborating the *relational social psychological* perspective on agency in public enterprise promotion policy.

What is not suggested in the dissertation is that the perspective of relational social psychology would be somehow better than perspectives taken in previous studies. However, it is argued that the perspective of

relational social psychology is a useful one. It helps us understand the problematics included in public enterprise promotion. Instead of attributing interactional problems to actors' inner properties, interactional problems can also be viewed as what they are: *interactional* problems. Relational social psychology enables a better understanding of how rural small business owners interpret their agency, and how these interpretations may hinder functional interaction with public sector actors. This understanding hopefully sheds light on the question of why the relationship between these two groups may seem to be dysfunctional.

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APPENDIX 1

Prompts, questions and stimuli, presented to business owners

Prompt 1	Yleiskuva: Luonnehdi lyhyesti yritystäsi, sen vaiheita ja toimintaideaa	Overview: please, characterise briefly the nature and development of your business, and your business idea
Prompt 2	Avaintapahtumat = Tärkeitä valintatilanteita, ratkaisevia käännekohtia, kriisivaiheita, läpimurtoja, oppimisen / oivalluksen hetkiä ... Kirjaa omalla kohdallasi keskeiset avaintapahtumat aikajanalle	Critical incidents = Important choices, turning points, crisis, breakthroughs, inspirations ... Please mark your critical incidents on the timeline
Prompt 3	Oliko mainitsemisiasi avaintapahtumissa kysymys liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien tunnistamisesta ja toteuttamisesta? Jos niin miten? Liittyykö jokin muu avaintapahtuma kohdallasi nimenomaan mahdollisuuden tunnistamiseen ja sen toteuttamiseen?	Did any of the the critical incidents you mentioned have to do with recognising and realising business opportunities? If yes, how? Did some other critical incident you haven't mentioned, have something specific to do with recognising and realising business opportunities?
Prompt 4	Liittyvätkö mainitsemasi avaintapahtumat liiketoimintastrategian luomiseen ja arviointiin? Jos niin miten? Onko muita, nimenomaan liiketoimintastrategian luomiseen ja arviointiin kytkeytyviä avaintapahtumia, joita et ole vielä maininnut?	Did any of the the critical incidents you mentioned have to do with creating and evaluating a business strategy? If yes, how? Did some other critical incident you haven't yet mentioned, have something to do with creating and evaluating a business strategy?

<p>Prompt 5</p>	<p>Oliko mainitsemisissä avaintapahtumissa kysymys verkostoitumisesta ja kontaktien hyödyntämisestä? Jos niin miten? Liittyykö verkostoitumiseen ja kontaktien hyödyntämiseen avaintapahtumia, joita ei ole aikaisemmin mainittu?</p> <p>Jos ajattelet erikseen asiakassuhteita, kilpailijoita, palkattua työvoimaa, yrityksen ulkopuolisia yhteistyötahoja, tai vaikkapa viranomaisia, tuleeko mieleesi vielä muita yritystoimintasi kannalta ratkaisevia avaintapahtumia?</p>	<p>Did any of the the critical incidents you mentioned have to do with networking and utilising contacts? If yes, how?</p> <p>Did some other critical incident you haven't yet mentioned, have something to do with networking and utilising contacts?</p> <p>Do any other critical incidents spring to mind if you think about your customers, competitors, employees, partners or authorities?</p>
<p>Prompt 6</p>	<p>Yrityksen menestyspolku:</p> <p>Mitkä seikat ovat erityisesti vaikuttaneet yritystoimintasi menestykseen?</p> <p>Miten? Kuka tai ketkä? Mitkä toimet tai toimenpiteet?</p>	<p>Path way to successful business:</p> <p>Which factors have especially contributed to the success of your business?</p> <p>How? Who? Which actions or intervention?</p>
<p>Prompt 7</p>	<p>Yrittäjyyttä edistävät tahot ja toimijat = TE-keskukset, Tekes, elinkeino- tai maaseutuasiamies, yrittäjäjärjestöt, toimintaryhmä, ministeriöt jne...</p> <p>Ovatko yrittäjyyttä edistävät tahot olleet merkittävässä roolissa edellä mainituissa avaintapahtumissa? Tai yritystoimintasi menestyksessä yleensä ottaen? Jos niin miten</p>	<p>Enterprise promotion takes place via = ELY, Tekes, livelihood officers, rural officer, Federations of enterprises, LAGs, Ministeries (etc.)...</p> <p>Have any of these actors played a role in the critical incidents you mentioned earlier?</p> <p>Have they played a role in the success of your business? If yes, how?</p>

<p>Prompt 8</p>	<p>Yrittäjyyttä edistävät ympäristöt = yrityskeskittymät, yrityshautomot, neuvonta- ja koulutuspalvelut, tutkimus- ja oppilaitokset, osaamiskeskukset, elinkeino-, alue- ja maaseutupoliittiset ohjelmat jne...</p> <p>Ovatko yrittäjyyttä edistävät ympäristöt olleet merkittävässä roolissa edellä mainituissa avaintapahtumissa? Tai yritystoimintasi menestyksessä yleensä ottaen? Jos niin miten?</p>	<p>Enabling environments = clusters, business accelerators, training and advisory services, research centers, academies, centers of expertise, industrial, regional and rural programmes (etc.)</p> <p>Has the enabling environment played a role in the critical incidents you mentioned earlier? Has it played a role in the success of your business? If yes, how?</p>
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Prompts, questions and stimuli, presented policy implementers and group discussants

<p>Prompt 1</p>	<p>Aineistosta nousee kolmenlaisia tapauksia: A. Yritykset ovat kehittäneet toimintaansa pääosin tai täysin ”omin voimin”, B. Yritykset ovat jossain (avain)vaiheessa hyödyntäneet rahoitusmahdollisuuksia, neuvonta/koulutuspalveluja ja mahdollisesti osallistuneet kehittämisprojekteihin, C. Yritykset ovat hyödyntäneet kehittämisspoliittista ympäristöä ja välineistöä olennaisena resurssina ja elementtinä omassa liiketoiminnassa ja sen rakentamisessa.</p> <p>Mitä ajatuksia tämä herättää?</p>	<p>The data include three types of enterprises: A. Enterprises have been developed mainly by the business owners alone, B. Enterprises have, at some critical incident, taken advantage of public funding, training and advisory services or participated in development projects. C. Enterprises have substantially benefitted from the enabling environment while developing their own business.</p> <p>What do you think about this?</p>
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<p>Prompt 2</p>	<p>Aineistossa ne yritykset, jotka eivät ole hyödyntäneet kehittämisvälineitä ovat pärjänneet kaikki yhtä hyvin eivätkä koe erityisemmin tarvinneensa kehittämisvälineitä.</p> <p>Onko alueella sellaisia yrityksiä/yrittäjiä/yrittäjäksi aikovia, joilta kehittämisvälineet jäävät hyödyntämättä, vaikka niille olisi tarvetta tai käyttöä?</p>	<p>In the data, the enterprises which have not taken advantage of public enterprise promotion have succeeded, and do not think they would have needed any promotion.</p> <p>Do you think that in this area there are enterprises or (potential) business owners that do not take advantage of public enterprise promotion even though they would clearly benefit from it?</p>
<p>Prompt 3</p>	<p>Nykyään erotetaan perinteisen pk-yritysten edistämispolitiikan rinnalla yrittäjyyspolitiikka, joka ei kohdistu suoraan yrityksiin vaan jolla pyritään luomaan yrittäjyyttä synnyttäviä ympäristöjä (vedotaan mm. innovaatioihin, tietointensiivisyyteen, kasvupotentiaaliin, klusteroitumiseen / erikoistumiseen sekä kumppanuuteen/ verkostoitumiseen).</p> <p>Kuinka selkeä tällainen ero on alueen toimijoille (ml. yrittäjät ja kehittäjät)? Pidätkö jompaakumpaa tärkeämpänä?</p>	<p>SME policy can be separated from entrepreneurship policy. The latter one does not focus on existing enterprises, but tries to create enabling environments (reference to innovations, knowledge intensiveness, growth potential, specialisation, clusters, partnerships, networks etc.)</p> <p>How clear is this difference to regional actors (including business owners and enterprise developers)? Do you think that one is more important than the other?</p>
<p>Prompt 4</p>	<p>Uudessa yrittäjyyspolitiikassa kehittämisestä tulee itsessään yhdenlaista yrittäjyyttä, jossa etsitään ja tunnistetaan mahdollisuuksia, lähdetään tavoittelemaan niitä ja otetaan myös riskejä.</p> <p>Mitä ajatuksia tämä herättää?</p>	<p>Within entrepreneurship policy, development work becomes 'entrepreneurial'; developers recognise and realise opportunities, and also take risks.</p> <p>What do you think about this?</p>

<p>Prompt 5</p>	<p>Strategiset kärkialat = materiaalinkäsittely, elintarvike, huonekalu & sisustus.</p> <p>Onko näillä liikaa painoarvoa käytännön kehittämisessä, vai pitäisikö olla jopa enemmän? Mitä muita strategisesti tärkeitä painopisteitä voisi kehittämällä olla (esim. palveluissa, kaupassa)?</p>	<p>Strategic lines of business = materials handling, food, furniture and interior industry.</p> <p>Are these lines of business emphasised too much? Should they be emphasised even more? What other strategic lines of business (services, trade etc.) could there be?</p>
<p>Prompt 6</p>	<p>Kauhajoen seudulla toteutettavalla yrittäjyyden edistämispolitiikalla on kiinteä yhteys siihen, millaiseksi aluetta kokonaisuutena halutaan kehittää.</p> <p>Millä tavoilla nykyisten kärkialojen kehittäminen hyödyttää alueen kokonaisuutta?</p>	<p>Enterprise promotion executed at Kauhajoki region is connected with the general overall development of the region.</p> <p>How does the development of strategic lines of business benefit the region as a whole?</p>
<p>Prompt 7</p>	<p>Yrittäjyyden edistämispolitiikan tavoitteena on ensi sijassa alueen yritysten kansallisen (ja kansainvälisen) kilpailukyyn parantaminen vs. Yrittäjyyden edistämispolitiikassa tulee alueen palvelutarjonnan turvaamisella on keskeinen merkitys.</p> <p>Mitä ajatuksia tämä herättää?</p>	<p>'Enterprise promotion policy should aim at national (and global) competitiveness'</p> <p>or</p> <p>'Enterprise promotion policy should secure local services'</p> <p>What do you think about this?</p>
<p>Prompt 8</p>	<p>Mikä merkitys yrittäjyyden edistämisen kannalta on sillä, että Kauhajoen seutu on suurimmaksi osaksi maaseutualuetta?</p> <p>Mikä maatilojen asema tulisi olla yrittäjyyden edistämisessä?</p>	<p>Considering enterprise promotion, does it make a difference that Kauhajoki region consists of rural municipalities?</p> <p>What should be the role of farms in enterprise promotion?</p>

<p>Prompt 9</p>	<p>Mikä Kauhajoen seudun yrittäjyyden edistämässä toimii nyt hyvin, missä asioissa on parantamisen varaa?</p> <p>Mihin yrittäjyyden edistämällä pitäisi pyrkiä, mitä pitäisi tehdä yrittäjyyden edistämiseksi ja kenen toimesta?</p>	<p>What is working well in the regional enterprise promotion? What could be done better</p> <p>What should be the main goal of enterprise promotion policy? What should be done and who should do it?</p>
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APPENDIX 2

Table 5: Statistical differences of sum-variable means (One-sample t-tests) (Source: Study I: Niska, Vesala & Vesala, under review)

	Sum-variables			
	Autonomy	Economy	Societal	Tradition
Autonomy		t(207)=8.81, p < .001	t(207)=-8.861, p < .001	t(206)=-22.323, p < .001
Economy			t(207)=-.845 p = .399	t(206)=18.232, p < .001
Societal				t(206)=19.113, p < .001

Note: N= 207–208.

Table 6: Statistical differences of sum-variable means (One-sample t-tests) (Source: Study II: Niska, Vesala & Vesala 2012).

	Sum-variables			
	Autonomy	Economy	Societal	Tradition
Autonomy		t(636)= -8.569 p < .001	t(636) = 13.728, p < .001	t(636)=16.457, p < .001
Economy			t(637)=5.935 p < .001	t(637)=10.617, p < .001
Societal				t(637)=-7.661 p < .001

Note: N= 637–638.