A change of the form of politics - effects for both descriptive and substantive representation.

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

Keywords: European Structural Funds, partnerships, entrepreneurship, gender, women, networks, descriptive, substantive representation
The position of women in Swedish local and regional politics provides an opportunity to investigate the broader contested issue of descriptive versus substantive representation, a subject first introduced by Anne Phillips’ seminal book, *The Politics of Presence* (1995). Philips’s (1995) attempt to argue against a dichotomy of ideas and presence referred to earlier theoretical debates on the concept of interests versus needs, as well as different modes of gendered authority (Jonasdottir 1994; Jones 1993; Sapiro 1981; Skeije 1994) which almost seemed to have faded away in the light of new approaches related to anti-essentialism, identity politics, and discourse representation (Butler 1990; Scott 1992). Global political changes over recent decades appear to have created a space where the different theoretical perspectives can meet regarding the gendered impact of institutional changes, new norms, and governance replacing government (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007; Jones and Jónasdóttir 2008).

The aim of this paper is to review preliminary results from an empirical study of gender and local and regional representation in a period of transformation of political steering often called ”from government to governance”. We wish to discern whether the potential for substantive representation is challenged by the decisionmaking in new networks and partnerships related to regional development and the EU regional structural fund.

A Swedish gender equality paradox is obvious regarding two different spheres: entrepreneurship and politics. Sweden is ranked as 23 among the 25 EU member states regarding self-employed women and on the top position concerning women’s political representation. Related to a discourse on economic growth and innovation in EU and national policy the improvement of women’s entrepreneurship is stressed. Entrepreneurship and politics on regional development and innovation are supposed to interact according to the policy of the EU’s structural funds. The idea of Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and its reliance on learning and networking (Homeyer, 2007) serves as an ideal to different regional partnerships. The Swedish case raises the general question whether regional structural fund partnerships may create a space of gender inclusive networking between entrepreneurs and politics. *Is it possible for women entrepreneurs to politizise their interests and needs as political subjects or are they objects of the structural fund policy?*

The small share of self-employed women is partly explained by the strongly gender segregated Swedish labour market. The post-war expansion of the welfare state combined with urbanisation resulted in women mainly working within the public sphere. Other factors are the gendered discourses on entrepreneurship in daily life, which have disfavoured women (see e.g. Ahl, 2002; Pettersson, 2002), as well as the gendered conditions under which men and women run (or do not run) businesses (see e.g. Sundin & Holmquist, 1989; Berg, 1994; Hanson & Blake, 2005). The expansion of the welfare state, on the other hand, has been regarded as one cause to women’s entrance into the public sphere of politics (Haavio-Mannila, 1983; Hedlund 1988, 1996). Since the break through in the 1970’s, a gendered division of labour has resulted in “male” and “female” policy areas, with men being active in the fields of economy and business, and women in social and cultural affairs (Wängnerud, 1998). Using Jónasdóttir’s (2008) distinction between gender related presence and content in politics, the gender segregation has decreased in *formal* representation in the 1990’s. A masculine norm does however exist in the *content* of innovation policy, visible in discourses on clusters, entrepreneurship and innovation as well as in prioritized fields of business (Blake & Hansson, 2005; Pettersson, 2002; Lindberg, 2008a, 2008b).
In economic geography, geographical differences in entrepreneurship and regional economic success have been discussed using terms such as industrial districts, local milieu and agglomeration (Asheim, 2000). Historic traditions, tacit knowledge and local buzz all affect the local business climate. Local cultures are often ascribed an important role. Even in the study of politics, geographical differences occur with distinct variations in gendered representation (Lindgren & Vernby, 2007). Tradition of higher education, access to public services and a labour market for women, lack of strong local patriarchal culture and women’s agency seem to improve the role of women in politics (Hedlund, 1996; Forsberg, 2000).

The conditions under which men and women run businesses have been acknowledged by the Swedish governments during the last fifteen years. Projects and programmes have been initiated, often on regional and local levels, to accomplish changes but there still seems to be gendered obstacles for women in starting and running businesses. The escalating political interest in entrepreneurship and self-employment is part of a shift within Swedish regional policy. In correspondence with EU policy, regional development policy has changed its focus from a national redistribution among regions to a decentralized economic growth policy with competing and independent regions (Frisk, 2008, pp.47-54). From a gender perspective one of the main concerns is how regional policy is implemented through partnerships.

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

What room of manoeuvre do women as entrepreneurs have to gain access to relevant networks and/or to create new networks in order to be descriptive or substantive represented in EU related partnerships? What room of manoeuvre do women as entrepreneurs have to gain access to the allocation process of EU structural fund financial resources?

Following this introduction is a brief presentation of two policy related concepts which are both crucial for our empirical study, i.e. networks and partnerships. In the third section we present our multidisciplinary theoretical framework relating gender, partnerships and regions to the three concepts room of manoeuvre, political climate and institutionalisation. We then demonstrate our empirical analysis of the European Structural Funds Partnerships in the four selected regions. Finally, we conclude by summarizing our study, and discussing the relations between agency and structure as a way to proceed with further research.

2. Partnerships and networks

Conceptually and in practice, partnership is closely linked to a new perspective concerning the role of the State and politics in modern society. Traditional political decision-making and control are regarded inadequate to handle complex problems. A great number of different partnerships and networks can be identified seeking for solutions where the State is one of many players. Partnerships differ from informal networks as they often have a formal status based on the idea of a win-win situation among the participants who are supposed to strive for a common goal and problem definition. “From government to governance” is a storyline often quoted in social science research (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Hedlund & Montin, 2009; Svensson & Nilsson, 2008). “Government” represents a hierarchical chain of control with imperative decisions. “Governance”, on the other hand, designates authoritative decisions arrived at in “negotiations”. The implementation of the decisions takes place in collaboration between different players. Multi-level governance is a term that depicts how local
development in a small municipality can be intertwined with negotiations in Brussels on regional structural funds. Private-public partnerships and network politics raise questions about the impact on certain fundamental values in representative democracy. Social representativity and political accountability are, for example, areas in which problems have been addressed in social science research (Elander, 1999, 2002). Often there is a close link to the ideas of inclusive planning and deliberative democracy in which different groups, so-called “stakeholders”, meet. If a partnership includes the relevant players within a specific area and they meet as equals, then perhaps we can speak about “deliberative” or “discursive” democracy (Dryzek, 1990).

We assume that the opportunities of women entrepreneurs, defined as stakeholders, to establish relations with networks surrounding structural fund partnerships are important in order to gain access to the allocation process of structural fund financial resources. The importance of networks and contacts for business owners and entrepreneurs is emphasized in entrepreneurship as well as geographical research (see for example Aldrich & Brickman Elam, 1995; Johannisson, 1996; Johannisson, 2005; Renzulli, Aldrich & Moody, 2000). In network literature, the concept of homosociality is discussed, i.e. the tendency of people to bond, interact and establish contacts with people who resemble themselves (Hanson, 2000; Hamrén, 2007; Hedlund, 2008). At the same time as weak ties in networks (Granovetter, 1973) and bridging networks (Putnam, 2000) can be useful for entrepreneurs in gaining access to resources that they do not have at their own disposal, excluding mechanism in social networks can prevent the possibilities of developing necessary contacts and acting on the equal premises.

The policy dissemination of the partnership concept has succeeded in Sweden compared to Great Britain (Bache & Olsson, 2001). The EU has played an important role through its structural fund policy. The method adopted, according to the authors, for the creation of Swedish regional development partnerships is based on Swedish corporative traditions typical of Swedish political culture. The Swedish case did not show the British exclusion of local and regional politicians. The key players were officials at the County Administrative Boards, state authorities and ministries. Within the framework of the EU’s structural fund system, there has been a development over time in terms of the demands regarding organisation and the inclusion of different groups in the drawing up of regional programmes, structural fund partnerships and the implementation of projects (Hedlund, 2008).

During the period 1995-2007, critics and evaluations have illuminated the structural fund partnership processes as a male-dominated project dominated by public officials (Hedlund, 2008; Horell & Roininen, 1999; Lindsten et al, 2001; Hudson & Rönnblom, 2006; Rydstedt, 2006; Westberg, 2008). The state-regional growth agreements replacement with regional growth programmes aimed to co-ordinate efforts in different sectors in order to develop sustainable, local, labour-market regions. Local authorities and county councils now played a more prominent role and different stakeholders were excluded. In several areas, it was regarded better to have small and effective partnerships in which funders and implementers dominated. Organisations with limited resources were regarded as being of little interest in this context (Hedlund, 2008). The new national strategy for regional competitiveness and employment for the period 2007-2013 aims for a greater degree of co-ordination between the regional growth programmes and the EU’s structural funds. Still evaluations have criticized the lack of horizontal objectives (gender equality, integration and the environment) in the programmes. What kind of gender equality - gender mainstreaming in all kinds of projects or gender fair distribution of structural fund resources - is not a clearly formulated problem in the policy process (Bacchi, 1999).
3. Theoretical perspectives

In a study of governance failure in gender equality policy in the Netherlands Marijke Prins (2000) suggests that room of manoeuvre, political climate, and institutionalisation are useful concepts for the theoretical development of governance studies. She finds it important that the interaction between women’s movements and the state machinery (and the EU machinery in our case) works and that the interaction is built on mutual trust. She suggests that a flexible combination of authoritative top-down steering and the coordinative steering of different networks is the ultimate process in policy areas that may be controversial and include conflicts. We will use her theoretical concepts in our study, enlarging her concept of political climate by including entrepreneurial climate in our theoretical tool-box. This means that we are dealing with a dual concept of climate.

3.1 Room of manoeuvre

Prins, who has studied governance and women’s emancipation in the Netherlands, defines room of manoeuvre as

… the relation among actors themselves as well as between actors and the institutions involved […] The relations between actors – the interactions which influence behaviour, that is, by extending or limiting it – and institutions determine the freedom of manoeuvre. Together these determine the room for manoeuvre, which can vary in time and is also dependent on the sort of actors and institutions which are involved in the discussion (Prins, 1993, p. 78).

Our operationalization of this definition is the room of women entrepreneurs to gain access to relevant networks and/or to create new networks in order to establish relations with EU related partnerships and its allocation process of financial resources.

From previous research, we conclude that gender is a factor that affects the room of manoeuvre for entrepreneurs. The notion of an entrepreneur as being male and involved in a male gender coded business affects women entrepreneurs and women aspiring to start businesses, for example when applying for financial loans (Scholten, 2003; Nutek, 1999). Also the notion of economic growth and innovation policy as a male arena may effect the space for creating networks between women in politics and women entrepreneurs. The room of manoeuvre to create gender inclusive networks in politics seems to have grown as the gender segregation has decreased. Besides, women politicians on top positions do really represent women’s interests in employment policy (SCB, 2008; Lindgren & Vernby, 2007). A new situation is the norm of consensus and equality in partnerships which makes it difficult to illuminate gender exclusive processes (Hedlund, 2008).

3.2. Entrepreneurial climate and political climate

The dual concept of climate that we aim to discuss consists of 1) entrepreneurial climate and 2) political climate.

In studies and reports on entrepreneurial climate a geographical perspective is often used, and sometimes (but not always) a gender perspective is used. Combining two different indexes of entrepreneurial climate in Sweden, we find regions falling out in four categories, the four that we have chosen for further study are displayed in figure 1.

Gendered entrepreneurial climate has been investigated by for instance Danilda (2001) and Forsberg (1997, 2000) both arguing that social structures and social infrastructures should be parts of the entrepreneurial climate discussions. In one of our chosen regions, Jönköping, the small municipality Gnosjö is found, subject to several studies on entrepreneurship and industrial districts (see e.g. Johannisson, 1996). At the same time as often regarded a successful region regarding entrepreneurship and economic growth, feminist research brings forth other images of the region: un-equal gender structures are shown by Forsberg (2000) and the local male gender coded entrepreneurship is scrutinized by Pettersson (2002) and
Wigren (2003). The diverse studies on the same locality and the different ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing entrepreneurial climate let us draw the conclusion that entrepreneurial climate is elusive, yet gendered and geographical (compare Hedfeldt, 2008).

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

A correspondence between entrepreneurial climate and political climate seems to exist in some of the regional categories in figure 1 regarding gender-equal participation in politics (Hedfeldt & Hedlund, 2009; Hudson & Rönnblom, 2007). By including policy in our definition of political climate it is obvious that the policy of improvement of women’s entrepreneurship is integrated in a discourse of economic growth and regional development. The EU’s “soft steering” and the OMC method investigated by Farinós (2007) and Zirra & Buchkremer (2007) aims to integrate a gender perspective in the national and regional policy (Hudson & Rönnblom, 2007). Referring to Prins’ analysis of how to avoid governance failure,
it is obvious that a gender inclusive authoritative top-down steering does exist in regulating procedures of the OMC process. The masculine oriented innovation discourse and its narrow definition of economic growth which favours male dominated business, creates a more complex picture (Blake & Hansson, 2005; Lindberg 2008a, 2008b). Prins’ notion of the importance of horizontal steering of different networks creates an even more complex picture and then we have to turn into institutionalisation.

3.3 Institutionalisation

The EU’s Structural Funds being one of the most important instruments in the implementation of the overall goal in cohesion policy of the Lisbon Strategy has practised the Open Method of Communication, OMC, as an ideal model of steering (Homeyer, 2007:45-46). Gender equality as one of the horizontal objectives is stressed in steering documents. OMC has in real-world applications showed significant national differences. In the Swedish case most of 1,33 billion Euro is allocated to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to finance measures within the objective "Regional Competitiveness and Employment” during the period 2007-2013. As state feminism has kept its institutions (Bergqvist et al, 2007), gender mainstreaming as a principle is integrated in the governments’ steering of the regional structural fund programmes and its partnerships. The composition of the representatives in the partnership boards and their supervision committees is strictly regulated and in accordance with Swedish political culture (SFS 2007:459; dnr N 2007/3312/RT Näringsdepartementet)\(^1\). The gender mainstream policy and inclusion of business representatives may thus create a room of manoeuvre for women entrepreneurs’ networks. Institutions supporting such networks are the gender experts at the County Administrative Board and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket). These authorities, as well as local and regional politicians, do not have any top-down steering role in the structural fund partnerships where consensus and common goals should be the main principle (Rydstedt, 2006).

The present regionalization process creates a lack of institutionalisation called the “regional mess” (Stegmann McCallion, 2008, p.587). According to a state investigation, Sweden has a “fragmented growth- and development policy as well as a weak and unclear regional organisation of society” (SOU 2007:10, p.18). 40 different central state actors and 38 different regional “maps” currently exist according to Olauzon (2006). An indirect Europeanization seems to occur as the rhetoric of “Europe of the regions” is used by domestic actors to provide resources which can cause a redistribution of power in the national context (Stegmann McCallion, 2008, p.588). The EU membership, a push for reforms from below intertwined with decentralisation of Swedish regional policy, occurred at the same period. Stegmann McCallion’s nine identified key actors (men from different levels in administration and politics) seem to represent the “male networks” which create gender excluding processes in regional development and innovation policy (Bull, 2001; Westerberg, 2008; Lindberg, 2008). Another lack of institutionalisation is the refusal of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and The Swedish Federation of Business Owners to participate in the partnerships.\(^2\) A third lack of institutionalisation is the short term projects run by the Resource Centres for women.

4. The four investigated regions and the regional mess

On local and national level, the political and administrative organisation is obvious (Stegmann McCallion, 2008). The regional/meso administrative level is however still incoherent. Many

\(^1\) The boards show some variations depending on size and regional structure. 8-10 persons represent the municipalities, 3-4 persons represent the labour market (business and unions), one person civil society and 2-3 persons state administration on regional level.

\(^2\) Telephone interview May 28 2009.
actors as the County Council, County Administration Board, municipal associations and central state agencies create this blurred situation. It seems like the organisation of the EU structural funds gave a "tool box" on how to create new regional partnerships (NRP) which are steered by a council of non-directly appointed representatives. These partnerships do not have the same power and dignity as two special “pilot projects” in the south of Sweden. Rather they can be seen as a solution where the central state is withdrawing its previous attempt to redistribute power to the regional level (Hedlund & Hedfeldt, 2009; Stegmann McCallion, 2008). Two of the selected regions in our study (Halland and Jönköping) have a NRP which may be door-openers to a gender inclusive networking in relation to the structural fund partnerships. The four regions investigated in this article belong in the two northern cases to the structural fund partnership Middle Northland and in the southern case to Smaland and the Islands respectively West-Sweden. From a political and an administrative point of view these partnerships differs when it comes to how they relate to their regional surroundings.

4.1 Agents

Primarily, we focus on three central agents involved in different and crossing networks related to the structural fund partnerships and women’s entrepreneurs: the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, Resource Centres and The Swedish Federation of Business Owners.

Representing the central state administration, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has for more than 15 years promoted women’s entrepreneurship. Quantitative objectives in a current (2007-2009) national programme include e.g. more women being open to starting a business and the share of women among self-employed increasing to at least 40 percent. Besides start-up focused objectives, objectives include more women going into business on full time and more women entrepreneurs hiring staff.

For about the same length of time as the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has promoted women’s entrepreneurship, they have hosted a national programme for development of Resource Centres for women. These are operationalized at regional and local levels. The multilevel structure and the mix of different actors involved make the Resource Centres (RCs) an example of governance. RCs aim to improve and support women’s (not only women entrepreneurs) conditions and prerequisites and to support women’s participation in regional development processes. Even though running more than 10 years, research and evaluations point out severe limitations to the actual room of manoeuvre for RCs in NRP’s development processes. Often they are not perceived of the legitimate agent they need to be in order to influence the condition of women, especially on the regional level (Scholten, 2003; Nutek, 2004; Tillväxtverket, 2009). Due to an unclear commission from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, other agents have difficulties relating to them. Short term projects make it even more difficult to become an established agent with influence on structures and process such as Regional Growth Programmes and Regional Development Programmes. Further more, RCs are obliged to cooperate with other agents while corresponding obligations do not exist.

The Swedish Federation of Business Owners is interesting since they represent the actual entrepreneurs. They have published reports on gender equal participation in entrepreneurship and arrange and promote events for women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, this is a women led organization which has taken a stand for women entrepreneurs and made statements on the gendered conditions for entrepreneurs in media (Lindberg, 2008a). The federation does however not participate in the partnership boards of the EU structural fund programmes due to being considered a formal state authority according to the government bill. However, they participate in the supervision boards. In the list of participants they are presented as individual
business owners by the state authority to “create an image of an active and involved business life”.

4.2 Looking for women entrepreneurs

We will now investigate empirically if women with a background in business or entrepreneurship as well as the regional resource centres are represented in the EU structural fund partnerships. As a background to each case we will comment on what kind of regionalization process the different counties Jämtland, Västernorrland, Halland and Jönköping has gone through. The room of manoeuvre to establish broad networks may be affected by variations within the “regional mess”.

The two northern regions, Jämtland and Västernorrland, have, partly as a result of local conflicts, not been active in the current regionalization process from below. (Länsposten, June 2 2009). The input to the process of writing the EU structural fund programme was to a great extent dependent on traditional state civil servants. The gender equality expert in the County Administrative Board declares that she has been “extremely active” to influence the writing however without success, male dominated branches dominate the operative part of the programme. The two regions belong to the same structural fund partnership and in one case (Jämtland) woman entrepreneurs will find two regional representatives of similar background involved. In the supervision board they will find two women entrepreneurs from other regions. A small regional network seem to be available in this institution as we find three women on key-positions from the public sector, two from state authorities and one from local politics. Of totally 67 representatives in both the partnership and the supervision board, we find the four women representing industry, farming and reindeer breading. Two of them come from Jämtland.

In the south of Sweden the two regions Halland and Jönköping are active in the regionalization process and have created NRPs. They belong to two different structural fund partnerships. In the structural fund partnership West Sweden, where Halland belongs, we find a woman representing The Swedish Federation of Business Owners which is as a deviance from the principle of non-involvement. She crosses the boarders within the regional elite and is active as consultant in the public sector as well as in business life. However, her geographical background is not from Halland. In the other structural fund partnership, Smaland and the Islands, we find no representative related to self-employed women or women in business. Thus the networking in the region of Jönköping seem as difficult as in Halland. The two structural fund partnerships share the same supervision committee and the only seat with a woman entrepreneur is not related to any of the regions. Of totally 81 representatives we find no woman entrepreneur from the the regions Halland and Jönköping. There are a small group of women holding key-positions in politics and state administration and three of them are situated in the Halland and Jönköping.

4.3 Networking Resource Centres

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

In interviews with representatives for Resource Centres, it is clear that networks are not only useful but necessary when planning projects, applying for and receiving funding from the EU structural fund. Networks make the application process and access to funding possible. Through networks and other agents’ knowledge, projects can be further developed and adjusted. Since the agents we primarily focus on are active on the regional level, it is

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3 Telephone interview May 28 2009 The Swedish Federation of Business Owners.
4 Telephone interview XXXXXXXXXX
interesting to notice how the representatives emphasize their contacts with other agents in their own local setting. Meeting other agents face-to-face, socializing and working together should not be underestimated. On the matter of whom the representatives for Resource Centres network with, this ranges from politicians and civil servants to representatives for business organizations. Both men and women are found among these network contacts.  

5. Conclusions
We find so far no particular geographical variations of the descriptive representation of women entrepreneurs in the structural fund partnerships and the supervision committees. This can be explained by the national form of institutionalisation which mirrors the traditional Swedish corporative system. The public sector, politics and state administration gain the majority of the seats while private sector, business and NGOs, constitute a minority. However in the supervision committees more than 100 persons are involved and we find two women with a business background. The OMC ideal of learning and listening seems problematic since the business organisations refuse to be involved. The only exception is the decision of the Federation of Business Owners to try to influence the informal networks and the supervision committees. The agents who may be a resource in a business related network of women entrepreneurs are extremely rare in the structural fund partnerships. We find no representative from the national or regional resource centres and a very few women from business life.

From a macro-level point of view, it is obvious that the political climate and the business climate seem to clash regarding the representation of business representatives in the EU regional structural funds partnerships. This clash also exists regarding the States threat to involve gender mainstreaming in the nomination process of corporation boards - a highly controversial topic. The dual aspect of local climate - politics and business – is related in different ways in the four regions. The two northern regions which belong to the North Middle Sweden structural fund partnership have a traditional political climate and share a resistance to the current regionalization process. They have a weak business climate but differ concerning gender, as one of the regions has a gender equal business climate. The few women entrepreneurs that do have seats have a background in this region.

In the south of Sweden the two counties Halland and Jönköping have started a regionalization process and created NRPs. They belong to two different EU structural fund partnerships. In Halland the combination of being non-traditional in political climate and gender equal in business climate has not resulted in women entrepreneurs involved in the structural fund partnership. Two business women from other counties are seated and may function as gate openers to Halland based networks. In Jönköping, the regional business climate is favourable but with a non-equal gender participation. Even in this case the result is that the very few women entrepreneurs who do take part in the structural fund partnership have a background in other geographical areas.

Based on these data and interviews with representatives from the business organisations, the Resource Centres and one State Administrative Board, we conclude that the room of manoeuvre seems to be limited regarding networking with other women entrepreneurs having seats in the formal partnerships. Another conclusion is that substantive representation seem very limited as the women entrepreneurs become objects of a policy created in other spheres. This means that networking has to be made with other alliances from mainly the public sphere. These contacts are taken on the local level and seem to be a way of muddling through the system upwards. Of interest is that both men and women are part of these networks which again seem to be based on agents from the public sphere. The networks are based on face-to

5 Telephone interviews with representatives for RCs in Västernorrland and Jönköping August 18 2009.
face contacts and there seem to be paths into the application process in an extremely complicated system. It does not seem like the “regional mess” creates distinct variations among the regions studied. Belonging to a “modern” region with a NRP taking part in the regionalization process from below, does not create a larger room of manoeuvre for the women entrepreneurs to gain access to the power elite in the structural board partnerships.

An area of future research is how informal networks function in creation of projects plans and influencing decisions of priority. The role of National and Regional Resource Centres and the Swedish Federation of Business owners will be further investigated. An assumption is that networking with agents from the public sphere is not enough to reach a gender fair allocation of resources from the European Regional Development Fund partnerships (ERDF). This raises an important question: Is there a path through informal networking to gain access to funding, or are the resources in the EU structural fund closed for women in business?
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