

# Empowering women's entrepreneurship

to establish bottom-up  
innovation systems

*- The case of cycling tourism in Norrtälje Region*



**Quadruple Helix reports 2011:5**

By  
Annika Skoglund

## Quadruple Helix reports 2011:5

### Empowering women's entrepreneurship to establish bottom-up innovation systems

- The case of cycling tourism in Norrtälje Region

ISBN: 978-91-979987-0-3



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE

TILLVÄXT  
VERKET



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



NORRTÄLJE  
KOMMUN

*Baltic Fem*



Läänemaa  
Turism



SAAREMAA  
UNIVERSITY CENTER



---

**QUADRUPLE HELIX Lead Partner:** Municipality of Norrtälje (Sweden). **Partners:** Stockholm county administrative board (Sweden), BalticFem (Sweden), Royal Institute of Technology, Industrial Economics and Management (Sweden), Åbo Akademi University (Finland), Eurohouse (Estonia), Läänemaa Tourism Association (Estonia), Foundation Saaremaa University Center (Estonia) - quadruplehelix.eu

---

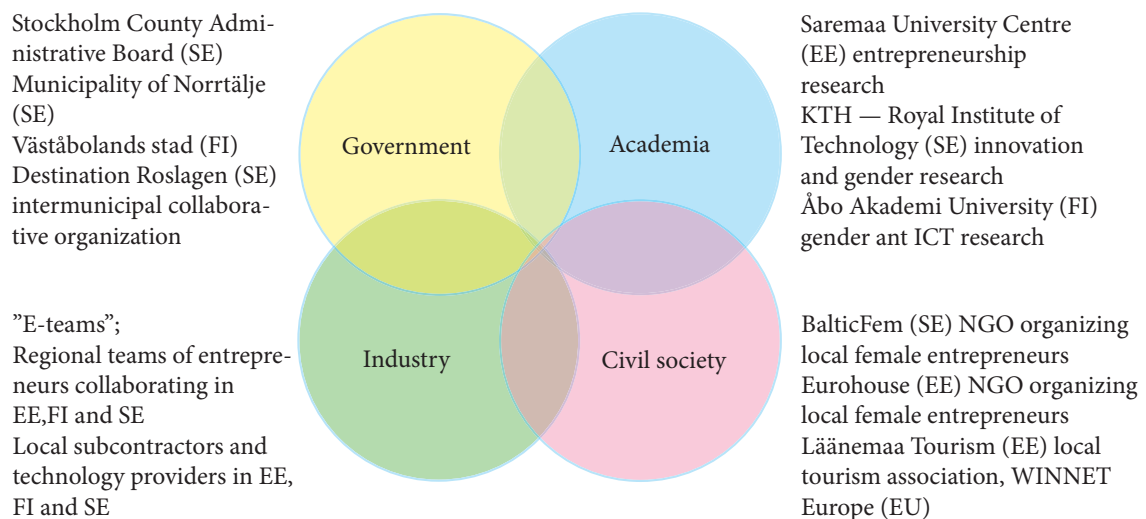
By  
Annika Skoglund  
Royal Institute of Technology, School of Industrial Management,  
Industrial Economics and Management, Stockholm

---

## Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship has been enhanced in several different contexts and by various means. It is a topic that links socio-political objectives with academic research and produces an ensemble of professionals with expertise and authority on specifically the category of women in relation to what can be termed entrepreneurship and practices correlated to it. These professionals often construct differences between men and women, commonly in the wake of a discourse on biological differences and psychological differences (e.g. see Ahl, 2006), or by showing how women are socially subordinated men on a structural level. As part of the EU-funded Quadruple Helix project seeking 'gender awareness', this report is thus positioned within this professional ensemble with its predefined categories, at the same time as a normative outcome is ambitiously sought at a political level.

The lead partner of the Quadruple Helix project is the Municipality of Norrtälje (Sweden). Complementary partners are: Stockholm County Administrative Board (Sweden), BalticFem (Sweden), Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden), Åbo Akademi University (Finland), Eurohouse (Estonia), Läänemaa Tourism Association (Estonia) and Saaremaa University Centre (Estonia). They are all partaking within their area of expertise, belonging to one of the helices in picture 1. An increased collaboration between these helices is to stimulate cluster formation and women's entrepreneurship, a process focused in this report by studying the specific case of cycling tourism in the Norrtälje region, area of Roslagen.



Picture 1: The Quadruple Helix and its actors

The report presents a study of the business of cycling tourism carried out by women as part of the framework of the Quadruple Helix project of the Central Baltic Interreg IV A programme (hereafter “QH-project”). An interview study was performed during spring and summer 2011, followed up by an analysis of how the EU-project unfolded with focus on the conditions for women entrepreneurs in the Norrtälje region. Norrtälje is part of the Baltic Sea region, a region that the QH-project seeks to strengthen by stimulating clusters of the tourism sector and increase networking among women entrepreneurs. The QH-project also aims to provide innovative support by adding new mobile telephone applications for the tourism sector. Both to create a more contemporary service industry in line with new market demands, and to couple a traditionally male branch with the tourism sector.



The aim of this study is to analyse how the QH-project turned out in practice, how it was operationalized and how it unfolded as a process. Focus is on the different actors involved, especially the management team at Norrtälje municipality, the entrepreneurs involved (hereafter ‘e—team’) in the tourism business, and the NGO ‘BalticFem’, supporting the networking activities. This detailed study of how a specific network took shape and formed a prosperous innovation process, can help us to understand how we can develop and complete the Quadruple Helix innovation model. The question is also how we can focus on entrepreneurship, innovation and clusters in a more gender equal way? When we understand how a network and an innovation process aiming to support women’s entrepreneurship unfolds, we may also create more gender equal businesses by how we compile the platform consisting of the four sectors: public sector, private sector, academic sector and civil society or the so-called third sector.

Except for the overall objective to stimulate entrepreneurship and increase business life and growth, the report addresses EU’s political interest in ‘gender awareness’. ‘Gender awareness’ is both promoted as a way to change gender structures, for example in developing countries (e.g. see Wright, 1995; Elson, 1995), or by managers in companies (Wahl, Holgersson, Höök, & Linghag, 2001). In this report, gender issues will be pinpointed by first illustrating how women entrepreneurs started to collaborate around a common business idea, a cycling route, and secondly, by presenting how they positioned themselves within the predefined category ‘woman entrepreneur’ (or female entrepreneur), an often problematized group in modern society. How an innovation system has been operationalized by project-based work can thus help us to address what gender orders this type of work has contributed to (cf. Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006). And an analysis of the subject positions constructed by the interviewees and interviewer (Fenwick, 2002), may

help us to understand how predefined categories are either resisted or maintained. This type of research design makes it possible to fulfil the stated socio-political objectives of the QH-project, at the same time as the academic contribution may provide with alternative insights and not merely repeat and strengthen descriptions of prevailing realities, as the one that women are structurally subordinated to men.

The description in this report will also be designed as a 'populated text', i.e. a text that is about people, what they can be said to do and how language produces them (Billig, 2011). For example, describing mentalities as inner states could be recognized as a 'de-population' of a text, i.e. that the text is not about people pursuing their businesses, but about their claimed inner states of mind (cf. Ibid). The case described in this document is thus aiming to be a text about people, a populated narrative, delivering descriptions of practices undertaken in realization of a specific business idea and the emanation of an innovation system bottom-up.

The interview study was performed as a qualitative inquiry, with semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions. The interviews were between 30-60 minutes each, often including a visit to the premises of the entrepreneurs, their bed and breakfasts, hostels and restaurants. Altogether 14 participants were interviewed and are kept anonymous. The interviews are not transcribed, but important quotes have been collected. Documents linked to the cycling route have also been analysed, complemented with observations during an exhibition.

The report is structured as follows. The first part consists of a case description, a success story of a prosperous woman entrepreneur and practical conclusions important for the QH-project as a functioning innovation system. The second part is a more critical discussion about the re-construction of women's entrepreneurship, subjectivities produced and the resistance towards the category 'vulnerable woman' and 'responsible woman'. Taken together, the report illustrates how women were empowered to engage in entrepreneurial activities to co-produce an innovation system.

## **Case description - Cycling tourism in Roslagen**

The QH-project started in October 2009, with educations, workshops and network activities to create transnational cooperation, strategies for equality, improved conditions for women entrepreneurs and creative connections between different actors in society, business and academia. While this overall objective was followed and pursued, the network consisting of entrepreneurs was a bit hard to gather, motivate and support (Int 1, 2011-05-19). The representative from the NGO 'BalticFem' organised several workshops on themes such as network cooperation, social media, Internet marketing and environmental advice (Meeting, 2011-02-24). At the same time, the NGO gathered entrepreneurs and tried to reach new woman entrepreneurs in Norrtälje region to create the 'e-team'. A representative of the management team at the municipality of Norrtälje expresses that in the beginning, she functioned as a middle hand in the project, with responsibility for economic reporting and communication, while the actual practical work with the entrepreneurs was a bit vague (Int 1, 2011-05-19).

The political objectives with the QH-project were however clear from the beginning, but the management team often found that the entrepreneurs involved were hesitant due to the elusive output for them. The practical objectives were vague. The management team and entrepreneurs eventually solved this problem collectively, when they decided to create a common practical objective with the EU-project. The solution brought forth was an old, to some degree neglected, idea that had been more alive before in the region; a cycling route. While the QH-project first had focused on a hiking trail and to create a digital map and mobile guide for it, a cycling route seemed more interlinking between the involved entrepreneurs. 'This was a real breakthrough' (Int 1, 2011-05-19). Hence, the idea to promote visitors to discover Roslagen as cycling destination was not introduced into the QH-project in the beginning, but grew out of a common interest between the different entrepreneurs and the municipality of Norrtälje.



## Collaborating entrepreneurs

The idea of a cycling route was brought up by one of the most active entrepreneurs in the e-team who also creates holiday packages for tourists (Meeting, 2011-02-24). She was not alone in thinking of cycling as a potential, still unexplored, business idea. Another entrepreneur in the e-team had been working with an EU-application for several years before the project was denied funding. As organiser, she gave up and continued with her individual business, concluding that the bureaucracy and administration was too difficult for her to handle as a small business entrepreneur. Even if there was a network that

applied for funding to explore the possibilities for cycling, this was not enough to fulfil the demands from EU. The entrepreneur stated that ‘The QH-project came in and saved us’, and we could continue with the cycling idea. (Int 3, 2011-05-27) A family business in the e-team also mentioned that this cycling route was an idea that were in the pipeline, with a promising future due to the new trend in cycling (Int 6, 2011-06-27).

When the municipality of Norrtälje, the NGO and the entrepreneurs met within the QH-project, the old idea of cycling was easily adapted within the new EU QH-project. The entrepreneur selling cycling packages mentions during an interview (2011-05-27) that she got the specific idea of a map of cycling routes in Roslagen from two customers who during the previous season wanted to cycle around Roslagen. She concluded that it was a demand for more and better information about cycling in the Norrtälje region, Roslagen. The entrepreneur also got advice from an experienced German cycling tourist, who gave her information on what to include in cycling packages. The idea to link the entrepreneurs with a cycling route, as well as a business that sells packages, has resulted in better coordination between the different cycling rentals and B&B’s in the area.

While the engaged entrepreneurs were positive about the idea of a cycling route, it was also recognized as helpful in the view of the project management in their overall accomplishments with the political objectives ulterior to the QH-project. To collaborate and develop a cycling package was considered to give positive cross-fertilization between the formerly existing cycle group, the quadruple e-team, civil sector (NGO) and governmental sector (management team). Though, some entrepreneurs were not as interested to be in the network, when cycling was introduced, why they dropped out. Even so, others were added, contributing even more to a stronger engagement in the activities of the QH-project.

In February 2011 the e-team met during a workshop at Norrtälje municipality office building. There were 11 participants at the workshop, including 7 entrepreneurs, representatives from the management team and NGO’s, as well as an external educator/consultant. The management team introduced the participants to the idea of a cycling route, including the possibility to create a common map and brochure, a mobile technical application, and a ‘basetool’, i.e. a platform and database for Roslagen.se, a tourist information site of the Roslagen region. This was followed by more detailed discussions on the practicalities with the cycling proposal as well as a workshop on business planning.

Information was provided by the management team about the technical assistance from Åbo Akademi University regarding the application for smart phones and the mobile site, i.e. a homepage suitable for both Internet and a mobile phone. The management team continued to show how a cycling tour application can function by comparing it to a similar technology/service in the Western part of Sweden. The management team also decided to collaborate with ‘Destination Roslagen’ (Destination Roslagen), and ‘Roslagen.se’, due to its collection of data and information, a system called ‘Basetool’. Nevertheless, to this solution new routes and information was needed, something that the entrepreneurs themselves could engage in. The management team also informed on the possibility to take a course in the ‘basetool’ system, free of charge for the e-team. The purpose was to engage the entrepreneurs to partake more actively in the technical application.

## From idea to practice

One of the participants from the NGO 'BalticFem' summarized the discussions she had had with one of the most active entrepreneurs about the need not only for a technical application with information, but also the need for a brochure and map in paper format. To accomplish such a thing, the e-teams both needed to contribute with information about the routes available close to their facilities, as well as agree upon the price to produce such information material, i.e. printing cost, etc. The management team proposed that it might be possible to collaborate with Roslagen.se, who were quite positive to co-financing the production cost if their logo and graphical profile was used in the material. The map and brochure would also be possible to make by a business model where the bulk cost would be covered by advertisements. The printing company would in that case take it upon themselves to find the advertisers to cover the printing cost. The e-team agreed upon this strategy during the meeting and got the task to collect name and addresses to potential advertisers in their neighbourhood. The e-team also got a small homework to write presentations about their own facilities, accommodation and offers, to be included in the brochure.

To go from idea to practice a workshop followed, held by an external consultant. The consultant was to be involved in the whole business plan process, to help the e-teams to form their individual business ideas and the common idea around the cycling route. During the first workshop, three categories of advertisers were discussed; internal (the entrepreneurs themselves), external and sponsors/stakeholders. Thereafter she stressed the importance to pin down the most attractive offers in the surrounding, to make the area interesting for several days and increase the number of nights in one place. The importance to keep the customers in the Roslagen area, and have them staying for several nights was repeated in several of the interviews (especially Int 6, 2011-06-27).

At the next workshop, seven entrepreneurs participated in a more detailed investigation of the uniqueness in their area and potential offers. The consultant also stressed the possibility to create services together to enhance the quality of the business idea. The e-team also got the homework to agree on common prices both to create packages for tourists as well as offering approximately the same for a room of a specific standard. This was further discussed at the second workshop with ten participating entrepreneurs. They agreed that the customer should not be disappointed if the standard between the different B&B differed, and that this must be considered in the offering of a package. The entrepreneur who is designing packages also informed on her possibility to offer a travel insurance if the package was sold through her business. The external consultant also brought up the possibility to have sponsors for the bikes, which could make the first investment cheaper.

The uniqueness of the different B&B and the common package for cycling was further elaborated on in the third workshop by the consultant. The entrepreneurs discussed the possibility to offer lunch boxes and dinner alternatives, cycle service and transportation of bikes between the entrepreneurs. The discussion about uniqueness was also connected to the possibility to increase the business during spring, fall and winter. While the profitability during the summer season is satisfactory among most of the entrepreneurs, they



were told to think more about how the rest of the seasons could be better exploited. The external consultant asked the basic questions: What are the customers asking for? Where are the customers? Who has money? How can one reach them?

The task to write a presentation for the brochure was successfully fulfilled by the entrepreneurs who expressed their engagement in the common endeavour during several of the interviews. Their description did however need to be cut shorter by the management team to fit the small space of the brochure. The participant from the NGO made an outline of the map and the group decided to create three main cycling routes with the possibility to go for shorter visits along these main routes. Interestingly, a route that previously passed the little village of Rimbo was excluded from the cycling brochure and map due to that there was no participating entrepreneur from there. Instead, the QH-project collectively chose to promote two alternative roads, passing closer to the facilities of entrepreneurs in the e-team.

It was during the fourth workshop decided that the printing brochure must be financed by the e-team. The management team expressed that this separated some of the entrepreneurs from the rest, those who afforded it from those who didn't (Int 1, 2011-05-19). It was also decided that the packaging needed to be standardized, to decide what is considered to be a package and what is not. The entrepreneurs made a benchmarking with other countries and areas in Sweden, and it was concluded that the price level of their offerings was not too expensive. Regarding promotion, a potential collaboration with an international vendor of cycling packages was discussed.



## A success story - Interview 14/7 2011.

In the very northern part of Norrtälje region one of the woman entrepreneurs has not only started her business around cycling, but offers kayaking and boat tours. Starting off in 2006, she has expanded from five kayaks to 24. Except for her own offers of accommodation, one cottage and some facilities that she is renting, the business idea is to connect tourists with other sleeping options in the region and function as a supplier. At least 50 different sleeping options, including cottages, can be provided by this single entrepreneur. She has also broadened the business idea from kayaking and sleeping to cycling, and provides approximately 20 bikes and trailers. To add, she complements this with one Camper and one Caravan for rent.

The entrepreneur did not join the QH-project in the beginning due to a problematic hip, followed up by surgery and inactivity due to a long healing process. It was first during spring 2011 that she was able to join the network and e-team. Since she is also located quite far from the city of Norrtälje and municipality office, she has been more active at a distance, something that is more common for those entrepreneurs who are situated closer to the archipelago.

The entrepreneur has thus contributed to the QH-project by delivering information and detailed descriptions about her specific area. She estimates that the data requested by the management team was provided a few hours work. At the time for the interview, the entrepreneur had received the map of the cycling route, but not the brochure. She had also decided to advertise her business in the technical application connected to the QH-project, and was looking forward to the outcome of this investment.



The entrepreneur decided to advertise in the technical application since she figured this was an extremely interesting take on the service provided to tourists. “This is what is contemporary. Even if I am a woman of 60 years, I do realize that one should have a mobile phone with Internet connection in one’s pocket. Then you have got all options and opportunities”. She continues to tell how her customers find her business through the Internet and her homepage. She even argues that paper brochures are a bit out of date, people do not want to pay for anything, they want to find the information for free through Internet, she proposes.

The entrepreneur stresses the immense support she has received from her municipality (not Norrtälje municipality). She has got all her wishes responded to, except for a lower speed limit in the perimeter of her facilities. ‘I think it is due to my positive personality (...) I have had constant sunshine and the wind in my back’. The entrepreneur has also decided that she will stay as the one who is promoting her business and talking to the customers, while she has a caretaker on 50% of a full employment.

She further considers all competitors as potential collaborators. If she had not had this strategy, she would not have been able to be a supplier and packager of complete visits, such as ‘Roslagskusten’ (The coast of Roslagen). It is a cycling and boat tour that begins in the northern part of the Norrtälje region and stretches all the way to the city centre of Stockholm. This tour would not have been possible without sincere collaborations. Another important aspect with the collaborative approach, according to the entrepreneur, is her ability to call the big players when she is out of accommodation. She also stresses the fun aspect of collaborating, it is just more of an enjoyment to keep in touch with other entrepreneurs and help each other.

## Summary of the case – Quadruple Analysis

### Government

To take up the idea of a cycling route and reproduce it showed to be a very successful strategy within the operations of the QH-project, not only for the entrepreneurs, but for the governmental representatives, the management team. Both the entrepreneurs and management team now know better how to work together and gather around the transformation of a clear idea into a business idea. Even so, when the QH-project was operationalized by a narrower goal, some of the entrepreneurs dropped out. This loss was however not a problem for the management team, since the project unfolded more effectively with intensive and goal oriented entrepreneurs. The management team even expressed that this way of working could be advantageous for other small business entrepreneurs: ‘Other small business entrepreneurs may want to get together in a network and collaborate just as we have done in this project’. (2011-05-19)

Financing  
 Policy formulation  
 Innovation support  
 Advisory services



Initiative  
 Tourism + ICT  
 (bridge gender, but not balance)  
 Financing  
 Service Innovation  
 Support  
 "Glue" in the network  
 Promotion

The entrepreneurs appreciated that there was a project management team dedicated to the practical issues in the QH-project. 'Without the management team, it would not have been possible to fulfil the idea' (Int. 4, 2011-05-27). The governmental representatives have thus functioned very well by picking up the initiative of the cycling route and make the entrepreneurs collaborate around one idea and form a network in practice. As glue in the network, the project management has been successful thanks to how they have let the e-team concentrate fully on their businesses. The management team has also tried to promote the project internally in their organizations, to support women entrepreneurship by working politically to change gender structures.

However, the networking activities provided by the management team has sometimes been described as superfluous by the e-team. The reason for this is that the entrepreneurs in the tourism business, especially those offering accommodation in the Norrtälje region, are networking a lot already (Int 3 2011-05-27). The e-team rather saw a need to extend the network outside Norrtälje, and to the most nearby cycling destination, the Åland islands (Int 3, 2011-05-27).

### Civil society

The representatives from the NGO 'BalticFem' have been described by the e-team as very energetic regarding how to support business ideas. 'They stress the opportunities and not the problems' (Int 4, 2011-05-27). And even if the NGO has a political objective to support especially women, the interviews with the e-team showed that the entrepreneurs appreciated the genuine interest in entrepreneurship hold by the NGO. 'It is not really gender issues that has been on the agenda, it is just that we happen to be women in this project that makes it a women's project' (Int. 5, 2011-06-27). The ideological basis of the NGO is not what the entrepreneurs have noticed, what they stress is rather the support given to the women in connection to their individual businesses.

Collaboration platform  
 Legitimizing link  
 Competence & process development  
 Carrying individual and structural perspectives

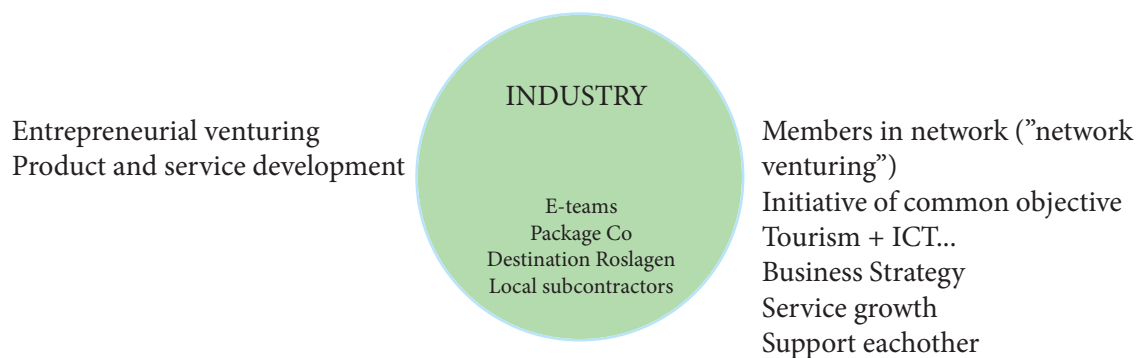


Ideological aim  
 Increase women's entrepreneurship  
 by business support  
 Technical development  
 Information material  
 Tight contact with the municipality  
 Implicitly inform about structures  
 Promote to the old "hawks"

The NGO also provided technical support to the e-teams and the cycling idea by design and layout of the brochure etc. The NGO also had a tight link to the management team at the municipality, with co-production of the workshops, map and brochure. Last but not least, the NGO mentioned that they work with their ideological mission by promoting the cycling route as a women entrepreneurship project to the ‘old hawks’. (Int. 7, 2011-06-28) The manager at the NGO also stated that the most important thing with the QH-project is the model; that several small entrepreneurs work together with a common business idea. She will in the future actively try to enhance that other small businesses get together around a common project, such as a riding trail or hiking trail.

## Industry

The e-team has become collaborators as members in the QH-project network. No one described themselves as competing with the others. Nor did they express that they needed to protect themselves from the others in the e-team. Those entrepreneurs that had chosen to join the QH-project can be assumed to be interested in collaborating, rather than competing. However, those entrepreneurs that were situated further away from the project management and the city of Norrtälje, were less integrated in the collaborative approach.



The e-team can be said to be an overall hardworking group of women positive to entrepreneurship as a way of living. The common objective of a cycling route has become a practice of ‘network venturing’ where the women support each other. The support that one is giving to each other is not illustrated as a means to overcome problems, but described as mostly for fun, to discuss new ideas.

## Academia

Academia has mostly been involved in the QH-project by staying in contact directly with the management team. The e-team has however got in contact with the academic partner through workshops and in interview situations. The link between academia and the e-team has been established both regarding the technical application and the issue of gender awareness. But due to the delayed technical application, and the abstract objective of gender awareness, this link has not been particularly strong. Academia has rather been involved to give project feedback and provide with a meta-perspective on how the QH-project has functioned.

R&D  
Education  
Incubators  
Spin-off:s



Education  
Gender awareness  
Policy proposals  
Reporting  
Academic publishing  
Project feedback  
Internal critical process

### **Theoretical Reflection – to re-construct women’s entrepreneurship**

Above narrative on the case of a cycling route in the tourist business takes some assumptions as pre-given, especially about entrepreneurship and the gendering of it. With descriptions of entrepreneurship, an entrepreneur often comes with a set of capabilities, qualities and properties, for example as enthusiastic and engaged, two essentialistic mentalities that are often connected to a positive personality and outcome. In the QH-project, where especially women’s entrepreneurship is studied, the positioning of ‘women’ is also testament of how it is possible to talk about women at a particular point in time. ‘[D]iscourses on women entrepreneurs are linguistic practices that create truth effects, i.e. they contribute to the practicing of gender at the very same time that they contribute to the gendering of entrepreneurial practices.’ (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004) Where discourse constitutes certain realities and excludes other (Jorgensen Winther & Philips, 2000). Since the very way a research text is written positions the writer, produces her/him in the process of making (in this document) the story of the cycling route authentic (Potter, 1996), one should pay particular attention to the historicity of the arguments deployed. The presence of the in-authentic in the very case description given could thus in itself be analysed in relation to a gendering of female entrepreneurship and its exclusions (Ahl, 2006).

### **The positioning of a team manager in the QH-project – being the balancer**

When interviewing a representative for the management team at the municipality of Norrtälje (2011-05-19), I particularly asked questions about their responsibility in relation to the policy objectives of the EU. One question posed was: ‘How do you look upon your freedom to implement this project in relation to what the entrepreneurs wish?’ The representative answered that the application was very theoretical; ‘some sort of discourse that I did not really understand’, ‘it said nothing about what we were supposed to do’, ‘no content’, so the project has rather emanated by how we are as persons (2011-05-19). She later added that this personal engagement peculiarly needs to be balanced: ‘Sometimes one is very hesitant to even articulate what one is doing in practice in this project, since this can be scrutinized in relation to EU regulations. (...) Due to this, it is very difficult to support innovativeness and creativity in the region.’ (2011-05-19) This should not be understood in the sense that the manager has done some mistakes, but rather that her professionalism required a constant self-regulating balancing act. Thus, she expresses how a possibility to implement the project by the means that she could bring forth was

stimulated by the undefined zone, however, in a vagueness that even forced her practical capabilities further than she initially had wanted. She thus positions herself as a balancer between the rigorous demands for order and structure in the project work, and the demand for project outcomes in the form of increased entrepreneurship and a better cluster.

The representative also told that she has not focused on 'gender awareness', since this receives very little response from the entrepreneurs. Instead, it has been her mission to promote the technology and application for the mobile, as an area that has not been traditionally incorporated in women's entrepreneurship, where some of the women acknowledged the technology directly and no one was negative. To focus on the practical things, by offering the technical application instead of arguing theoretically for gender awareness, was by the management team seen as a more successful promotion of women's entrepreneurship.

The theme of this interview is a typical representation of a struggle within policy implementation, building upon common dichotomies between state or transnational state intervention and the zone for individual freedom, the wishes of entrepreneurial subjects. On one hand, the management team is obliged to follow the bureaucratic process, and on the other, they have the ambition to stimulate entrepreneurship in the context where they are situated themselves. It is in this gap between the EU-level and the level of a collective of women entrepreneurs, that the management team is to operationalize specific objectives. It is to act as a relay of politics in the construction of the relation between the institution and the individual woman entrepreneur. Where the representative in this case positions herself constantly by comparisons to the vague practical objectives, and



constitutes herself as a manager who can make the project happen by understanding the entrepreneurs and their needs. But in the end, she adds that this mostly was a problem in the beginning, while they now have let go of the theoretical ambitions a bit, to apply their tools to handle the overall policy goals and the entrepreneurs respectively. The management team is thus positioned as a quite successful balancer, however still maintaining that gender awareness is very difficult to stimulate, while entrepreneurship is easier.

The manager also stresses that the technical application is supposed to be finished before the summer season, but that it is a bit delayed. She talks about her responsibility to deliver a technical application to the tourist entrepreneurs, and she rather positions herself in relation to knowledge about the technical application, than to knowledge about gender awareness, and a deliverance of gender awareness. The technical application, still as invisible as gender awareness, is more easily drawn upon as part of the practical realization of the project. This should not surprise us, as technology since the 20:th century has been one of the most legitimate things to talk about, while other creations of the human, such as gender awareness, risks being neglected in comparison. Consequently, while the manager is doing project work, steered by how the QH-project is designed by EU, she ends up solving a gender problematic by enforced technical progression.



### **The positioning of a woman entrepreneur in the QH-project – being crazy and irresponsible**

The women in the e-team had either been working as entrepreneurs in the family business for a long time, or changed their career path in later years. Many of them worked



with other jobs on the side or were partly supported by their husbands. Regarding financial problems, one of the entrepreneurs states: 'My husband and I went together to the bank, but it is I who am the company' (Int 4, 2011-05-27). She continues the story by telling how he is fully supportive of her ideas, and that they do the business together, but that it is she who is considered the entrepreneur in the family.

They all had positive statements about the QH-project, where some had been more engaged than others. The level of engagement seemed to depend on how far away from the management team and Norrtälje city their facilities were situated. Continuing to investigate how the women entrepreneurs, as a predefined category in the QH-project, create themselves as entrepreneurs by stories on how they had partaken in the project work, most of them answered that they considered it a way of living, or as a way to finally do something more fun 'before it is too late' (Int 2, 2011-05-27). When asking them about the specific objective to support women, no one seemed to be willing to position themselves as a problematic group. A male participant in the e-team even stated that the women really seem to succeed by themselves (Int 6, 2011-06-28). Overall, no one is willing to talk about differences between men and women in relation to entrepreneurship, in the view of the e-team, the conditions for men and women are equal. The 'vulnerable subject', i.e. the woman as a subject that is in need of help and support systems, is rejected. Lewis (Lewis, 2006) has discussed this type of gender blindness as a way to produce yourself by differentiation to feminine norms, i.e. to 'conceal gender as a means of gaining advantage'.

I asked one of the women if she considers herself an entrepreneur in the QH-project: 'Absolutely, this is totally a hobby (...) I haven't received a penny for my work, but at the same time we [the e-team] see this project as a long term mission, it will hopefully bring some income in the future.' (Int 2, 2011-05-27) She continued to talk about the various jobs she had beside the business, to secure her income, and the negative reaction she had got from some people in her private network in the beginning, when she proposed that she wanted to become an entrepreneur: 'You are crazy, they said to me, you cannot quit your job and start a business, you have a family to support. But I have never said that I am not crazy either.' (Ibid) This shows how the woman entrepreneur provides a self-portrait, first of herself as someone who is doing a hobby, a quite common take on female entrepreneurship, where the entrepreneurial profitmaking is discussed as a hope.

Since the business was not recognized as lucrative at once, it was neither considered as a responsible behaviour of the woman to start her business. The hobby and self-realization, was put into question in relation to the family as a collective, in need of support. The woman, in response to her own claim of being constructed as irresponsible by her friends (and family?), responds to her own quote of their opinion by drawing on the traditional hysterical woman, the last resort for dismissing strong women. To be able to constitute herself as an entrepreneur, this woman consequently needed to acknowledge that she was crazy, regardless the irony in this statement, to legitimize herself as someone who could actually become an entrepreneur by saying that she is a deviant, while laughing. She thus resisted the position as 'responsible woman', not by talking about entrepreneurship as a different form of responsibility, but as an extraordinary thing to actually pursue.

Nevertheless, she did not consider women entrepreneurs in Norrtälje region as something out of the ordinary. 'There seems to be more women than men in this business in Norrtälje, and more and more women are joining'. She also informed me that the network for women never addresses any problems for women, no, rather 'it is self evident that we can create new businesses (...) it is natural (...) women should run Norrtälje'. She also hinted that there are some men supporting her, but mostly, she said, 'women are supporting each other'. (Int 2, 2011-05-27)

The illustrated positioning of the woman entrepreneur follows some established norms. The specific 'woman' category of entrepreneur is in this case produced by how the entrepreneurship is said to affect the family life. An entrepreneur who is a woman is constantly asked about her private life struggles, implying that it should be a more precarious situation for her than for a man. In the interview, a woman who is to support her family leads to the proposal that she should not choose to start a business. It could both be considered too risky in terms of total failure, or too risky in terms of lack of short-term income. Accusations of women not being as risk prone as men, and hence, not being an essentialistic material good enough for entrepreneurship, is in this case a position which is opposed by the woman. This woman rather shows how she is accused of creating risks, expected not to take any risk but stay tight to her family, serving it responsibly. The production of the woman entrepreneur is thus determined in relation to the norm of a stable family life. Where she needs to position herself in relation to this norm, and consequently resists a predefined place for her actions within it.

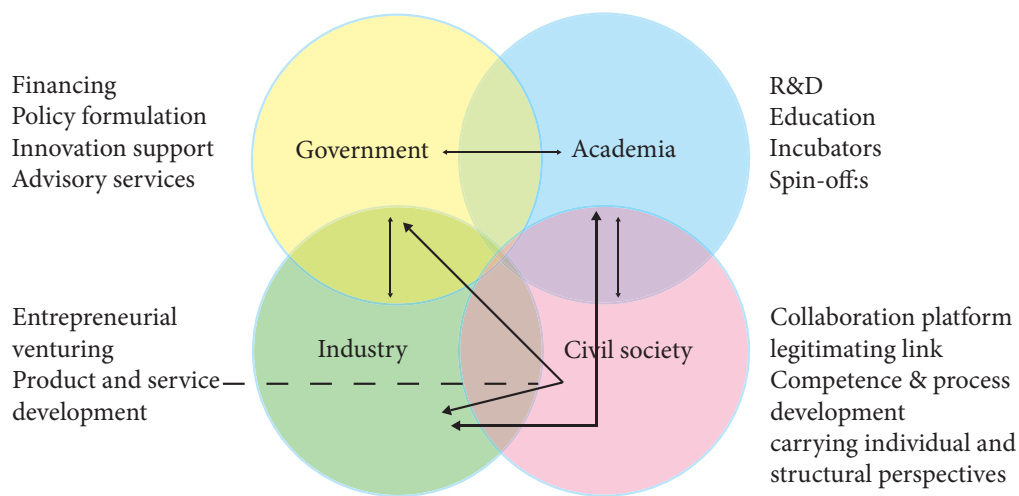
Even if the woman in question seems to resist the typical female attributes ascribed to women, she repeats them and positions herself in relation to them. She goes for an aggressive standpoint, resisting the norms, where she inevitably becomes the traditional dangerous woman by constituting herself as crazy, almost making craziness into something positive. Since she is excluded in relation to the traditional norms, she draws upon one of the most common categories for deviant women, but succeed to make entrepreneurship craziness into a strategy that allows her to pursue her business and supposedly irresponsible family life. Hence, this entrepreneur exemplifies both how it is possible to resist established norms on how a woman is supposed to take care of the family, at the same time as she positions herself, not as a future strong prosperous business owner, but as a crazy woman with hopes.

## **Conclusion**

This report has described how a cycling route became the practical objective of the QH-project. The case description ended with an analysis of how the different helixes in the QH-project has been involved in the project work. How the cycling route has been operationalized, from idea to practice, thus provides with practical conclusions important for how the QH-project functions as innovation system. The QH-project started slowly in 2009 and unfolded bottom-up in the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011, when the team management picked up the idea of a cycling route. The idea of a cycling route made it possible to work towards a common practical goal, with a map and a brochure. The management team (governmental representative) could in the wake of this distribute tasks to the entrepreneurs, and the entrepreneurs could collaborate with each other

and connect their individual businesses to a more common service business idea and 'network venturing'. The NGO supported the network both in practice and by working politically to change established gender structures.

As illustrated below, the 'e-team' has had access to all the helices, but in the case of cycling tourism, the entrepreneurs have mostly networked with each other supported by the NGO and part of local government. This was already discussed in Quadruple Helix report by Lindberg et al. (2010), which showed that small businesses in regions have few and weak relations to academia and governmental agencies while they may be furthered by civil society actors.



In the second part of the report a more critical discussion about 'gender awareness' was provided. This illustrated how the interviewer and interviewees constructed different positions. The project manager involved constituted herself as a balancer, promoting the overall objectives of the QH-project and supporting the individual entrepreneurs. Turning to the e-team and category of 'women entrepreneur', the interviewees resisted the category of the 'vulnerable woman' and 'responsible woman', and rather positioned themselves as strong, energetic, hardworking and even crazy. This last neglect of any problems for women in relation to men, is usually discussed as a 'blindness' to how the sexes and gender order is constructed (Wahl, et al., 2001:41). Consequently, the women don't portrait themselves as hindered, but as adventurous, strong or crazy, to actually be able to overcome the traditional norms imposed. It is not enough to become an entrepreneur, without incorporating the traditional masculine capacities for 'adventure' and 'strength', or the marginal feminine category of 'craziness'. In this way, gender structures are still present and re-constructed.

## Empirical material

Notes from meetings:

2011-02-24

2011-03-10

2011-03-17

2011-03-31

Interviews:

Team manager: Int 1, 2011-05-19

Entrepreneur: Int 2, 2011-05-27

Entrepreneur: Int 3, 2011-05-27

Entrepreneur: Int 3, 2011-05-27

Entrepreneur: Int 4, 2011-05-27

Entrepreneur: Int 5, 2011-06-27

Family business/woman and man: Int 6, 2011-06-27

NGO: Int 7, 2011-06-28

Entrepreneur: Int 8, 2011-06-28

Family business/woman and man: Int 9, 2011-06-28

Entrepreneur (man): Int 10, 2011-07-14

Entrepreneur: Int 11, 2011-07-14

Observation during exhibition

2011-05-27



## References

- Ahl, H. (2006). Why Research o Women Entrepreneurship Need New Directions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 595–621.
- Billig, M. (2011). Writing social psychology: Fictional things and unpopulated texts. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 50, 4-20.
- Bruni, A., Gherardi, S., & Poggio, B. (2004). Entrepreneur-mentality, gender and the study of women entrepreneurs. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 17(3), 256-268.
- Elson, D. (1995). Gender Awareness in Modeling Structural Adjustment. *World Development*, 23(11), 1851-1868.
- Fenwick, T. J. (2002). Lady, Inc.: women learning, negotiating subjectivity in entrepreneurial discourses. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(2), 162-177.
- Jorgensen Winther, M., & Philips, L. (2000). *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Lewis, P. (2006). The Quest for Invisibility: Female Entrepreneurs and the Masculine Norm of Entrepreneurship. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 13(5), 453–469.
- Lindberg, M. Lindgren, M. Packendorff, J. (2010) The role of NGOs in supporting women's entrepreneurship – A study of a Quadruple Helix project in the Baltic Sea region, *Quadruple Helix reports 2010:4*.
- Lindgren, M., & Packendorff, J. (2006). What's New in New Forms of Organizing? Construction of gender in Project-Based Work. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4), 841–866.
- Potter, J. (1996). *Representing Reality – Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*. London: Sage.
- Wahl, A., Holgersson, C., Höök, P., & Linghag, S. (2001). *Det ordnar sig*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Wright, C. (1995). Gender Awareness in Migration Theory: Synthesizing Actor and Structure in Southern Africa. *Development and Change*, 26(4), 771–792.







EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**

[www.quadruplehelix.eu](http://www.quadruplehelix.eu)