Blurred Boundaries between the Work and Non-Work domains in Rural Entrepreneurial Family Businesses

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Background & Aim
Previous research (Bjuggren & Duggal, 2012) shows that more than half of all family businesses in Sweden are located in rural areas. This fact has, however, not been much noticed in research so far. Unique for rural entrepreneurship is that the business and the family home often are located at the same physical place; sometimes it is literally the same place. In that regards, boundaries between work and non-work are blurred. Rural entrepreneurship may be comparable to the "pre-industrial" society where integration was seen as a norm, but the development of our society lead to value separation between work and non-work, today it is a cultural norm to separate between the two. In rural context, separation of work place and home place is indeed observable. Today, however, new entrepreneurship is developed, like "bed and breakfast", like "experience one week-end at the farm", like "riding school" and so forth. What we observe is thus a panel of ways to which boundaries between work and non-work are defined by rural entrepreneurs. We use theories from the field of work-non-work boundary theory and management (integration, segmentation, permeability of boundaries, flexibility of boundaries) to frame this phenomenon. So far, this theoretical framework has been scarcely applied on the field of family businesses and only recently used in rural entrepreneurship (see for example Andersson-Cederholm and Hultman, 2010) especially with consequences on individual's well-being. Considering that rural entrepreneurship is central to of the rural economic development, it becomes central to further understand rural entrepreneurial family businesses and how the family and the business construct boundaries between work and non-work activities. This is the aim of this paper.

Methods and Material
The paper builds on ethnographic inspired case studies of entrepreneurs who have grown their businesses, and continuously developed them. They organize life related to their businesses, and as part of their businesses. The cases in this study are family businesses; two of the three are started by previous generations in the family; one has been created by the entrepreneur who runs it today. In two of the three cases the homes of the families are located at the same physical places as the family businesses; in one
case the family bought a second farm, where they run the business. The analysis of this case is made using family business and boundary theory and management theories.

**Main Preliminary Results and Conclusions**
The three cases show how their business and private lives are intervened in stories that become important parts of their story telling organizations (Boje, 1991, 1995). In the analysis we find that how the business owners' view the boundaries between work and non-work is central to the actual entrepreneurial activities and to their business ideas. From the cases we can create an understanding about how the owners view work/non-work experiences and how they daily conducted and developed their businesses. Over time boundaries become more negotiated. The blurred boundaries between work/non-work imply that the business becomes perceived as being authentic, which fulfils their "biological/sustainable interest". On the other side, no blurring may be seen as "industrial" and "non unique experience". Starting our analysis in family business and in boundary theory/management we come to discuss how blurring and authenticity becomes a competitive advantage. As a whole, the value of rural entrepreneurship is in the "blurring" of boundaries. To realise the business vision and still manage a "life", in other words to be able to manage work and non-work and reach a certain equilibrium between both, the rural entrepreneurs must understand his/her overall work-life strategies. They also need to develop work/non-work strategies with other members in the business and the family.

**Theoretical/Practical/Methodological Implications**
Contributes to research on rural entrepreneurs and how the business value is connected to the blurring of boundaries.
It offers guidelines to rural entrepreneur in how to manage work/non-work balance.
The ethnographical data collected shows that more ethnographical research could give more value to work-life research in specific context.

**Potential contributions to the conference**
Rural entrepreneurship is a specific spatial context and it becomes central nowadays as the lack of growth in rural areas. For economic, social and environmental sustainability, it is central thus to understand how rural entrepreneurs can manage their life and business to contribute to society and their community.