

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Good workers, good firms? : Rural SMEs legitimising immigrant workforce

Lähdesmäki, Merja

2020-07

Lähdesmäki , M & Suutari , T 2020 , ' Good workers, good firms? Rural SMEs legitimising immigrant workforce ' , Journal of Rural Studies , vol. 77 , pp. 1-10 . <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.04.035>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/343318>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.04.035>

cc_by_nc_nd

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

This manuscript has been accepted for publication in *Journal of Rural Studies*, 2020, 77, 1-10.

Merja Lähdesmäki & Timo Suutari

Good workers, good firms? Rural SMEs legitimising immigrant workforce

Abstract

The workforce potential offered by immigrants is perceived as one solution for the sustainable operation of many rural companies. Still, diversifying the workforce and recruiting immigrant employees represents not only a significant organizational change for rural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) but can also reflect on their legitimacy in the eyes of the local community. In this study, we examine the legitimation strategies rural SMEs use in order to justify the decision to employ immigrant workers as socially accepted. The theoretical framework builds on the discussion concerning legitimacy and legitimation. By analysing the interviews with the representatives of 35 rural SMEs, we identified three legitimation strategies used to justify the decision to recruit immigrants, based on owner-managerial values, immigrants as good workers and the economic, demographic and social context consequent upon rural location. The aim of the legitimacy strategies is to convince rural community members in perceiving the recruitment of immigrant employees as favourable and preferable. Our study demonstrates that for rural SMEs, recruiting immigrant workers is not just an economic or bureaucratic procedure but entails social aspects as well. These social aspects need to be taken into consideration in order to maintain the business legitimacy.

Introduction

The rural context can present a unique set of challenges for business operations, like long physical distances, low market potential due to a small clientele, poor availability and condition of infrastructure and dominance of single industry (e.g. Siemens, 2010; Steiner and Atterton, 2015). The constrained labour pool has also been identified as one of the main challenges in rural business. This

challenge has recently become even more significant as an ageing population is an overarching phenomenon in developed countries, related particularly to rural areas, which are simultaneously facing the outmigration of younger generations (Aure et al., 2018; Burholt and Dobbs, 2012; Glasgow and Brown, 2012; Stockdale, 2006). The workforce potential offered by immigrants is perceived as one solution to ensuring the sustainable operation of many companies in rural areas (Górny and Kaczmarczyk, 2018; McAreavey and Argent, 2018). However, even though there has been recent experience of more immigrants moving and settling in rural areas (e.g. Søholt et al., 2018; Papadopoulos et al., 2018; McAreavey, 2017; Rye, 2014; Simard and Jentsch, 2009; Jentsch, 2007), most of the immigrants are mobile and destined for the urban areas and larger cities (see Papadopoulos, 2012; Duncan and Popp, 2017; Kordel and Weidinger, 2018). Within the European Union for instance, the proportion of foreign-born inhabitants in the total population of larger cities is greater than the national average (Eurostat, 2016). Thus, when looking at the rural labour market, it can be argued that rural companies have a significant role in drawing and engaging immigrants as part of their local communities in order to secure workers in rural areas.

In this study, we have focused on the recruitment of immigrant workers from the perspective of rural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Finland. The ability of SMEs' successful recruitment of employees is consistently rated by the owner-managers as one of the more important factors influencing the success of their business operations (Williamson, 2000; Williamson et al., 2002). However, recruiting new employees is not just an economic process but also entails social and cultural aspects (Findlay et al., 2013). Businesses located in rural and peripheral regions tend to be strongly embedded in their local communities (Besser and Miller, 2001, 2013; Lähdesmäki and Suutari, 2012; Steiner and Atterton, 2015), and have traditionally sought a culturally and ethnically homogenous (local) workforce. This coexists with the fact that people living in rural areas are significantly less likely to interact with immigrants (European Union, 2018) and attitudes towards immigrants in rural

areas are often less tolerant compared to the urban context (Crawley et al., 2019). Therefore, diversifying the workforce and recruiting immigrant employees represents not only a significant organisational change for a SME (Gudmundson and Hartenian, 2000) but can also reflect on their legitimacy in the eyes of the local community (see Findlay et al., 2013). As the success of SMEs is often strongly related to their degree of legitimacy from local stakeholders (e.g. Besser and Miller, 2001; Ruffo et al., 2018; Russo and Perrini, 2010), previous research has indicated that rural businesses care about the reactions of their local stakeholders when recruiting immigrant workers (for example in the Finnish context, see Lämsä et al., 2019; Mattila and Björklund, 2013; Saartenoja et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand how rural business owner-managers represent immigrant labour as an ‘essential’ or preferable recruitment option in their local communities in order to maintain the legitimacy of their business operations.

The theoretical framework of this study is built on the discussion concerning legitimacy and legitimation. Organisational legitimacy refers to the congruence between organisations’ behaviour and values and the norms of acceptable behaviour in the larger social system of which they are a part (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975). Legitimacy influences the level of societal support that organisations receive, and thus it is often considered to be an intangible asset vital for organisational survival (e.g. Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Accordingly, our aim in this paper is to answer the following research question: What legitimation strategies do rural SME representatives use in order to justify the decision to employ immigrant workers as a socially accepted form of business activity? We approached legitimation as a deliberate discursive process by which speakers justify immigrant employment by making discursive judgements regarding their propriety and validity (see e.g. Bitektine and Haack, 2015; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). The question of whether the success of organisational recruitment process is influenced by how well recruitment

practices coincide with the institutionalised norms of behaviour within a society remains largely unanswered (Barber, 1998).

Our study contributes to the research concerning rural SMEs and immigrant workers in rural areas. As our aim is not so much to answer the question about *why* rural SMEs recruit immigrant workers, but *how* they justify their recruitment decisions and how they build up their legitimacy, our aim is to add understanding about the characteristics of legitimacy processes in rural contexts. We approached the immigrant workforce from the perspective of rural SMEs since previous studies have mostly looked at immigrants' employment and situation in the labour market from the immigrants' point of view. Meanwhile, the employers and other operators in the labour market have received less academic attention (e.g. Findlay and McCollum, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Rodriguez, 2004). However, integrating the employer's perspective into research on immigrant employment is of paramount importance as it is a way to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the immigrant employment process and the functioning of the labour market (Rodriguez, 2004; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Scott, 2013).

Theoretical framework: Discursive legitimation to build social acceptance

According to a well-accepted definition, legitimacy is “a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Thus, in the business context, an organisation is considered to be legitimate as long as its means and ends are seen appropriate to their social context (Tost, 2011). Legitimacy justifies the role of business organisations as part of a larger social system and helps attract resources and the continued support of constituents that enhances the likelihood of business survival (Rao, 1994). It is thus strongly interlinked with embeddedness which

refers to the idea that “economic action is affected by an actor’s dyadic relationships and by the structure of the overall network of relations” (Granovetter 1992, p. 33). According to this view, the economic sphere cannot be considered as being separable from other social spheres, which provide supplementary motives and enact alternative realities (Johannisson and Mönsted, 1997).

Our focus in this study is on SMEs which are often more embedded in their local communities and face different, and stronger, institutional pressures than large businesses (Ruffo et al. 2018). In locally embedded SMEs, business partners are typically linked to each other by additional relationships beyond the business context (e.g., Longenecker et al., 2006; Besser and Jarnagin, 2010). The same individuals may simultaneously be kin, neighbours and co-workers, thus intensifying the capacity for mutual monitoring of their ties as well as the relative power of stakeholders (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019; Ruffo et al., 2018). Since the business in SMEs is often rather personal (Kitching, 1994) and linked to the founder in particular (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011), business and personal reputations are coterminous. Accordingly, a legitimacy crisis also represents a potential risk to the owner-manager’s personal reputation (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019).

We argue that gaining and maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of local stakeholders is particularly important for rural SMEs, which are often even more locally embedded than their urban counterparts (Frazier et al., 2013; Greenberg et al., 2018). Previous research has suggested that sense of serving their community is an integral part of the behaviour of many rural businesses (Bosworth, 2012), therefore being dependent on strong community relationships in order to survive (Besser and Miller, 2001). It has been also stated that defensive localism, referring the willingness to accept the new characteristics of many rural areas (Winter, 2003), reinforces the significance of legitimacy in successful rural business (Akgün et al., 2010).

In this study, we make the theoretical distinction between legitimacy and legitimation. Accordingly, we define legitimation to mean “the process whereby an organisation justifies to a peer or superordinate system its right to exist” (Maurer, 1971, p. 361). In similar vein, Rojo and van Dijk (1997, p. 560) define legitimation as the act of “attributing acceptability to social actors, actions and social relations within the normative order”. Indeed, there has been a move from a static perception of legitimacy towards more dynamic understandings. As Hybels (1995) has stated, legitimacy is usually not an unquestioned state once established but is a topic for discourse and debate. While it has been recognised that legitimation is very much about discourse, the academic interest in the processes of meaning-making in the context of legitimation has been strengthened (Joutsenvirta, 2013; Vaara and Monin, 2010). Accordingly, it has been suggested that successful legitimation requires audiences to be able to identify with the main arguments used when different decisions, practices or changes in them are legitimated (Erkama and Vaara, 2010).

An often-cited model for analysing discursive legitimation was developed by van Leeuwen (2007) who considers that legitimation involves answers to the questions: why should we do this in this way? (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 94; also 2008, pp. 105–106). He further introduced four strategies that elaborate the above-mentioned questions. The strategies are described as authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation and mythopoesis. Authorization is legitimation by reference to someone with vested authority due to their status or role in a certain institution or their organisational expertise. Authority can also be impersonal, such as that imposed by laws, rules and regulations, or that based on custom, tradition or conformity. Rationalisation legitimises a practice by reference to the goals and uses which hold certain cognitive validity in the given cultural context. In rationalisation, legitimation is grounded either on ‘the way things are’ or by reference to their goals, uses and effects. Legitimation through moral evaluation is based on moral values, which are an integral part of any ethical process evaluating what is right, just and fair. Moral evaluation can be

realised as evaluative adjectives, comparisons or abstractions through which a certain positive value is distilled from the practice. The fourth legitimation strategy is called mythopoesis, i.e. legitimation is achieved through the telling of stories. These narratives can be ‘moral tales’, or ‘cautionary stories’ in which the outcome of the legitimate practice is rewarded, or the illegitimate practice is punished (van Leeuwen, 2007).

In order to examine how SME representatives build legitimacy into their decision to recruit immigrant workers, we have adopted the idea of legitimacy as a discursive and dynamic process. This allows us to shift attention from established legitimacy to the discursive process through which the recruitment of immigrant workers is created as positive, beneficial, ethical, understandable, necessary, or otherwise acceptable action rural business context (see Vaara and Monin, 2010). We will utilize the theoretical framework provided by van Leeuwen (2007) as a starting point of our data analysis. While this framework provides a well-distinguished way of identifying specific legitimation strategies, it still is general enough to leave room for the micro-level, situational discursive practices employed in the context of rural SMEs (see Vaara et al., 2006).

Empirical material and data analysis

The study was conducted in Finland, which is one of the more rural countries in Europe when measured by the number of people living in rural areas (OECD, 2008). However, the number of immigrants living in rural communities has traditionally been quite low. In general, immigration to Finland has been relatively small until the 1980s, when the number of immigrants started to exceed the number of emigrants. In the early 1990s, there were the first noteworthy migration waves when asylum seekers from Somalia, Ingrian returning migrants and refugees from the former Yugoslavia migrated to Finland. Even though there have been centres for refugees and asylum seekers in rural areas as well, most of the immigrants settled in urban areas. (Forsander, 2000; Saari, 2013.)

Nowadays a bit more than 10 per cent of the population with a foreign background live in rural areas, which means just around 42 000 people. Most of them are from Europe but increasingly from the Middle East, Northern Africa and Asian countries. Among the rural dwellers, immigrants are clearly a minority since 2.6 per cent of the total rural population has a foreign background. Indeed, an absolute majority of immigrants in Finland live and work in large cities, particularly in the capital area of Helsinki. (Juopperi, 2019; Statistics Finland, 2019.)

When looking at the Finnish labour market, there are considerable differences in unemployment rates and the amount of the employed labour force both regionally and between the segments of the population. Figures for the sparsely populated areas of northern and eastern Finland are worse than those of cities and rural areas in southern and western Finland. As for the differences between the segments of the population, unemployment figures among immigrants follow regional patterns. (Larja and Sutela, 2014; Statistics Finland, 2020.)

The empirical data comprise face-to-face interviews with 35 rural small and medium size enterprise (SME) representatives. Most of the interviewees were owner-managers, but in six cases, the respondent was the firm's personnel manager or production manager. Here SME is defined as an independently owned and operated firm (Peterson et al., 1986) with fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover of €50 million euros or less (see European Commission, 2003). The selection of the businesses was based on the purposeful sampling method in order to obtain variation in the data and to capture the equivocality of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). There were two main criteria for the selection of the businesses. The first criterion was that businesses had experience in employing immigrants, either they currently had immigrant workers or they had previously had an immigrant workforce. The second main criterion was that businesses were located in rural areas. In a national urban-rural classification, Finnish areas have been divided into seven classes of which four are

considered to be rural (Finland's environmental administration, 2019). The classification uses 250 x 250 metre statistical squares. In order to simplify the selection of rural SMEs, classification was reduced to the municipal level by choosing those municipalities that comprise only rural area statistical squares. Therefore, the selected SMEs are located in municipalities that represent various combinations of rural areas (rural heartland areas, sparsely populated rural areas, local centres in rural areas, and rural areas close to urban areas) or just one type of rural area. (See Appendix 1.). Within these criteria of rural location, the SMEs were randomly chosen from public business registers. After that, SME representatives were contacted by phone or email and asked whether they had any immigrant workers at the moment or had earlier had an immigrant workforce.

The SMEs represented several branches of industry e.g. the production of crops and production of animal, manufacture of food products, textiles, wood products, rubber and plastic products, articles of concrete, cement and plaster, fabricated metal products as well as machinery and equipment. There were also SMEs representing wholesale and retail trade of fruit and vegetables, land transport, and accommodation and social activities. (See Appendix 1). Even though some of the rural businesses in which we conducted interviews employed immigrants for expert positions (like supervision of work, coding, product development, international marketing), the majority of the immigrant workers in this study were employed to undertake rather monotonous or physically demanding work, like harvesting, food processing, assembling, cleaning, serving, transporting and building. The immigrants employed by rural businesses were both from European (like Estonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine) and non-European countries (Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam and some African countries).

Rural SME representatives, especially owner-managers, are often community and opinion leaders and active in their local communities in many ways (e.g. Besser, 2002; Steiner and Atterton, 2015). After the interviews, we asked the informants to fill in the inquiry sheet concerning their participation

in local policy, organisations and associations. Twenty-six out of the 35 informants showed themselves to be actively engaging in some of these activities. Employer and trade associations were the most common forms of participation, while five of the informants were local politicians alongside their business activities. In addition, 22 of the informants had spent most of their lives in the same municipality they were now operating their business in.

The interviews were conducted between June and November 2017. Data were gathered by using a stimulus-based interview method (e.g. Törrönen, 2002) in which respondents were shown stimuli (questions, claims, photos, and quotes) concerning the operating opportunities and environment of SME, functioning of the local labour market, immigrant workers and recruitment practices as well as the social responsibility businesses feel for their employees. In the interviews, we used the terms ‘immigrant’ and ‘person with a foreign background’ as interchangeable to refer those employees who had come to Finland from another country and who are not ‘ethnic Finns’ (see Lämsä et al., 2019, p. 659). We acknowledge that when SME representatives were asked about members of their labour force with a foreign background they were talking about immigrants in general, sometimes they were specifically talking about refugees or asylum seekers but sometimes also migrant workers and seasonal migrants. Furthermore, we recognise that while the term ‘immigrant’ has been criticised as creating limiting stereotypes by freezing a person’s identity in one specific category (McAreevey and Argent, 2018), it still manages to capture the heterogeneity of people who migrate to another country for a variety of reasons. Indeed, most immigrants come to Finland for work, family or educational reasons (Sutela and Larja, 2015).

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. We started the data analysis by reading through the transcribed interviews during which we condensed the material into more manageable aggregates. After that, we started to categorise and code the empirical material and went through condensed

interviews one-by-one, focusing especially on text passages which would expose how informants describe sections of the workforce with a foreign background and how they justified decisions to employ immigrant workers. At this stage, our data analysis was based on detailed readings of data to derive the main categories and themes (e.g. Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2006). However, from the very beginning, we had a theoretical framework concerning discursive legitimation in our minds, which directed the reading and analysis of the empirical material. The analysis process was a continuous iteration (e.g. Wodak, 2001) between the data and the theoretical framework.

The second round of analysis resulted in a preliminary categorisation, which comprised almost 30 themes consisting of various arguments used by rural SME representatives when justifying their decisions and building up social acceptance in the eyes of their stakeholders. We continued reading and analysing these identified themes and tried to find overlapping categories in order to merge them and make sure that all the categories were in consistent with the theoretical framework. Finally, we ended up with nine themes that represent the main arguments used by SME representatives. This categorisation formed a basis for the definite analysis and results presented in this article. These nine themes were given names as per their main contents. We scrutinised these themes from the perspective of strategic legitimation theory and recognised three main legitimation strategies that build on different arguments. (See Table 1.)

Legitimation strategy based on owner-managerial values
Social mission of the firm
Equal job opportunities
Local acceptance of immigrants
Legitimation strategy based on immigrants as good workers
Work attitude
Workers' skills and abilities
Business benefits
Legitimation strategy based on economic, demographic and social context of the businesses

Availability of workforce
Externalizing legitimation
Welfare state structures and functioning of labour market

Table 1. Main legitimation strategies and arguments

Results

Legitimation strategy based on owner-managerial values

In this legitimation strategy, the recruitment of immigrants was mainly introduced to reflect the owner-managerial values (see Lämsä et al., 2019). In SMEs, owner-managers are often both the drivers and implementers of business values (Spence, 2016), because they are not as mediated and constrained by the same systems and established norms as managers in large businesses often are (Quinn, 1997). Accordingly, previous research has noted that the decisions made by the owner-managers – including hiring decisions – are based both on the needs of the business as well as the manager’s personal preferences (Gudmundson and Hartenian, 2000). This could be also noticed when the owner-managers legitimised their decision to hire immigrant employees. For example, one of the informants reflected on the recruitment of immigrants simply noting that: “*Well, it is because... everything is based on my values*” (Int. 26). Doing the morally right thing and acting in line with one’s own values was considered to provide a sense of self-satisfaction, as the following interview citations shows:

“*It [recruitment of an immigrant] makes you feel... it doesn’t put a halo on your head, but it gives you a good feeling when you are able to give someone hand and you see that they really appreciate it*”. (Int. 17.)

The idea of businesses, and particularly their owner-managers, being able to assist in the integration process of the immigrants appeals to the sense of moral obligation by implying that taking care of and meeting the needs of immigrants is something that a business should be part of. The legitimation reflects the ideas of the care ethic, which puts relationships at the very heart of moral evaluation by highlighting the moral importance of meeting the needs of particular others for whom we take responsibility (Held, 2006). In some cases, the SME representatives explicitly used the term ‘social mission’ when referring to their employment decisions. By providing employment opportunities, particularly for asylum seekers and refugees, a business can participate in the integration process. For example, in the interview citation below the informant describes the workplace, with its social contacts, as an important arena for identity reproduction and social integration for immigrants (see also Valenta, 2008).

“It’s easier for the integration of immigrants if they have a work community where they can have natural interaction with the original population. So of course, the businesses play an important role in the integration process. Somehow you have to take care that those people [immigrants] are able to get into the society and can get started with their lives here”. (Int.2.)

In some cases, positive attitudes towards immigrants reflected the values of the local community, which made the legitimation of immigrant employees through moral arguments rather easy. However, in most rural areas, immigrants still were an uncommon sight and local people were considered inexperienced in interacting with people from different cultures (see also Crawley et al., 2019), thus potentially evoking scepticism and even prejudices towards immigrants. In these cases, the employment of immigrants was constructed as a practice that has the potential to increase tolerance towards foreign people and cultures – both in the businesses and more generally at the community

level. The SME representatives created a subject position of an educator for themselves as they considered that being able to employ immigrants gave them a key position to change sometimes negative attitudes and fear of foreign people:

“I have tried to increase the tolerance in this area. For me, it’s important to acknowledge that people are different, they have different skin colours, different backgrounds and in principal, we should be able to get along and accept each other. So I think that it [recruiting immigrants] is a kind of social responsibility of our business”. (Int. 24.)

The moral aspects of the legitimation also echo the ideas of capability theory which highlight the moral significance of individuals’ capability to achieve the kind of life they have reason to value (Sen, 1985, 1999; Robeyns, 2005). The interviewees introduced themselves as providing opportunities for immigrants to lead a meaningful life in new, foreign settings as demonstrated in the following citation. Here the owner-manager intensifies his moral argumentation by asking the audience to take the immigrant’s position, thus appealing to the emotions of the audience.

“If you imagine being in a strange country and you have been used to doing something, and now all you can do is to spit at the ceiling and pass the time... I’m sure that everyone would like to spend their time doing something other than just watching how the time goes by”. (Int. 17.)

The owner-manager (Int. 17) further continued his argumentation by telling a success story, a kind of a moral tale, in which he explicitly demonstrated how his decision to recruit an immigrant employee had indeed been a right decision by reflecting on the employee’s later career in Finland. Even though

it is not possible to verify an employer's role in an immigrant employee's economic mobility, the owner-manager wanted to tell this small narrative in order to demonstrate that by providing the immigrant with an opportunity to work, he also enabled and enhanced the immigrant's capacity to acquire a good education and establish his own business. This, at least implicitly, is considered beneficial not only for the immigrant himself but more generally for society. Thus, the moral legitimation is intertwined with more rational, benefit-orientated legitimation.

“One of the immigrants who used to work with us, now lives [in a nearby city] and he has his own business there. He employs ten people and he actually got his master's degree from the university as well”. (Int. 17.)

Moral values were also highlighted when SME representatives perceived immigrants' nationality and ethnic background as being irrelevant for their recruiting decision. Instead, they highlighted that the best potential candidate should be recruited, whether being a Finn or not. Naturally, legislation and the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014) prevent any discrimination based on origin, nationality or language. However, SME representatives do not explicitly refer to legislation, but instead they presented themselves as fair and morally solid employers. For example, one of the interviewees considered the very question of discriminating between an immigrant and a Finn in a recruitment situation as uncomfortable: *“The very question bothers me in a sense that I have specifically used to think it [the recruitment process] without emphasising any differences between ethnic groups (Int. 33)”*. The discussion on equal opportunities highlights that “if individuals bring the same abilities to work, or perform in the same way, they should receive the same access to jobs and employment benefits, regardless of social group membership” (Liff and Wajcman, 1996, p. 79). In a similar vein, in the following interview citation, the recruitment decision was justified by describing the aim to make a morally correct decision based on the values of the owner-manager.

“Nobody is given priority, but we recruit the best possible employees for the business. Of course, I have tried to take a neutral and objective approach so that, based on the ideas of equality, it makes no difference whether they [job applicants] are from [the name of the municipality], Finland, Iraq or Syria”. (Int. 25.)

Legitimation strategy based on immigrants as good workers

Another legitimation strategy used to justify the recruitment of immigrant workers was based on immigrants’ characteristics and skills. This legitimation strategy produced a discursive distinction between the work motivation of immigrants and unemployed local people, when the latter group was not considered to be sufficiently motivated to work especially in physically demanding occupations (see Tannock, 2015). The argumentation was strengthened by presenting the poor motivation of the unemployed as a fact: *“It’s an unfortunate fact that you can’t get any Finns to do blue-collar work anymore”* (Int.1). The informants often recalled the disappointments they had faced when trying to recruit locally and even told cautionary stories. In these narratives, the recruitment processes had usually ended because of the lack of any potential and suitable job-applicants. Thus, even though recruiting a person with a different cultural background is a decision an SME makes with careful deliberation, it was highlighted that previous disappointment with recruitment of the local unemployed had enhanced their willingness to take a risk and start recruiting immigrants, like the following interview citation shows:

“I tried to find local employees through the employment service agency and there was always the question whether the local unemployed were actually willing to work at all. But those who are coming from abroad, they usually come here to work and earn money.

[...] *I immediately noticed that I can cope with these people [immigrants] even though we may have some misunderstandings because of the language.*" (Int. 4.)

In contrast to the poor motivation of local unemployed, SME representatives constructed immigrant workers as having a superior working attitude and work ethics, in other words they were presented as 'good workers'. It has been demonstrated in the literature that the recruitment and employment of immigrants is often strongly influenced by normative understandings of the 'ideal' worker (Findlay et al., 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). For example, in the study by MacKenzie and Forde (2009, p. 150), immigrant workers were "manifested in terms of perceived willingness to work hard, follow management instructions and, crucially, work long hours when the firm requires". In our study, similar attributes were commonly used in relation to immigrant workers when SME representatives justified their recruitment decisions, like one of the informants states: "*In my opinion, their [immigrant employees] attitude towards work is good and they value work more than Finns and they are ready to be more flexible*" (Int. 15). Accordingly, the interviewees portrayed immigrant workers as diligent, hardworking, flexible and motivated. The idea of a 'good worker' was further strengthened in the narratives in which immigrants' working pace was described, as the following citation exemplifies:

"At the beginning, we had a kind of nickname for her 'cause she was just like a machine – she comes, does the work and goes home. All the others were a bit like a mouth open watching her 'cause the working pace was something totally different from that they were used to. And whatever I used to say her, she was like 'yeah, clear'". (Int. 5.)

The informants also considered immigrants with strong ties to native Finns as being more committed workers than those without any local ties. Still, it is not only strong ties to local people but also their

own communities of compatriots that would help them to become a part of the rural municipalities. Some actually used this as justifying the recruitment of immigrant labour. However, these “ethnic enclaves” can be a double-edged sword for immigrants: having peer support can help to get a job but it also can hamper the process of acculturation.

“There are Thai wives here in [municipality]. It is great thing that they have already been here for some years. They have passable knowledge in Finnish, which is extremely important thing. [...] and since they are staying here, we don’t have to be afraid that they are leaving for somewhere else.” (Int.8.)

In this legitimation strategy, by emphasising the good work attitude and motivation as well as other skills of immigrant employees, SME representatives also aimed to compensate for the potential challenges caused by immigrant employees’ low skills in Finnish. Indeed, it was highlighted in many cases that the work could be successfully taken care of despite incomplete language skills. Thus, the good working attitude was usually appreciated over relevant experiences or specific skills, sometimes even language skills (see Nickson et al., 2005). Still, having enough Finnish and shared language on factory floors was perceived as an industrial safety issue and an indication of attachment to the society. This underlines the fact that especially Estonian workers assimilate quite well in Finnish workplaces and surrounding communities, since they understand and often speak Finnish well and are probably not any sort of ‘burden’ for an employer or a local community since they have already adjusted to Finnish society. However, this seems to accentuate the need for an immigrant to be like a native Finn. As one respondent comments: *“Estonians are not really considered to be foreigners”* (Int. 20). The same informant further continued by stating that: *“there hasn’t ever been any problems with immigrant employees”*, which gave him the necessary justification to employ immigrants in the future. It can be speculated that some of the SME representatives interpreted the fact that there had

not been any problems or confrontations between the immigrant and Finnish background employees or the local community in more general as a silent approval of immigrant workers.

While this legitimization strategy highlights the immigrant employees' attitudes and skills (compared to native Finns), it is strongly based on rationalisation and presents immigrants as an important (economic) resource for a business. The SME representatives stated that without the immigrant employees, they would be either forced to end their business operations or move them to other location. Thus, in addition to business benefits, this argumentation implicitly points out the benefits to local employees and other stakeholders. The recruitment of immigrant employees provides the business with the opportunity to remain in the area, which contributes to the local labour market situation, as the following interview citation exemplifies:

“I guess we would be forced to relocate our operations to the Baltic countries [without immigrant employees]. That’s one thing we have discussed with the shop stewards and other employees as well... that it’s basically everyone’s benefit that we are able to recruit immigrant employees and thus retain the focus of our operation here in Finland in the future”. (Int. 26.)

Even if they are located in a rural area, businesses must now confront global competition, which requires that they constantly pay attention to their competitiveness. This was also highlighted when the decision to recruit immigrant employees was justified. Immigrant employees were considered to have skills, often based on their ethnic background, like language skills and knowledge of certain social or cultural habits, which were lacking among native Finns. Thus, immigrant employees were able to strengthen the competitive advantage of a business, like one of the interviewees briefly stated: *“They [immigrant employees] have good language skills which is very beneficial to us.”* (Int. 13).

Some of the SME representatives further highlighted that by recruiting immigrant employees they were able to increase the profits of their business. However, this explicit reference to economic benefits was uncommon in the data.

Legitimation strategy based on economic, demographic and social context of the businesses

Within this legitimation strategy, SME representatives based their arguments concerning recruitment of immigrant employees on the economic, demographic and social context consequent upon rural location. The respondents reproduced the idea that there is a strong interlinkage between the location of a business and potential availability of workers and by locating in rural area, a business could lose its competitive edge (see Smallbone and North, 1999). This is mainly because of the demographic change in rural areas: age cohorts are diminishing, and young people are moving away, as one informant puts it: *“There are no people available here who are between twenty-five and fifty-five who are capable of working. There are simply no people at all”* (Int. 4). In addition to demographic trends, in several rural municipalities, there are businesses operating in labour intensive industries (e.g. gardens, greenhouses, foodstuff industry, and the metal industry) and these industrial fields were already suffering from skilled labour shortages. That makes the firms compete in order to find workers in the local labour market.

The SME representatives highlighted the (mal)functioning of local and regional labour markets or the status of welfare state structures and public services when seeking reasons for the poor availability of a workforce and justifying the decision to recruit an immigrant worker. What is noteworthy here is that legitimation is not built on the actions and values of a business and its owner-manager or immigrant workers' characteristics, but on conditions imposed from outside the business. The main argument is that there are simply not enough working-age people in local and regional labour markets

and there is a threat that if a firm does not respond to this situation by hiring immigrant workers, the continuity of the business would be at stake. Accordingly, the poor availability of a workforce is said to be partly due to centralising regional policy, by which respondents meant that both the state and municipalities are centralising their operations at various administrative levels and sectors of the society (health care, education etc.). Therefore, legitimation was based on a subjective observation that the best sections of the working age cohorts are following this centralising trend and moving to the growth centres. However, firms located in rural areas cannot follow the workforce because they are linked in many ways to their location sites. Since this legitimation strategy builds on arguments stressing factors exogenous to the firm, it can be interpreted as being mainly based on the authority of the economic and social context and institutional structures compelling the firms.

“This Finnish policy, twenty years has been like this, rural areas, and all other areas but a few growth centres are run down. It will have effects; we do not have young domestic and good workers available anymore. They move into cities. [...] I think that because of this policy, there will be many shutdowns of firms. There are no operational preconditions anymore, no personnel can be found. Not many of those firms are capable of moving somewhere else, they cannot move their premises. From the very start I have been thinking that this centralizing policy sucks.” (Int. 15.)

Many respondents further justified the recruitment of immigrant workers by criticising the Finnish welfare state. They argued that one main reason for the poor availability of workers is the affluent society and especially unemployment benefits, which make native Finns passive and too selective for jobs. It was not considered that the system encouraged the unemployed to seek work and it deactivated people who preferred not to work, like the following citation shows:

“We have grown up in this welfare state, we get food on our table and have an apartment and everything else, and we can fulfil those basic needs. Work is not as valuable for us as it is for those who do not take [welfare] for granted and have to strive for it.” (Int. 16.)

Respondents also stressed the problems with educational structures. Even though there might be a workforce available, questions about the qualifications and expertise of the labour remains. It is not just manual labour that firms need, but also workers with higher education qualifications and special skills, which are difficult to find in small municipalities. Vocational education and training was particularly blamed for not keeping up with the needs of the working life, which causes challenges of finding workers. Since education and training opportunities in the area are not diverse or appealing enough, young people are moving out. This, combined with the demographic trends, creates a vicious circle, which may lead to closedowns of training programmes or even educational units. SMEs do appreciate collaboration with local educational units and hope that they could have interns from schools and keep young people bound to the area before they move away. However, SMEs have also reacted in such a way that they have started apprenticeship training by themselves.

“It would be better to locate somewhere else, closer to [vocational] schools because bakers are not trained here. There are cooks trained here, but no bakers. It also means that it is difficult to get skilled staff. That is why we have ended up having our own training here.” (Int. 24.)

Many of the SMEs representatives operated in sectors with high seasonal variations in production and as subcontractors with production peaks. In these cases, the legitimacy of the immigrant workforce was built on necessity: firms have to respond flexibly to production requirements, and in

practice, the workforce is the major element of this flexibility. Therefore, employment services are occasionally needed. Public employment agencies and public employment services were especially mentioned, in both a positive and negative light when legitimating recruitment of workers with an immigrant background. Public employment agencies have sometimes been initiators concerning immigrant workers. Also, public support tools such as wage subsidies were mentioned as a legitimating factor for the use of immigrant labour. In some cases, however, SME representatives were disappointed with the results produced by public employment services, which pushed them to use private agencies who have many immigrant workers on their lists. Business representatives mentioned that by using private employment agencies, they could quickly find workers they need, and these private employment agencies take care, of the labour licenses on behalf of firms. Private employment agencies or employment offices actually preselect the workforce for rural SMEs and make the decision to hire immigrant workers on behalf of them.

“It is just a thing for us that new employees come through the private employment agencies, for the most part. I also put announcements on the pages of employment offices. They make recommendations and arrange certain pre-selection.” (Int. 7.)

These discourses expose how respondents are in a way externalising legitimation. In that sense, that the definite responsibility and rationale for recruiting immigrants is transferred from the SMEs to employment officials, local labour markets, educational and regional policy and, finally, to society in general. Even though this legitimation strategy is mainly built on arguments stressing the unfavourableness of the rural location and the SME representatives present themselves as ‘victims’ of external conditions, they are not just passive bystanders. They are actively trying to change the external conditions by recruiting immigrant workers.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study, recruitment of immigrants in rural SMEs was examined through the legitimation process. It has been suggested that for SMEs, gaining and maintaining legitimacy is a precarious process “due to their liability of smallness and higher institutional pressures coming from their embeddedness in local networks of actors” (Ruffo et al., 2018). Hence, SMEs must actively reproduce and renegotiate the legitimacy of their business operations and decisions in the eyes of local stakeholders in order to get the necessary resources to sustain business. We suggest that in the rural context, recruiting an immigrant employee is in fact a decision that challenges existing local traditions, and for that reason, the recruitment of immigrant workers needs to be presented as acceptable and the behaviour of the business as right and justified in order to secure the support of local stakeholders.

We identified three legitimation strategies SME representatives, mainly owner-managers, used to justify their decision to recruit immigrant workers based on owner-managerial values, immigrants as good workers and rural environment for businesses. The aim of the legitimacy strategies identified is to convince the audience to perceive the recruitment of immigrant employees as favourable and preferable. However, it should be noted that rural communities, despite often being small, do not usually form a homogenous entity. Because of the heterogeneity of the audience, different legitimation strategies are usually used simultaneously, i.e. one business representative adopts two or more strategies when justifying the decision to recruit immigrant employees.

The first of the legitimation strategies discussed here was strongly based on moral legitimation by representing the recruitment of immigrants as a decision that reflects owner-managers’ personal values. Moral legitimacy refers to the recruitment of immigrants as a normative decision, thus taking a stance on how the recruitment of immigrants should be undertaken. According to Suchman (1995),

an organisation can indeed garner moral legitimacy by embracing procedures that are perceived to be socially accepted. However, the attitudes towards immigrants and immigration can be rather negative in rural areas (Crawley et al., 2019, Fennelly and Federico, 2008). Therefore, it can be questioned whether local stakeholders are able to evaluate the procedure, i.e. recruitment of immigrant employees, solely on moral basis and accept the legitimisation argument. Still, it should be noted that the moral argumentation does not only build on the equal opportunities of immigrant employees but also embraces SME representatives and their positions as autonomous decision-makers in the business. Instead, appealing the moral worth of the procedure as such (recruiting immigrant workers), the strategy also aims to appeal the owner-managers' moral right to make the recruitment decisions according to their own value judgements. Thus, even though there was some scepticism towards immigration, moral legitimisation may still be successful in cases when local stakeholders agree on the SME representatives' moral right to make autonomous recruitment decisions. This can further positively influence the attitudes towards immigrant employees since the literature has demonstrated that "individual 'moral entrepreneurs' play a substantial role in disrupting old institutions" (Weber, 1978, p. 245).

The second legitimisation strategy focuses on the immigrants' characteristics and presents them as a vital resource for the business. This strategy aims to convince the audience on the validity of recruiting immigrants through rational argumentation. The main message of the legitimisation strategy is that without immigrant employees, the continuity of the business is threatened – a perspective that is lacking in the legitimisation based on the owner-managerial values. Even though the legitimisation explicitly puts the business benefits in the spotlight, it still appeals to the self-interest calculation of local community members by implying the practical consequences of not recruiting immigrant employees. In many rural communities, small businesses have a direct association with the vitality of the communities and the prosperity of their residents. In addition to direct employment creation and

service/product delivery, it is also important to acknowledge the indirect influence of businesses on local development through in-kind contributions supporting their communities (Steiner and Atterton, 2015). Accordingly, it can be argued that this strategy appeals to local audiences since in addition to business benefits, it also underlines the benefits of the business for the community.

Continuity of business operations is also highlighted in the third legitimation strategy: rather than highlighting immigrants' supreme characteristics, it uses rural location and the operational environment of a business as key arguments in justifying the recruitment of immigrant employees. Accordingly, it is considered that the external environment puts rural SMEs in a situation in which their best (and sometimes only) option for sustainable business is by recruiting immigrant employees. The societal structure is taken as a taken-for-granted hindering factor for rural entrepreneurship. This kind of legitimation aims to externalise the individual agency by removing social structure from the presumed control of the very actors who are participating in creating it (Suchman, 1995). The aim of this strategy is thus to transfer the definite responsibility for recruiting immigrants from the SMEs to the malfunctioning rural business environment. The SME representatives represent themselves as 'victims' of inevitable and unfavourable conditions, while the nonspecific and vague 'society' drives them to recruit immigrant employees. Producing this kind of taken-for-granted legitimacy for the recruitment decision can be powerful in convincing the audiences in cases when the rural community members themselves identify powerlessness in relation to structures.

The legitimation strategies (re)produce certain subject positions for SME representatives, immigrants as well as rural communities in general. Some of the subject positions are explicitly underlined in the legitimation strategies. Accordingly, the SME representatives present themselves as fair and equal employers whose recruiting decisions are based on personal moral reasoning and immigrants as good workers with commendable work ethics. Furthermore, even though rural location was often perceived

as a challenge for a business by highlighting negative demographic changes and a potential lack of workforce, rural business representatives still presented themselves as actors who can solve these challenges by looking for the workforce beyond the local settings. Our study thus shows that small and medium sized businesses in rural and peripheral regions also produce themselves as enablers of rural dynamism and cosmopolitanism by providing the work opportunities for immigrants and at the same time working to change the local communities to be more tolerant about cultural differences (see Woods, 2018). It can be argued that the SME representatives are producing ideal subject positions that are considered to appeal and convince the audience, i.e. local community members and other stakeholders.

At the same time, these ideal subject positions can create stereotypical understandings about small businesses, immigrants and their relationships which may also (re)produce some unwarranted power relationships. Most notably, the legitimation strategies may implicitly enhance the idea of immigrants' vulnerable position in the labour market. In other words, emphasis on the flexibility of immigrant employees may simultaneously make them vulnerable in the labour market if the flexibility becomes a forced and definitive aspect of work identities that can be exploited. Similarly, using the Finnish welfare system and affluent society as a reason for the diminishing work ethos among native Finns and challenges for SMEs to find native employees as a departure point for legitimation of immigrant labour, puts a business into a precarious position. The subject matter is sensitive and can easily backfire. Accordingly, for legitimation strategies to be successful, SME representatives need to understand the risks involved in them.

There have been recent experiences of more immigrants moving and settling in rural areas (e.g. Søholt et al., 2018; Papadopoulos et al., 2018; McAreavey, 2017; Rye, 2014; Simard and Jentsch 2009; Jentsch, 2007) and SMEs surely play an important role in immigration and integration processes. In

many remote areas, SMEs are important engines contributing to the vitality and resilience of the local community (e.g. Besser, 2002; Steiner and Atterton, 2015), and for that reason, are sometimes seen as opinion leaders in their areas. Accordingly, the way rural businesses perceive immigrants can influence the local views on immigrants, and thus their integration into local communities. However, we do not claim that businesses have to be principal opinion leaders for positive attitudes towards immigrants. Instead, there are immigration coordinators in few rural municipalities and immigration projects have especially paved the way for firms to hire employees with a foreign background.

As a conclusion, our study demonstrates that for rural SMEs, recruiting immigrant workers is not just an economic or bureaucratic procedure but it also entails social aspects. These social aspects need to be taken into consideration in order to maintain the legitimacy of the business. Still, some limitations indicate the need for further research. Our research data were gathered solely from those rural businesses that already had experience in recruiting immigrant employees. By focusing on these businesses, we managed to answer our research question and improved our understanding of the immigrants' recruitment process from the rural business perspective. Future research on the rural immigrant employees would nevertheless benefit from also including the perspectives of those businesses not willing to recruit immigrants and thus complete the view on the ways rural businesses perceive immigrant workers.

Appendix 1.

Branch of industry (Based on the Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community: Nace Rev. 2)	Personnel < 5 5 – 25 26 – 100 101 – 250	Turnover 2015 (€) < €1 000 000 €1 000 000 – €5 999 999 €6 000 000 – €19 999 999 EUR €20 000 000 – €50 000 000	Rural classification of the municipality (Based on national urban-rural classification in Finland) RH = Rural heartland areas SP = Sparsely populated rural areas LC = Local centres in rural areas CU = Rural areas close to urban areas
Growing of other non-perennial crops	5 – 25	€1 000 000 – €5 999 999	RH
Raising of other animals	26 – 100	€6 000 000 – €19 999 999	RH / SP
Mixed farming	< 5	NA	RH / SP
Mixed farming	5 – 25	NA	SP
Mixed farming	5 – 25	NA	LC / RH / SP
Production of meat and poultry meat products	101 – 250	€20 000 000 – €50 000 000	LC / RH
Operation of dairies and cheese making	101 – 250	€20 000 000 – €50 000 000	CU / RH / SP
Manufacture of bread; manufacture of fresh pastry goods and cakes	26 – 100	€6 000 000 – €19 999 999	LC / RH / SP
Manufacture of bread; manufacture of fresh pastry goods and cakes	101 – 250	€6 000 000 – €19 999 999	LC / RH / SP
Manufacture of other food products n.e.c.	26 – 100	€1 000 000 – €5 999 999	LC / RH / SP
Manufacture of carpets and rugs	26 – 100	€1 000 000 – €5 999 999	RH / SP
Manufacture of other textiles n.e.c.	26 – 100	€1 000 000 – €5 999 999	RH / SP
Manufacture of veneer sheets and wood-based panels	26 – 100	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	CU / RH / SP
Manufacture of other plastic products	5 – 25	€1 000 000 – €5 999 999	SP
Manufacture of concrete products for construction purposes	5 – 25	€1 000 000 – €5 999 999	LC / RH / SP
Manufacture of concrete products for construction purposes	101 – 250	20 – 50 MEUR	SP
Manufacture of concrete products for construction purposes	26 – 100	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	RH / SP
Manufacture of metal structures and parts of structures	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	SP
Manufacture of metal structures and parts of structures	26 – 100	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	CU / RH / SP
Machining	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	CU / RH / SP
Machining	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	LC / CU / RH
Manufacture of other fabricated metal products n.e.c.	26 – 100	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	SP
Manufacture of other general-purpose machinery n.e.c.	26 – 100	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	CU / RH / SP
Manufacture of other machine tools	101 – 250	20 – 50 MEUR	RH / SP
Other manufacturing n.e.c.	101 – 250	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	SP
Wholesale of flowers and plants	5 – 25	< 1 MEUR	RH / SP

Wholesale of other machinery and equipment	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	RH / SP
Retail sale of fruit and vegetables in specialised stores	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	RH / SP
Retail sale of fruit and vegetables in specialised stores	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	RH / SP
Other passenger land transport n.e.c.	< 5	< 1 MEUR	LC / RH
Freight transport by road	5 – 25	< 1 MEUR	LC / RH / SP
Freight transport by road	5 – 25	1 000 000 – 5 999 999 EUR	SP
Hotels and similar accommodation	101 – 250	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	SP
Hotels and similar accommodation	101 – 250	6 000 000 – 19 999 999 EUR	SP
Other social work activities without accommodation n.e.c.	26 – 100	NA	LC / RH / SP

TABLE 1. Information Concerning the SMEs Involved in this Project

References

- Akgün, A.A., Nijkamp, P., Baycan, T. and Brons, M., 2010. Embeddedness of entrepreneurs in rural areas: A comparative rough set data analysis. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 101(5), pp. 538–553.
- Aure, M., Førde, A. and Magnussen, T., 2018. Will migrant workers rescue rural regions? Challenges of creating stability through mobility. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 60, pp. 52–59.
- Barber, A. E., 1998. *Recruiting employees: Individual and organizational perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, Inc.
- Besser, T. L., 2002. *The conscience of capitalism: Business social responsibility to communities*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Besser, T.L. and Jarnagin, S.K., 2010. *Corporate social responsibility. Small businesses and small towns. History of corporate social responsibility project*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Ethical Business Cultures located at the Opus College of Business, University of St.Thomas - Minnesota.
- Besser, T.L. and Miller, N., 2001. Is the good corporation dead? The community social responsibility of small business operators. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 30(3), pp. 221–241.
- Besser, T.L. and Miller, N., 2013. Community Matters: Successful Entrepreneurship in Remote Rural US Locations. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 14(1), pp. 15–27.

- Bitektine A. and Haack, P., 2015. The “macro” and the “micro” of legitimacy: Toward a multilevel theory of the legitimacy process. *Academy of Management Review*, 40, pp. 49–75.
- Bosworth, G., 2012. Characterising rural businesses – Tales from the paperman. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28(4), pp. 499–506.
- Burholt, V. and Dobbs, C., 2012. Research on rural ageing: Where have we got to and where are we going in Europe? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28(4), pp. 432–446.
- Crawley, H., Drinkwater, S. and Kausar, R., 2019. Attitudes towards asylum seekers: Understanding differences between rural and urban areas. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 71, pp. 104–113.
- Dowling, J. and Pfeffer, J., 1975. Organizational legitimacy. Social values and organizational behavior. *Sociological Perspectives*, 18(1), pp. 122–136.
- Duncan, H. and Popp, I., 2017. Migrants and cities: Stepping beyond world migration report 2015, in IOM (2017) *World Migration Report 2018*, IOM: Geneva.
- Erkama, N. and Vaara, E., 2010. Struggles over legitimacy in global organizational restructuring: A rhetorical perspective on legitimation strategies and dynamics in a shutdown case. *Organization Studies*, 31(07), pp. 813–839.
- European Commission: 2003, ‘Recommendation 2003/361/EC’, http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/sme_definition/index_en.htm.

Eurostat, 2016. Urban Europe – Statistics on cities, towns and suburbs. Statistical Books, Eurostat. 2016 Edition. European Union, 2016. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/7596823/KS-01-16-691-EN-N.pdf/0abf140c-ccc7-4a7f-b236-682effcde10f>.

European Union, 2018. Integration of immigrants in the European Union. Special Eurobarometer 469.

Fauchart, E. and Gruber, M., 2011. Darwinians, communitarians, and missionaries: The role of founder identity in Entrepreneurship. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(5), pp. 935–957.

Fennelly, K. and Federico, C., 2008. Rural residence as a determinant of attitudes toward US immigration policy. *International Migration*, 46(1), 151–190.

Findlay, A. and McCollum, D., 2013. Recruitment and employment regimes: Migrant labour channels in the UK's rural agribusiness sector, from accession to recession. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 30, pp. 10–19.

Findlay, A., McCollum, D., Shubin, S., Apsite, E. and Krisjane, Z., 2013. The role of recruitment agencies in imagining and producing the 'good' migrant. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 14(2), pp. 145–167.

Finland's Environmental Administration, 2019. Urban-Rural classification. Available at: <https://www.ymparisto.fi/en->

US/Living_environment_and_planning/Community_structure/Information_about_the_community_structure/Urbanrural_classification. (Accessed 11.12.2019).

Forsander, A., 2000. Työvoiman tarve ja maahanmuuttopolitiikka – Onko maahanmuuttajien osaaminen vastaus työvoiman kysyntään? In Trux, M-L. (ed.): Aukeavat ovet – kulttuurien moninaisuus Suomen elinkeinoelämässä. WSOY, Juva, pp. 143–202.

Frazier, B., Stoel, L., Niehm, L. and Eckerson, N., 2013. Optimism for new business survival in rural communities: an institutional perspective. *Journal of Small Business & Netrepreneurship*, 26:5, 443–462.

Glasgow, N. and Brown, D.L., 2012. Rural ageing in the United States: Trends and contexts. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28(4), pp. 422–431.

Górny, A. and Kaczmarczyk, P., 2018. A known but uncertain path: The role of foreign labour in Polish agriculture. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 64, pp. 177–188.

Granovetter, M., 1992. Problems of explanation in economic sociology. In Nohria, N. and Eccles, R. (eds), *Networks and organizations: Structure, form and action*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. 25–56.

Greenberg, Z., Farja, Y. and Gimmon, E., 2018. Embeddedness and growth of small businesses in rural regions. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 62, 174–182.

- Gudmunson, D. and Hartenian, L.S., 2000. Workforce diversity in small business: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 38(3), pp. 27–36.
- Held, V., 2006. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
- Hybels, R.C., 1995. On legitimacy, legitimation, and organizations: A critical review and integrative theoretical model. *Academy of Management*, 1, pp. 241–245.
- Jentsch B., 2007. Migrant integration in rural and urban areas of new settlement countries: Thematic introduction. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 9, pp. 1–12.
- Johannisson B. and Mönsted M., 1997. Contextualising entrepreneurial networking – The case of Scandinavia. *International Studies of Management and Organisations*, 27(3), pp.109–136.
- Joutsenvirta, M., 2013. Executive pay and legitimacy: Changing discursive battles over the morality of excessive manager compensation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 116(3), pp. 459–477.
- Juopperi, J., 2019. Maahanmuuttajat suuntaavat kaupunkeihin – Euroopasta tulleita asettunut maaseudullekin. *Tieto&Trendit*, 7.2.2019. Tilastokeskus. Available at: <https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tietotrendit/kirjoittajat/jukka-juopperi/>. (Accessed 11.12.2019).
- Kitching, J., 1994. Employer's work- force construction policies in the small service sector enterprise, in D. Storey, and J. Atkinson, (eds) *Employment, the Small Firm, and the Labour Market*, London, UK: Routledge, pp. 103–46.

- Kordel, S. and Weidinger, T. 2018. Editorial. Current Processes of Immigration to European Peripheries: Status quo, Implications and Development Strategies. In Kordel, S., Weidinger, T. and Jelen, I. (eds.): Processes of Immigration in Rural Europe: Status quo, Implications and Development Strategies. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. xv–xxx.
- Larja, L. and Sutela, H., 2015. Työllisyys. In Nieminen, T., Sutela, H. and Hannula, U. Ulkomaista syntyperää olevien työ ja hyvinvointi Suomessa 2014. Helsinki, Finland: Statistics Finland. 71–82.
- Liff, S. and Wajcman, J., 1996. ‘Sameness’ and ‘difference’ revisited: Which way forward for equal opportunity initiatives? *Journal of Management Studies*, 33(1), pp. 79–94.
- Longenecker, J.G., Moore, C.W., Petty, J.W., Palich, L.E. and McKinney, J.A., 2006. Ethical attitudes in small businesses and large corporations: Theory and empirical findings from a tracking study spanning three decades. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 44(2), pp. 167–183.
- Lähdesmäki, M., Siltaoja, M., and Spence, L. 2019. Stakeholder salience for small businesses: A social proximity perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 158, pp. 373–385.
- Lähdesmäki, M. and Suutari, T., 2012. Keeping at arm’s length or searching for social proximity? Corporate social responsibility as a reciprocal process between small businesses and the local community. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 108(4), pp. 481–493.

- Lämsä, A-M., Mattila, M., Lähdesmäki, M. and Suutari T., 2019. Company values guiding the recruitment of employees with a foreign background. *Baltic Journal of Management*. 14, 4, pp. 658–675.
- MacKenzie, R. and Forde, C., 2009. The rhetoric of the ‘good worker’ versus the realities of employers’ use and the experiences of migrant workers. *Work, Employment and Society*, 23(1), pp. 142–159.
- Mattila, M. and Björklund, K., 2013. Tomaatteja, teollisuutta ja monikulttuurisuutta. Närpiön malli maahanmuuttajien kotouttamisessa. Aluekeskuksen tutkimuksia nro 5. Siirtolaisuusinstituutti, Turku
- Maurer, J.G., 1971. *Readings in organization Theory: Open-System approaches*. New York: Random House.
- McAreavey, R., 2017. *New Immigration Destinations. Migrating to Rural and Peripheral Areas*. New York: Routledge.
- McAreavey, R. and Argent, N., 2018. New Immigration Destinations (NID) unravelling the challenges and opportunities for migrants and for host communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 64, pp. 148–152.
- Nickson, D., Warhurst, C. and Dutton, E., 2005. The importance of attitude and appearance in the service encounter in retail and hospitality. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 15(2), pp. 195–208.

Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014). Available at:
<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20141325>. (Accessed 3.4.2020.)

OECD, 2008. OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Finland. Available at:
<https://www.oecd.org/gov/oecd-rural-policy-reviews-finland.htm>. (Accessed 13.12.2019).

Papadopoulos, A. G., Fratsea, L. and Mavrommatis, G., 2018. Governing migrant labour in an intensive agricultural area in Greece: Precarity, political mobilization and migrant agency in the fields of Manolada. *Journal of Rural Studies* 64, pp. 200–209.

Papadopoulos, A. G., 2012. Transnational Immigration in Rural Greece: Analysing the Different Mobilities of Albanian Immigrants. In Hedberg, C., do Carmo, R. M. (eds.): *Translocal Ruralism: Mobility and Connectivity in European Rural Spaces*, pp.163–183.

Patton M.Q., 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd edition, Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Peterson, R.A., Albaum, G. and Kozmetsky, G., 1986. The public's definition of small business. *Journal of Small Business Management* 24, pp. 63–68.

Pfeffer, J. and Salancik, G.R., 1978. *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*, New York, Harper & Row.

Quinn, J.J., 1997. Personal ethics and business ethics: The ethical attitudes of owner/managers of small business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 16(2), pp. 119–127.

- Rao, H., 1994. The social construction of reputation: Certification contests, legitimation, and the survival of organizations in the American automobile industry: 1895–1912. *Strategic Management Journal*, 15, pp. 29–44.
- Robeyns, I., 2005. The capability approach: A theoretical survey. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1), pp. 93–117.
- Rodriguez, N., 2004. Workers wanted: Employer recruitment of immigrant labor. *Work and Occupations*, 31(4), pp. 453–473.
- Rojo, M.L. and van Dijk, T.A., 1997. “There was a problem, and it was solved!”: Legitimizing the expulsion of ‘illegal’ migrants in Spanish parliamentary discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 8(4), pp. 523–566.
- Ruffo, O.I., Mnisri, K. Morin-Esteves, C. and Gendron, C., 2018. Judgements of SMEs’ legitimacy and its sources. *Journal of Business*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4063-3>.
- Russo, A. and Perrini, F., 2010. Investigating stakeholder theory and social capital: CSR in large firms and SMEs. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91(2), pp. 207–221.
- Rye, J. F., 2014. The Western European Countryside from an Eastern European Perspective: Case of Migrant Workers in Norwegian Agriculture. *European Countryside* 4: 327–346.

- Saari, M., 2013. Maahanmuuttajakeskittymiä on muuallakin kuin pääkaupunkiseudulla. Hyvinvointikatsaus 3/2013 – Teema: Vähemmistöt. Syyskuu 2013. Statistics Finland. Available at: http://www.stat.fi/artikkelit/2013/art_2013-09-23_008.html. (Accessed 3.4.2020.)
- Saartenoja, A., Träsk, M., Tantarimäki, S. and Mattila, M., 2009. Maaseudun maahanmuuttajat. Kokemuksia työperäisestä maahanmuutosta Etelä-Pohjanmaan ja Varsinais-Suomen maaseudulla. Reports 41. University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute. Seinäjoki, Finland.
- Scott, S., 2013. Migration and the employer perspective: pitfalls and potentials for a future research agenda. *Population, Space and Place*, 19(6), pp. 703–713.
- Sen, A., 1985. *Commodities and Capabilities*. Oxford, Elsevier Science Publishers.
- Sen, A., 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Siemens, L., 2010. Challenges, responses and available resources: Success in rural small businesses. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 23(1), pp. 65–80
- Simard, M. and Jentsch, B., 2009. Introduction: Key Issues in Contemporary Rural Immigration. In Jentsch, B. and Simard, M. (eds.): *International migration and rural areas: Cross-National Comparative Perspectives*. 1–16. London: Routledge.

- Smallbone, D. and North, D., 1999. Innovation and new technology in rural small and medium-sized enterprises: some policy issues. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 1999, volume 17, pp. 549–566.
- Spence, L.J., 2016. Small business social responsibility: Redrawing core CSR theory. *Business & Society*, 55(1), pp. 23–55.
- Statistics Finland, 2019. Statistics Finland (2019). Statistics Finland's PX-Web databases. Population structure. Population according to urban-rural classification in 1990 to 2017. Available at: https://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/fi/StatFin/StatFin__vrm__vaerak/?tablelist=true. (Accessed 13.12.2019.)
- Statistics Finland, 2020. Statistics Finland (2020). Statistics Finland's PX-Web databases. Municipal key figures. Municipal key figures 1987–2018. Available at: https://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/fi/Kuntien_avainluvut/?rxid=444223df-f91c-4479-891f-5dcd50b983d2. (Accessed 19.3.2020.)
- Steiner, A. and Atterton, J., 2015. Exploring the contribution of rural enterprises to local resilience. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 40, pp. 30–45.
- Stockdale, A., 2006. Migration: Pre-requisite for rural economic regeneration? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22(3), pp. 354–366.
- Suchman, M.C., 1995. Managing legitimacy: Strategies and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), pp. 571–610.

- Suddaby, R. and Greenwood, R., 2005. Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50, pp. 35–67.
- Sutela, H. and Larja, L., 2015. Maahanmuuton syyt. In Nieminen, T., Sutela, H. and Hannula, U. *Ulkomaista syntyperää olevien työ ja hyvinvointi Suomessa 2014*. Helsinki, Finland: Statistics Finland. 15–26.
- Søholt, S. Stenbacka, S. and Nørgaard, H., 2018. Conditioned receptiveness: Nordic rural elite perceptions of immigrant contributions to local resilience. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 64, pp. 220–229.
- Tannock, S., 2015. Bad attitude? Migrant workers, meat processing work and the local unemployed in a peripheral region of the UK. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 22(4), pp. 416–430.
- Thomas, D.R., 2006. A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), pp. 237–246.
- Tost, L.P., 2006. An integrative model of legitimacy judgments. *Academy of management Review*, 36(4), pp. 686–710.
- Törrönen, J., 2002. Semiotic theory on qualitative interviewing using stimulus texts. *Qualitative Research*, 2(3), pp. 343–362.

- Vaara, E. and Monin, P., 2010. A recursive perspective on discursive legitimation and organizational action in mergers and acquisitions. *Organization Science*, 21(1), pp. 3–22.
- Vaara, E., Tienari, J., and Laurila, J., 2006. Pulp and paper fiction: On the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. *Organization Studies*, 27(6), 789–813.
- Valenta, M., 2008. The workplace as an arena for identity affirmation and social integration of immigrants. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 9(2). Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/425/920>. (Accessed 11.10.2019).
- Van Der Gaag, N. and De Beer, J., 2014. From demographic dividend to demographic burden: The impact of population ageing on economic growth in Europe. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 106(1), pp. 94–109.
- van Leeuwen, T., 2007. Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, 1, pp. 91–112.
- van Leeuwen, T., 2008. *Discourse and practice. New tools for critical discourse analysis*, Oxford University Press.
- Weber, M., 1978. *Economy and society*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Williamson, I.O., 2000. Employer Legitimacy and Recruitment Success in Small Businesses. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, 25, pp. 27–42.

Williamson, I.O., Cable, D.M. and Aldrich, H.E., 2002. Smaller but not necessarily weaker: How small businesses can overcome barriers to recruitment. *Managing People in Entrepreneurial Organizations*, 5, pp. 83–106.

Winter, M., 2003. Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 23–32.

Woods, M., 2018. Precarious rural cosmopolitanism: Negotiating globalization, migration and diversity in Irish small towns. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 64, pp. 164–176.