

The presence of a business enterprise and its impact on the experience of home in Tuuri village , Finland

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Local businesses are the lifeblood of rural communities, providing jobs, economic activities, a sense of purpose and connections (Suutari & al. 2024; Steiner & Atterton 2015). As rural areas face population decline, aging demographics and shrinking access to services, enterprises serve as crucial pillars of resilience (Beckmann et al. 2023). Often the sole providers of essential goods and services, they sustain communities where other systems falter (Rinne-Koski & Lähdesmäki 2024). Beyond their economic role, small businesses foster social cohesion, preserve cultural heritage and anchor people to their hometowns (Besser & al. 2013; Lähdesmäki & Suutari 2012; Simunaniemi & al. 2024). Without them, rural areas risk losing their vitality and capacity to sustain future generations—they are the heartbeat of the rural economy. The resilience of these enterprises is inseparable from the communities: local people provide the networks, trust and shared values that sustain rural businesses.

Historical consciousness is the general basis of human (individual and community) understanding, as it enables speculative and reflective thinking. It is a necessary tool when dealing with values and actions (Rüsen 2012; Taylor 2012; White 2010, 249; 1973, 87; Straub 2006, 228). It enables the understanding of collective memory as part of a shared temporality which means, among other things, culture in a place, regional understanding and identity formation (Bellatti et al. 2020, 81; Ricœur 2000, 498; González Calleja 2013, 71–72; Gadamer 1996, 56, 90–91).

The academic discussion on embeddedness (Granovetter 1985; 1992) has provided valuable lens to the role of small rural businesses as part of their localities. This was also highlighted in DoLE project (funded by Research Council of Finland 2020–2024) that focused on the interplay between businesses and their social, economic and cultural environments. The DoLE project successfully provided detailed understanding about rural enterprises in their communities, but we also identified deficiencies in the current discussion of embeddedness, namely the scant attention to the spatiotemporal self-awareness of the actors (Korsgaard & al. 2015; Greenberg 2018). Enterprises, like communities, possess a form of historical consciousness, an awareness of themselves as part of the region’s ongoing story, which influences their everyday operations and decision-making (Riukulehto & Uusitalo 2025). They draw on history in the forms of facts, power, sensemaking and rhetoric (Suddaby 2016; Suddaby & Foster 2017).

In classical economic theory businesses are typically described as independent of region and its history. However, every enterprise has its own spatiotemporal identity. Regions are not interchangeable as business environments. Branches such as institutional economics and relational economic geography have sought to better understand the various forms of relationships within regions (Sunley 2008). The history paths of enterprises are not arbitrary.

Experiences and expectations have an influence on the targets, choices and opportunities of any one enterprise.

In economic models, deeply personal and emotional factors – often categorised as “external” – are typically ignored or taken for granted. In fact, key academic texts in economics, entrepreneurship and economic geography rarely, if ever, address concepts such as “sense of home” or “home consciousness.” These factors, however, play a significant role in shaping business decisions and must be considered when analysing the embeddedness of businesses in rural areas (Riukulehto & Uusitalo 2025).

Which and what kind of an enterprise emerges as a leader in the local community, is particularly important in non-core regions (e.g. Sotarauta & al. 2025). Di Faco & al. (2025) have recently reported findings from Italy when they examined the role of emotions in creating place-based leadership: it is the love for their village that is manifested in rural entrepreneurship. The local actors in rural areas are also aware of the connection between businesses and local experience. The connection is easily verifiable: for example, when examining the location of a company's operations, the factor most frequently mentioned in a survey conducted by entrepreneurs in South Ostrobothnia was love for the home. Ojala & al. (2021) have shown that Finnish companies are interested in their temporality: they want to be aware of their own historical path and strive to understand its effects on their own operations.

In this presentation, I will discuss **the Tuuri case study**. The analysis of the relationship between the village community and the large company operating in the village is based on relevant literature, two ethnographic observation periods and five elicited discussions with the villagers. The primary data has been collected in **two research projects in the village of Tuuri** in Alavus, in 2017–2018 and 2020–2024.

The research framework is the experiential theory of home, based on the legacy of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricœur, in which experiences are understood spatiotemporally. Experiences always combine spatial and temporal elements (places and events) that have acquired special meaning, which remain in life as experienced interpretations (landscapes and memories). The experience of home – or more simply home, as it is said in many languages – can be spoken of when specific memories and landscapes evoke a sense of homeliness. In other words, when the specificity of places and events creates a space of experience in which the experiencer can say that he or she is at home (Riukulehto 2015; Riukulehto & Suutari 2020).

The case study of Tuuri is based on data collected in **five elicited discussions**. 37 people participated in the discussions, slightly more men than women. The youngest participant in 2017 was 15 years old and the oldest was 82. The discussions lasted about an hour and a half.

To initiate the discussion, participants were presented with visual and verbal elicitations (stimuli), which inspired them to freely associate and discuss people, events, buildings or places that make up their home. We used two different elicitation frameworks. The 2017 elicitations focused on the temporality of home municipality (3 visual stimuli, 2 audio

stimuli, 13 text stimuli; see Riukulehto & Rinne-Koski 2019, 141–145). They led the discussion to events, memories, traditions and cultural heritage. Five of the elicitations for the 2022 discussions were photographs. They were views of their own village and its surrounding areas, businesses and buildings. The other five elicitations were in text form. We encouraged participants to discuss their home by asking a direct question to participants in all discussion sessions: if you could represent your home in one photo, what would it be?

Elicitations are widely used in social research, especially when the research questions are multifaceted, when the aim is to obtain empirical information that is difficult to study by interviewing alone, or when the same question needs to be explored again and again from many different perspectives. (see Lapenta 2011; Riukulehto & Suutari 2022; Suutari & Rinne-Koski 2015; Törrönen 2002). The essential principle of the prompt discussion method is that the researchers leading the working group avoid directing the discussion. Elicitations lead the discussion to the right topic, but the participants themselves are allowed to determine which issues and themes they want to address based on the given stimulus. This ensures that everyone has the opportunity to bring up issues they consider important and perspectives that are independent of the researcher. (Hänninen 2022, 233; Riukulehto & Suutari 2022; Steel, Suutari & Lähdesmäki 2024; Törrönen 2017.) The strength of photographs in stimulating discussions is their interpretative openness (Riukulehto & Lähteenniitty 2022, 26–29; Vium 2020, 173). Photographs bring to life things, past people, events and places that were thought to be lost (Harper 2002, 23). We also noted this in our own discussions when photographs reminded those present of a past village, lost people, buildings, places and companies.

Experiences of home in Tuuri village

The connection between companies and local communities works in both directions. Enterprises shape their environment and its culture. In a rural village community, the influence of even a medium-sized enterprise is pervasive. It is no exaggeration to talk about a fateful connection, because regions are not randomly interchangeable as operating environments. Villages live, flourish and decline along with their companies.

Unlike in many other villages in Finland, the conversation in Tuuri is not dominated by the fear of the death of the village. It is dominated by Finland's largest department store, *Keskinen*, an unnaturally large establishment for a rural village of less than 800 inhabitants. When the people of Tuuri talk about their home, they talk about Keskinen in one way or another: about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, how a sleepy rural village became a bustling commercial center, how it has changed the appearance and life of the village, and how it will affect the future.

Keskinen is an essential part of the Tuuri village landscape in its material presence and vitality. The changes it causes are sometimes welcomed with joy, sometimes with surprise or even dismay. They always become part of one's own experience of the local area. The constant change brought by Keskinen, a strong sense of home and a flexible understanding of what it means to be a local, keep the village alive.

Tuuri village market and Keskinen “village shop” are clearly part of the home for the people of Tuuri, but does the connection work the other way around? It can be thought that every company has its own sphere of home, where it feels natural and easy to operate.

Geographically, it could be the village of Tuuri, dominated by the store, where the tradition of entrepreneurship combines with the old agricultural landscape. All three generations of Keskinen’s private entrepreneurs have expressed their strong belief that their business belongs in Tuuri and nowhere else.

Looking at the built surroundings of the Keskinen store, you understand that Keskinen's experiential home is also something else. Its essential content is the land of imagination, from which the idea craftsman Vesa Keskinen draws his dreams for the whole village to marvel at. His home region also includes the social and cultural connections in which Keskinen's business is rooted. Over the course of three generations, the enterprise and its home have formed a functioning entity. This may be one explanation for why a business idea – sometimes seemingly extraordinary – can grow into a thriving business in one place, but cannot be replicated elsewhere.

The Keskinen case shows that factors such as place, events, memories and landscapes clearly have some impact on the operations of business enterprises and the entire economic system, even though information about them is not transmitted to actors through the price mechanism or other transactions.

We suggest that factors such as places, landscapes, events and memories have influence on the business acts, even if information about them is not conveyed to the economic actors through the price mechanism or other transaction mechanisms either. Ignoring this perspective of consciousness risks oversimplifying the complex interplay between businesses and their environments, leading to incomplete analyses.