

NJF Mikkeli 19 - 21 June 2017

**Theoretical framing of the (heroic and rebellious) actors
in the struggle for organic food and farming**

Minna Mikkola

University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute

Implications

- Change towards sustainability is a highly complex issue
- Collaborative projects for sustainable food systems (researchers and practitioners) benefit from a meta-theoretical approach
- Dutch transition management theory offers a powerful framing for analysis
- More life-like theories with rich, unstable, contradictory and open-ended developments can be useful
- The paper suggests the ‘narrative model’ (Propp, Greimas) as one such theory
- Deploys actors across levels, their ‘tools’ and timelines: who contributed what, when and how for what purpose, with which results?

Background and objectives

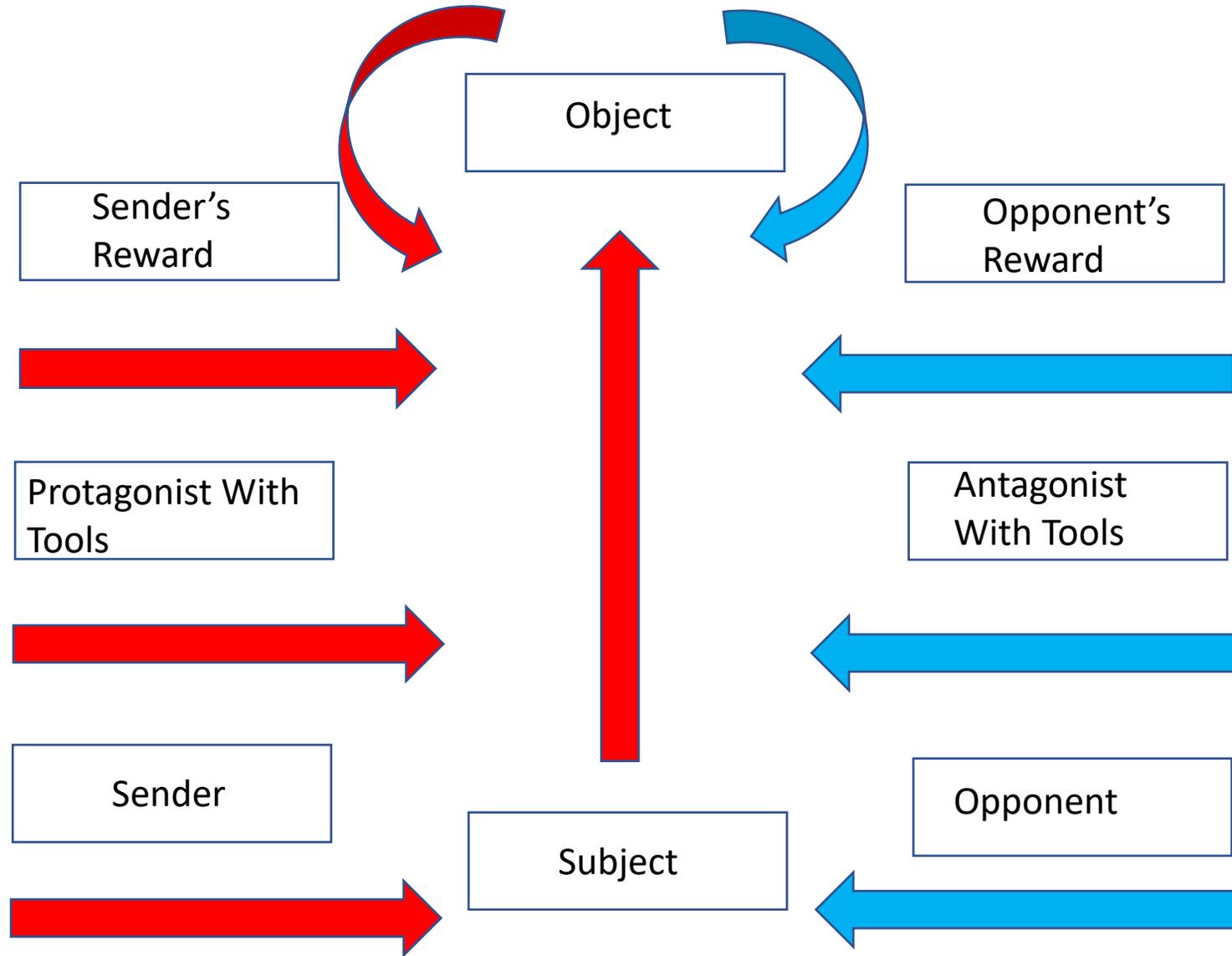
- Meta-theories aim to offer support in profound understanding of change
- In Horizon 2020 Coordination and Support Action (CSA) projects need a 'red thread' – how to make the change intelligible as collaboration between research and practice
- Transition management theory excellent for technologically and socially innovative business developments with strategic edge, for planning, funding
- However, a theory entailing actors and developments across levels, enabling use of different working theories, is seen to give a better insight about change dynamics
- This paper proposes the narrative model as a meta-theory of change

Key results and discussion – Transition management theory

- Conceptualization of levels of change (landscape, regime and niche)
- Places innovation in niche
- Interpretation of developments from the point of strategic business thinking (for sustainability)
- May include controversial developments, global approaches
- Clue to 'drama' by Buurma (2011) – suggests a literary theory
- Life as literature – endless richness

Key results and discussion - Narrative model

- Based initially on Russian folktales
- Crystallizes functions (actions) through ‘dramatis personae’ heroes, heroines, villains, benefactors, wizards, powerful persons (paradigmatic features)
- Displays 1. situations (paradigmatic settings) 2. consequentiality (syntagmatic features)
- Knitted together as settings and their sequence
- Highlights actors’ contradictory orientations and actions, roles, positions and abilities (tools) across levels – with societal implications



Discussion

- This meta-theory easy to deploy for different actors' issues
- Entails the preferred aim as the relation between subject and object for different audiences
- Narrator's and recipient's (societal) aims defines what is seen as heroic and rebellious
- Adopts technologies and scientific ideas as well as organizations and governmental regulations into its scenery
- Enables the 'knitting in' of very different working theories – displaying multiple aspects of reality
- Useful for the highlighting the contributions, effects and the time line of different actors in the change – enables rich and strongly orientated perception of reality