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Exploring entrepreneurial processes in new markets

Towards sustainable food systems

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Cover: Delivery of a meal kit at a customer's doorstep. Illustrating the early initiative with the meal kits.
(photo: T. Soares)

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of new markets.

New markets are business environments in an early stage of formation and offer an opportunity to change patterns of consumption and production. This makes new markets an interesting subject in society's quest towards more sustainable food systems. Therefore, we need to better understand the processes through which new markets are created and developed.

This thesis studied the emergence of the Swedish meal-kit market, which was initiated to target sustainable values. The empirical material was gathered through a qualitative longitudinal study that was conducted between 2010 and 2018 and the main source of empirical material was interviews with the founders and managers of ten firms. The analysis was performed in a process that iterated between empirics and theory.

The thesis contributes to an understanding of the micro-processes involved within and between founders, firms and markets, as new markets are created and developed. The processes are explained as *embeddedness*, *identity work* and *branding*, which all capture the interactions with context. It is argued that to better understand why and how entrepreneurship happens, we need to balance the myopic focus on economic values and also focus on other entrepreneurial outcomes than a firm's success. Thus, the thesis call for more contextualized perspectives of entrepreneurship in order to understand sustainable change in new markets.

Keywords: Agency, Context, Corporate branding, Embeddedness, Entrepreneurship, Food, Identity work, Meal-kit company, Sustainable value, Sweden

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Entreprenöriella processer på nya marknader

Sammanfattning

Syftet med denna avhandling är att utforska hur entreprenöriella processer fungerar i skapandet och utvecklingen av nya marknader.

Nya marknader är affärsmiljöer i ett tidigt skede och erbjuder en möjlighet att förändra mönster kring konsumtion och produktion. Detta gör nya marknader intressanta i samhällets strävan efter förändring till mer hållbara livsmedelssystem. Därför behöver vi lära oss mer om de processer genom vilka nya marknader skapas och utvecklas.

Den här avhandlingen studerar framväxten av den svenska matkassemarknaden, vilken initierades för att skapa hållbara värden. Det empiriska materialet har samlats in genom en kvalitativ longitudinell studie, mellan åren 2010 och 2018; huvudsakligen genom intervjuer med grundare och ledare för tio företag.

Avhandlingen bidrar till en förståelse för de mikroprocesser som sker, inom och mellan grundare, företag och marknaden, när nya marknader skapas och utvecklas. Dessa processer förklaras som *inbäddning*, *identitetsarbete* och *varumärkesbyggande* och de fångar alla samspelet med kontexten. I avhandlingen argumenteras att för att bättre förstå varför och hur entreprenörskap uppstår, så behöver vi studera andra värden än enbart ekonomiska, samt fokusera på andra entreprenöriella resultat än företagets framgång. Därmed efterlyses mer kontextualiserade perspektiv på entreprenörskap för att förstå hållbar förändring på nya marknader.

Nyckelord: Entreprenörskap, Företagare, Hållbar utveckling, Hållbara värden, Identitet, Inbäddning, Kontext, Matkassar, Varumärken, Sverige

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Preface

Like most of you readers, I am engaged in the sustainable development of our society. One way to contribute through my PhD work was to focus on the food system and how it could be improved. Our food systems are often highlighted as the culprits in the climate debate, where there is a need to change today's production and consumption patterns to cope with the UNs Sustainable Development Goals. Perhaps new, more sustainable markets can be part of the solution.

Food markets have evolved in different ways to meet the needs of stakeholders in various contexts. I saw the development as a process of change – from something to something else. I was particularly interested in how this change took place, how new, more sustainable solution became a solid element of what already existed. In order to understand the change, I decided to use the entrepreneurial process as my frame of reference as it captures the process of change.

I chose to follow a new food initiative – meal kits – which offered complete dinner solutions for consumers. Some meal kit firms addressed issues of sustainability by providing guidance to consumers about food products, how and where they were produced, reducing food waste and educating consumers about more sustainable eating habits. This certainly did not apply to all actors, yet it provided an interesting opportunity to examine how sustainable values were (and were not) created and developed in a new market.

Now, sit back and let me take you on my research journey into the world of meal kits. It all started with a woman, sitting in the sun, on a park bench in Stockholm. She had been given a task by her work coach, to reflect on her dream scenario. It was there and then that the first idea of the meal kits emerged, the idea of what developed into a profitable firm and a new market.

Dedication

To Filip, my beloved husband, who has accompanied me on this research journey. You are my rock, and you help me to be my best self.

To Freja, Tyra and Steira, my wonderful daughters, who give me new perspectives on life. You are my sunshine and, like in Peter Pan, you are my 'happy thoughts'.

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List of publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

- I. Astner, H. and Gaddefors, J. (2021). Identities at work in developing a new market. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRME-07-2018-0038>.
- II. Astner, H. (2022). The marionette: embeddedness in a community of family-controlled firms. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 260–277. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-01-2020-0011>.
- III. Astner, H. and Gaddefors, J. (2022). Founders and their brands. (manuscript).
- IV. Astner, H. (2022). The Creation of Sustainable Food Markets: Getting the Windmills to Turn. (manuscript).

Papers I–IV are reproduced with the permission of the publishers and any co-authors.

My contributions to Papers I–IV are as follows:

- I. This is a co-authored paper. As leading author, I presented a draft of the paper at the 41st Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) Conference in Birmingham in November 2018. My main contributions are in the overall design and development of the paper. I also collected and analysed the empirical material and did most of the writing.
- II. I am the sole author of this paper. I presented drafts of the paper at the 9th International Conference for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Development (ICEIRD) in Sheffield in June 2015 and at the 41st Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) Conference in Birmingham in November 2018.
- III. This is a co-authored paper. As leading author, I presented a draft of the paper at the 40th Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) Conference in Birmingham in November 2017. My main contributions are in the overall design and development of the paper. I also collected and analysed the empirical material and took a leading role in the writing and reviewing process.
- IV. I am the sole author of this paper. I presented a draft of the paper at the 1st Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Sustainability Conference (EISC) in Uppsala in December 2020. It has been accepted for presentation at the 21st Nordic Conference on Small Business Research (NCSB) in Kolding, Denmark, in May 2022.

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1. Introduction

When Petra started the first ever meal-kit firm, she ventured into the unknown, into a very loosely structured context. Her idea was to offer convenience in Swedish consumers' everyday lives by offering a complete dinner solution. She also wanted to provide support for all the difficult choices regarding food, push for sustainable diets, educate consumers and reduce food waste. Yet, in the beginning, nothing was given: the environment was ambiguous, the product not defined, value chains not established, customers unclear and referees shone with their absence. Thus, creating a space for customers to buy and prepare food in a new way, and for other firms to start delivering meal kits, was indeed a challenge beyond the ordinary.

This thesis is about exploring entrepreneurial processes in the unknown to understand what happens when, in my case, a new food market, characterised by sustainable values, finds its contours.

New markets, or nascent markets, are “business environments in an early stage of formation” (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009, 644), in which firms and customers meet to set prices, execute transactions and distribute goods and services (Menard, 1995). New markets are an opportunity to change what *is*, as they set out to challenge previous structures to create something new. Yet, there is more to learn about the processes through which new markets are created and developed. Particularly the creation of new markets has been difficult to capture in research, as we rarely know what will become a market before it actually becomes one. In my research, however, I have had the privilege of following a new market from its early development to try to understand the entrepreneurial processes involved. Hence, this research is based on a longitudinal case study of firms in the meal-kit market, which

started to develop in Sweden in 2007. By following actors in the market over a period of eight years, engaging in comprehensive literature studies in entrepreneurship, organisation theory and marketing, as well as extensive discussions of what has been observed, the ideas in this thesis have been framed and developed.

1.1 Background and motivation

New markets have the opportunity to change patterns of consumption and production. This makes new markets interesting in society's quest for sustainable change. An important focus for sustainable change are our food systems, which have been identified as important concerns to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2020). Food systems are made up of everybody and everything involved in feeding a population, including the production, distribution, consumption and disposal of food (Fanzo and Davis, 2021). The need for a more holistic and circular approach to food systems is now widely recognised (cf. Moscatelli et al., 2016; Horton et al., 2017; Doherty et al., 2019), but the journey to achieving a sustainable food system is long (SAPEA, 2020). According to the UN (2020), 29% of greenhouse gas emissions are produced by food systems, and food systems account for up to 80% of biodiversity loss, 80% of deforestation and 70% of all freshwater use. At the same time, food consumption patterns are unsustainable from a health perspective (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2019; European Commission, 2020). While some people struggle to afford food, food loss and food waste is extensive (25–30%)¹ and the food we consume is not always healthy. In the Western world the average intake of energy, red meat, sugar, salt and fat continues to exceed the recommendations (IPCC, 2019; European Commission, 2020). This leads to health problems such as overweight and obesity, cardiovascular disease and cancer (European Commission, 2020). For example, in the EU, more than half of the adult population is considered overweight and in 2017, it was estimated that over 950,000 deaths (one out of five) could be attributed to unhealthy diets (European Commission, 2020).

Thus, from both an environmental and a health perspective there is a call for change, and changing consumer behaviour is part of the solution.

¹ According to IPCC (2019, para 5.5.2.5) “food loss is defined as the reduction of edible food during production, postharvest, and processing, whereas food discarded by consumers is considered as food waste. Combined food loss and waste amount to 25-30% of total food produced”.

Consumer behaviour is considered to be part of the food system (Fanzo and Davis, 2021) and it governs what food we buy, where and how we shop, how we eat (i.e. eating habits) and handle food and how much we waste. This, in turn, has the potential to reduce the environmental impact of our food systems, and also work to achieve better health. For example, if we could switch to less energy-intensive diets with more coarse grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, this would reduce the environmental impact of the food system while reducing health problems (IPCC, 2019; European Commission, 2020). Moreover, if we could learn not to waste the food that we have used energy and resources to produce, this would benefit the environment and also save on costs.

Thus, consumer behaviour around food is part of our food systems, the food markets housed within them (Fanzo and Davis, 2021) and is therefore intertwined with the development of food markets. New consumer markets therefore offer a way to achieve changes in consumer behaviour and our food systems as a whole. One of the main ideas behind the initiatives that subsequently developed into the Swedish meal-kit market was to develop sustainable consumer behaviour by helping consumers choose more sustainable food products, teaching them how to make healthy meals and reduce food waste, while also creating profitable firms. Whether the meal-kit market that has been developed can be considered sustainable or not is difficult to determine, but my interest is in what the meal-kit market can teach us about how sustainable values can be incorporated into a food market and how these values change as the market develops. Entrepreneurship offers an important key to understanding such changes and the shaping of new consumer markets.

1.2 Entrepreneurship as change

Entrepreneurship helps us comprehend the processes behind change in order to understand how we can make it happen. Thus, it provides an approach to exploring what happens when a market is created and developed.

Anderson et al. (2012) articulated the essence of entrepreneurship as involving change, describing change as both the environment and the medium for entrepreneurship:

“Entrepreneurship captures change, employs change and creates change as it forms new order, new organizations manifest as new business and new products from the vortex of change.” (Anderson et al., 2012, 360)

In this thesis, I see entrepreneurship as change, i.e. a process of going from something to something else. Being a PhD candidate in business studies, I choose to examine the changes that occur around firms or, more specifically, when firms and founders are involved in creating and developing a market. Some of these changes take place in the firms, for example, through their development of a corporate identity and brand. Other changes occur in the people involved in these firms, e.g. how their engagement in the firms and the market affect their individual identities. Further changes take place on the market level, for example, in the structures that are created through interactions between different actors. Thus, change through entrepreneurial processes can be explored from multiple perspectives and I have chosen to focus on the firms, founders and the market because these were present in my empirical material.

The development, i.e. change, of founders, firms and markets, is a topic that has long been the focus of entrepreneurship literature (Hitt et al., 2011; Nasution et al., 2011). This change involves the creation and extraction of values from an environment (Anderson, 2000; Jack and Anderson, 2002). Yet, the literature has mainly focused on economic values (Anderson, 2015; Dodd et al., 2021). The interest of this thesis, however, revolves around sustainability, meaning more values become important. The economic perspective on entrepreneurship is thereby broadened to include the way in which economic, environmental and social values (collectively referred to as *sustainable values*, cf. Hart and Milstein, 2003; Cardoni et al., 2020) are created and extracted in the shaping of founders, firms and the market.

This broader approach to entrepreneurship has been addressed in literature on sustainable entrepreneurship, promoting entrepreneurship as part of the solution in the pursuit of sustainable development (Dean and McMullen, 2007; Cohen and Winn, 2007; Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Belz and Binder, 2017). This has developed our understanding of how start-ups striving for sustainability develop and perform in an established market (cf. Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010). As for new markets, however, less attention has been devoted to exploring the entrepreneurial processes involved in the co-creation of sustainable values, which is part of the topic

of this thesis. Processes involving the creation and development of new markets have been difficult to capture in general because we rarely know what a new market will be until after it has become established.

Seeing entrepreneurship as change resulting from the creation and extraction of values to an environment leads to certain assumptions. Firstly, this stems from a perspective in which someone perceives what is created as *being of value* to a person. Secondly, the change involves people acting, i.e. someone is *extracting* and *creating*, whereas it is people's practices that lead to the change (Gartner et al., 2016). Thirdly, the change involves interactions with an environment, i.e. it occurs in interaction with a context (Welter, 2011). As Welter (2011) states, "context is important for understanding when, how, and why entrepreneurship happens and who becomes involved". Thus, entrepreneurial processes happen in interaction with a context, which provides conditions out of which opportunities can be created and boundaries set (Welter, 2011). This process of extraction and creation involves social interactions as entrepreneurs bounce ideas, evaluate customer responses, negotiate for funding, mobilise resources etc. Entrepreneurial processes can thereby be seen as co-creations involving multiple actors (Gaddefors, 2005). In this co-creation of value processes, context is important, dynamic and constantly changing (Korsgaard et al., 2021). I therefore depart from literature that captures the process of change and context, by giving perspectives to the interactions between firms, individuals and markets.

1.3 The context of a new market

As this thesis looks into what happens as a new market is being shaped, this makes the new market context particularly interesting. To understand what a new market is, we first need to address the concept of market.

1.3.1 Defining a market

No two markets are alike; rather, they are unique in their structure, their actors and interactions. Defining a *market* is a difficult task, as the concept has been used in so many different ways (Menard, 1995). A market is commonly discussed as a trading place in which firms and customers meet to set prices, execute transactions and distribute goods and services. Yet markets do not have to be physical entities, rather, social constructions that are constantly being recreated through the interactions and relationships of

actors (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2008). From a literature study, Sarasvathy and Dew (2005, 536) suggest that an established market can be understood based on three “meanings”: demand, supply and institutions. Demand implies that there are people who are willing to pay for a product or service. Supply means that there are people who are willing to make a product or service at a price that customers are willing to pay. Institutions implies that there are established institutions that enable an exchange to take place. These institutions could be distribution mechanisms, laws and responsibilities (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005), but also social norms and institutional logics, i.e. shared systems of meaning that legitimise particular goals and practices (Thornton et al., 2012; Schick et al., 2016). When we talk about a market for a particular established product, we include all these three meanings of a market (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005); i.e. a market involves demand pulling, supply pushing and institutions lubricating (Hu and McLoughlin, 2012). Thus, market, as a concept, entails the abstract mechanisms whereby deals are made and reflect places, processes and institutions in which exchanges occur (Callon, 1998).

1.3.2 New markets

Let us now discuss what a *new market* involves. If we use the three meanings with an established market – demand, supply and institutions – these become difficult to grasp in a new market. As for demand, there are an infinite number of ways to meet a certain need through, for example, technological development (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). In terms of supply, the products have not yet been defined and there is uncertainty as to how and whether they can be produced at a reasonable price that will be welcomed by customers (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009). Finally, concerning institutions, in the beginning there are no clear institutions that allow an exchange to take place (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005; Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009). Thus, when a new market is created, context is loosely structured, few factors are given, and the market has a virtually infinite number of ways of being created.

Yet the literature frequently discuss new markets as something for entrepreneurs and managers to discover, as if market opportunities are already out there, ready for actors to realise (Alvarez and Barney, 2007; 2020; Goss and Sadler-Smith, 2018). This approach leans against evolutionary theory, which sees the emergence of markets as a process of searching and selecting among variations, and then retaining those variations

that are successful (Dew et al., 2018). Sarasvathy and Dew (2005, 533) explains how this approach is problematic, arguing that creating a new market is not a “search and selection process within the theoretical space of all possible markets”, but rather “the outcome of a process of transformation of extant realities into new possibilities”. Markets are therefore not discovered, but they are created.

Thus, if we view markets as being created in a turmoil of undefined demand, supply and institutions, there is a need to further understand the processes and mechanisms behind the creation and development of new markets. These processes are deeply embedded in their contexts, which calls for a contextualised approach to entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011; Welter and Baker, 2021).

1.4 Defining and problematizing sustainability and sustainable values

Since this thesis revolves around initiatives to shape sustainable food systems, it is appropriate to define what I mean by *sustainability* and *sustainable values*.

1.4.1 Approaches to sustainability

The concept of sustainability has been used and interpreted in many different ways (Hopwood et al., 2015). From approaching it as resource management (Wiersum, 1995) seeking to optimise the return on nature’s resources such as forests, fish and crops, to approaching it as being about human well-being and/or environmental sustainability (Hopwood et al., 2015).

The resource management approach may be traced as far back as 1713, when Hans Carl von Carlowitz proposed a strategy for forest management using the term *nachhaltigkeit* (German for *sustainability*). He proposed that no more trees should be cut down than could be replenished (von Carlowitz, 1713). This resource management perspective still prevails in economics in which the scarcity of resources is a central concern (Wilderer, 2007; Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010). Hopwood et al. (2015) discuss this as supporting the *status quo*, often entailing a techno-centred solution to sustainable development. In this context, and quoting Hopwood et al. (2015, 42), “development is identified with growth and economic growth is seen as

part of the solution”. Thus, this perspective on sustainable development primarily sheds light on resource efficiency.

Other approaches to sustainability put more emphasis on environmental and societal problems, which are largely attributed to economic and power structures and the pursuit of economic growth (Hopwood et al., 2015). Some scholars have an eco-centric perspective, highlighting the environment as the main concern, as in Schrivastava’s (1985) call for eco-centric management. Other scholars have a more anthropocentric perspective on sustainability, centred on ensuring human well-being. This entails environmental concerns primarily being a prerequisite for the well-being of future generations. Accordingly, and quoting Kuhlman and Farrington (2010), “environmental concerns are important, but the basic argument is one of welfare, seen in a context of inter-generational equity”. This latter perspective is embraced in the report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), commonly referred to as *the Bruntland report*. Here, sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987).

This thesis takes the Bruntland Commission’s approach to sustainability. The reason for this is that the creation of new firms and markets primarily originates in an anthropocentric view of development. Yet, environmental considerations will be of great importance as they make up the contexts for future generations.

1.4.2 A working definition of sustainability

In this thesis, sustainability is defined in the broad sense as the combination of a range of environmental, social and economic issues and concerns.

Sustainability and sustainable development are widely used concepts and ideas, both inside and outside of academia. Even though the concepts are sometimes used interchangeably, there are some commonly accepted understandings. Sustainability can be explained as a “state of affairs” (Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010, 3442) in which the totality of natural and human-made resources do not decline over time. Whereas, sustainable development denotes “improvements” (Hopwood et al., 2005, 40) leading towards this goal. Thus, put differently, sustainable development is the process that leads to sustainability.

What can be considered sustainable is a matter of perspective, including from whose point of view sustainability is determined and how we choose to look at factors such as time and risk. This means that what is perceived as sustainable, ultimately, is nearly impossible to determine as we cannot expect to have all the information about the multiplicity of contexts and its effects, nor have the ability to predict and evaluate our futures. Thus, in this thesis, I discuss sustainability as sustainable *intentions* (Han et al., 2017) i.e. the pursuit of sustainability. If we look at the meal-kit market and its actors, it is not possible to state whether or not the market as a whole is sustainable. But many actors highlight sustainable values where, in addition to economic profitability, they also express sustainable intentions.

1.4.3 A working definition of sustainable values

The Bruntland definition has received widespread recognition, yet it has also been the starting point for various reinterpretations of sustainability. Among these, we find the “triple bottom line” (Elkington, 1994, 2013), which divides sustainability into three interrelated dimensions – environmental, social and economic – which emphasise different values, collectively referred to as *sustainable values* (Hart and Milstein, 2003; Cardoni et al., 2020). However, Kuhlman and Farrington (2010) believe that this reinterpretation is problematic, since two of the dimensions concern human welfare, i.e. socio-economic issues, while only one dimension concerns environmental conservation. They argue that this risks diminishing the importance of the environmental dimension, thereby justifying short-term socio-economic growth at the expense of the environment. On the other hand, merging social and economic aspects create other problems. For example, we risk missing conflicts that often stem from short-term economic goals (centred around the welfare that money can buy, perhaps for a family or local community) and the societal problems that these create on a larger scale influenced by the prevailing economic and power structures.

However, from a firm’s perspective, sustainability often comes down to balancing the short-term budget with the desire to create a better world for others. Thus, I emphasise the distinction between values that are primarily centred on a person and their firm, which are of a socio-economic nature, and values of a more altruistic nature, that also take into account environmental concerns and the well-being of others, which I refer to as *sustainable values*.

1.5 Exploring entrepreneurial processes in the context of a new sustainable market

Although the prevailing entrepreneurship literature significantly contributes to our understanding of the creation and development of firms in markets (cf. Cillo et al., 2019; Sprong et al., 2021) new markets are foremost addressed from an evolutionary perspective (i.e. viewing markets as being discovered) (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005; Dew et al., 2018; Goss and Sadler-Smith, 2018). Thus, there is still more to learn about the micro-processes involved when new markets are created and developed.

As discussed above, new markets are different. They are characterised by an ambiguous environment in which products and customers have not been clearly defined and value chains have not been established (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009). Thus, supply, demand and institutions are difficult to distinguish (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). Yet, exploring the development in these three meanings of a market provides insights into the entrepreneurial processes that take place when a new market is being shaped (Hu and McLoughlin, 2012). I address these three meanings in this thesis. However, the prevailing perspective is derived from the supply side. The focus is thereby on the entrepreneurial initiatives that work to create and develop the new market.

As previously stated, context is important for understanding the changes that take place within a market and, in particular, the changes that take place when a new market is created. Before the market begins to take shape, there is an extant of realities (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). Generalisations about how to characterise new markets can therefore be difficult and sometimes misdirected. However, many theoretical attempts have been made to follow this path. One example is the literature on market entry in which scholars have struggled to reach consensus on whether being the first mover in a new market is the best approach for a firm (Lambkin, 1988; Lieberman and Montgomery, 1988; Narasimhan and Zhang, 2000; Rodríguez-Pinto et al., 2008). By instead adopting a contextualised perspective (Welter, 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Welter et al., 2019; Welter and Baker, 2021), this thesis sets out to a better understand the mechanisms behind the creation of a new market. The focus of the thesis is on the interplay between entrepreneurship and context, in order to explore the mechanisms of change. In particular I will focus on the interactions between founders, firms and the market.

I will discuss the changes, i.e. entrepreneurial processes, using three interlinked concepts: embeddedness, identity work and branding. I chose these concepts because they helped me to explore the process of change while embracing interactions with context. I use the concept of *embeddedness* to explain how firms and founders are embedded in, and interact with, a context. I use the concept of *identity work* to discuss how identities interact with context and argue that identity work can take place in individuals, firms and markets. Finally, I turn to *branding* to discuss how the branding process interacts with actors and the market. (These concepts will be further discussed in Chapter 3.) Thus, the interactions between founders, firms and the market was the process on which I concentrated and I saw embeddedness, identity work and branding as being part of the entrepreneurial process. In this way, I intend to go beyond mere descriptions to provide explanations about what happens in the shaping of a market.

In addition, and as previously discussed, entrepreneurship literature has long centred on economic values (Anderson, 2015; Dodd et al., 2021). However, this becomes problematic when trying to understand the sustainable initiatives of firms and markets. Here we need to broaden the perspective to include environmental and social values as a complement to economic values (collectively referred to as sustainable values). This, in turn, highlights the advantage of taking a contextualised perspective, as sustainable values operate both inside and outside of firms.

Research on sustainable development has come a long way. Based on a recent report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we have all the information we need to understand what we need to do to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (IPCC, 2022). However, the challenge of implementing the necessary changes is, in practice, very difficult. The idea behind this thesis is that by studying entrepreneurial processes, we can better understand how changes take place and thereby also better understand how sustainable development measures can be implemented.

Thus, this thesis sets out to explore how entrepreneurial processes in the development of new markets unfold and how they may contribute to more sustainable food systems.

1.6 Aim

The processes of achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is the challenge of our time. In this context, changing our food systems has been identified as an important focus area, in which new markets constitute an opportunity to influence both consumption and production for a more sustainable development. I therefore want to understand how new markets emerge and how different values are created and developed in a market. Thus, in order to contribute to more sustainable food systems, I depart from the evolving meal-kit market, which was initiated in order to target sustainable values, and investigate how values, identities and brands are co-created and context dependent. More specifically, the aim of this thesis is to explore how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of new markets.

This thesis is based on four academic papers. The papers collectively contribute to fulfilling the aim of the thesis but, while they are closely linked, they make slightly different contributions. Table 1 describes the aims and research questions of each of the papers.

Table 1. Aim and research questions in the four papers

| Paper | Aim | Research question |
|--------------|--|---|
| I | to explore the role of identities in entrepreneurial processes during the development of a new market | - How do the founder's identity, corporate identity and market identity interact as a new market is developing? - What are the functions of identity in the entrepreneurial process? |
| II | to explore how embeddedness and agency interact during the entrepreneurial process | - How does the family interact in the entrepreneurial process? - How does embeddedness inform the process? |
| III | to improve the understanding of how the founder's identity engages with branding in small developing firms | - How is the founder's identity developed into a brand? - How do small firms' brands change? |
| IV | to explore how a new market characterised by sustainable values is created and developed | - How can sustainable entrepreneurship explain the creation and development of a new market? - How are sustainable values shaped in a market? |

The four papers are summarised in Chapter 4 and are included in full text in appendices I–IV.

1.7 Focus areas

This thesis is placed within the wider research discipline of business administration and belongs to the research field of entrepreneurship. The phenomenon explored is the entrepreneurial process, particularly those processes that occur when new markets are created and developed, and which involve interactions between founders, firms and the market. The empirical material has been gathered from the emerging Swedish meal-kit market (Table 2).

Table 2. Placing the thesis within the wider research field

| Discipline | Sub-discipline | Phenomenon | Empirical material |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Business administration | Entrepreneurship | Entrepreneurial processes in the creation and development of a new market | The emerging meal-kit market |

The first initiative in the meal-kit market started in Sweden in 2007. Firms involved in this market provide pre-planned meal kits for families and couples that contained dinner solutions (ingredients and recipes) for a certain number of days (usually five days). A number of the firms described their meal kits as sustainable (see Appendix 1, Table 1, p. 7). Customers typically subscribed to the service to receive meal kits at regular intervals, either home delivered or collected locally. This thesis explores the Swedish market in which this all started. I have followed the Swedish market from an early stage of formation, characterised by small start-ups, to a mature stage that giant food retailers (henceforth referred to as retailers) have entered. In terms of the number of active firms, the market peaked in Sweden in 2015 at around 60 firms. My last overview in 2018 showed that there were around 20 firms and one third of them were major retailers.

The four papers in this thesis contribute in various ways to exploring the phenomenon. Table 3 shows how the papers address the overall phenomenon by focusing on different processes and using different theoretical

frameworks. These frameworks are based on theories of entrepreneurship and context, and combined with other literature (see *Theoretical framework* in Table 3) to enhance understanding.

Table 3. Focus areas within the four papers

| | Paper I | Paper II | Paper III | Paper IV |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Topic | The roles of identities in entrepreneurship | Embeddedness and agency in a family-firm community | Founder's role in small firm branding | Entrepreneurial processes in new sustainable markets |
| Processual focus | Developing individuals, firms and markets | Developing firms | Developing brands in start-ups in a new market | Developing markets |
| Theoretical framework | Identity work Corporate identity Market identity | Embeddedness Psychological ownership | Identity work Corporate branding | Sustainable entrepreneurship Institutional logics |

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This research journey starts with an introduction (Chapter 1) in which I present the background, problem and aim of the thesis. In Chapter 2 I discuss my research approach, in which I explain my ontological and epistemological positions and my research design. This chapter appears immediately after the introduction, to provide a background to my choices about theory and empirics. Chapter 3 provides a description of my conceptual framework and Chapter 4 provides accounts of the evolving meal-kit market. In Chapter 5, I have included abstracts of the four papers that make up this thesis. The papers are included in full text at the end of this thesis (note, only in the printed version). Finally, in Chapter 5, I reconnect with my aim and discuss my main contributions.

2. Approach and methods

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section relates to the ontological and epistemological approach of this thesis. I started with this because the approach forms the basis of the research design in terms of both choices about empirics and perspectives on theory. The second section describes the research design, including how the empirical material was selected, collected, analysed and interpreted. The third and last section discusses research quality.

2.1 Viewing knowledge as socially constructed

In order to explore how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of new markets, I chose to view knowledge as socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). In this view, entrepreneurship and markets are derived from, and maintained through, social interactions, which are guided by people's values, interpretations and assumptions. Knowledge of entrepreneurship is thus seen as "knowledge on how individuals and collectives perceive, define, produce and re-produce entrepreneurial action in society" (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009, 31). With this social constructionist approach, my role as a researcher is about articulating an understanding how individuals and collectives construct their entrepreneurial actions as unfolding processes (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). In this context, questions such as 'how' and 'why' come into focus, mainly based on the aim of seeking understanding. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) explain, we cannot separate knowledge from the knower, whereas 'data' and 'facts' are constructions and results of interpretations. This thereby puts focus on our interpretations, and how we arrive at them (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018).

2.1.1 Interpretations and reflexivity

Employing a social constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology calls for reflexivity. Reflexivity is one of the cornerstones of qualitative research (Alvesson et al., 2008). It concerns the extent to which a researcher influences the results (Jootun et al., 2009). According to Alvesson (2003, 24), “the researcher is part of the social world that is studied, and this calls for exploration and self-examination”. Bordieu (2004) also writes in this vein, arguing that who we are – our social origin, education and experiences – will affect our interpretations and interests. With this in mind, it becomes essential to adopt a reflexive approach throughout the research process.

The notion of reflexivity may be traced back to sociologist William Thomas in what has come to be known as *the Thomas theorem*, which states that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas, 1928, 572). Thus, as we define our realities and truths, we will act according to these. Reflexivity, then, is “ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing ways of seeing” (Clegg and Hardy, 1996, p. 4 in Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018, p. 329). The notion of reflexivity may therefore be viewed as both connected to the constructions of identities (who we are) and the constructions of realities (sense-making as well as actions). Alvesson (2003, 25) describes reflexivity as the researcher’s “conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single, favoured angle and vocabulary”. Thus, aiming for a reflexive stance, I have devoted time to my interpretations in order to avoid traps and produce rich and varied results (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). This also involves “the handling of the question of representation and authority” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018, 321). As my empirical material has largely been collected through interviews (see more on this in 2.2), it has been important for me to reflect on representation and authority. When conducting my interviews, I represented the SLU (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences), which is recognised as a government body of high integrity. Moreover, I am a female PhD student, and when I conducted my first round of interviews, I was also pregnant. Looking back at this, I suppose my affiliation with the SLU, as well as my appearance, made me come across as helpfully curious, reliable and even harmless, all in an environment characterised by change, increased competition and fear of new players. Thus, I believe that this helped to create confidence in the

interview settings. Often, and particularly at the end of interviews when the audio recorder was turned off, the interviewees shared secrets about the market, competitors or even personal problems. Even though I would never divulge these secrets (of course), this sharing still helped me to form my understanding of the actors, their actions and the market. Thus, the narratives in this thesis are co-constructed interpretations within contexts. The realisation of this calls for a reflexive approach. Thus, when collecting and working on my material, and writing this thesis, I have tried to be open to different perspectives and alternative interpretations. I have frequently discussed my research with others: international colleagues as well as colleagues from other fields and with different ontological and epistemological views, students, family, friends and acquaintances. This has opened my eyes to new fields of literature, sometimes made me reconsider what I do and what I know, and helped me develop and refine my interpretations.

2.1.2 Theoretical perspectives

Entrepreneurship is largely about change (Andersson et al., 2012). As a phenomenon, entrepreneurship has aroused the interest of scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplines (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007). This has given rise to interdisciplinary approaches.

As we see what we are trained to see, the inclusion of multiple theoretical perspectives can increase our “interpretive repertoire”, i.e. our ability to interpret a phenomenon (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). Thus, the reflexive inclusion of different conceptual frameworks is something that is encouraged in a social constructionist approach (Steyaert, 1997; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). This kind of inclusion offers an important opportunity to develop the field of entrepreneurship (Zahra, 2007; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009).

In this thesis, I explore entrepreneurial processes, i.e. change, when a market is being created and developed. I have therefore chosen to focus on concepts that capture the process of change. For example, I employ the concept of *embeddedness* to explain how firms and founders interact with context. I also use the concept of *identity work* to discuss how identities interact with context and argue that it can take place in individuals, firms and markets. Finally, I turn to *branding* to discuss how the branding process

interacts with actors and the market. I will return to this in 3.1 when I discuss my theoretical framework.

2.2 Research design

I have adopted an inductive approach in this thesis, which entails research questions unfolding over time from an iterative process between empirics and theory. The research design comprises a qualitative method in which I have conducted a longitudinal study of the development of a specific market, namely, the Swedish meal-kit market. In the sections that follow, I explain my research design.

2.2.1 Qualitative methodology

The focus of this thesis is to understand entrepreneurial processes when new markets are being created and developed. As the focus is on understanding, questions such as ‘how’ and ‘why’ are interesting. This lends itself to a qualitative method. This is because a qualitative approach provides in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its contexts (Wigren, 2007).

New market development is, per definition, highly context specific. Thus, generalisations may become so general that their usefulness for understanding a specific market’s development may be questioned. Flyvbjerg (2006, 224) explains this by stating:

“Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals”.

Moreover, a new market often lack prerequisites for quantitative studies, as it initially comprises one or a few firms struggling to manage opportunities and boundaries in existing structures. Thus, looking for qualitative, rich, detailed and context-sensitive material when studying a new market has provided an opportunity to understand the unique situations and processes involved. It has provided the opportunity to look at open-ended and contextualised processes as individuals, firms and the market develop.

Also, employing a qualitative methodology is very compatible with a social constructionist ontology. Applying a social constructionist approach

to entrepreneurship calls for a methodology that allows for ambiguity in the various potential interpretations and visualisation of the researcher's construction (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) argue that the qualitative method is well suited to handling different perspectives and reflexivity. Lindgren and Packendorff (2009) suggest that in-depth interviews and narrative analysis (of which both are applied in this thesis) may offer the kind of fieldwork approaches that acknowledge the researcher as part of the process. Thus, with this approach, I have developed a closeness to my empirics and the processes that I study and interpret. As Wigren (2007, 383) explains, "doing qualitative studies is about coming close to the field and learning from it". In my work, I have followed the market over time, allowing my questions and interests to develop as the market (as well as my research) evolved.

2.2.2 A longitudinal approach

In order to understand how new markets develop, I have conducted a longitudinal study. This helps to capture change over time and thus puts focus on the process. According to Lindgren and Packendorff (2009, 35), "[entrepreneurial] processes are continuously emerging, becoming, changing, as (inter)actors develop their understandings of their selves and their entrepreneurial reality". Thus, my approach allowed me to investigate the social interactions and contexts that shaped the processes over time. In entrepreneurship, focusing on the process and how we can understand the interactions that take place between actors and their contexts (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009) is sometimes referred to as the *process approach* (Olaison, 2014) or *contextual turn* (Welter, 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019; Welter and Baker, 2021). Tunberg (2017, 23f) takes this one step further by encouraging researchers to "absorb the processual" in order to "rethink and problematize [...] rather than filling in the gaps of existing theory". Studying entrepreneurial processes can be seen as studying "open-ended series of events in which people create/develop things together" (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009, 35). As I want to better understand how new markets are developed and how these processes unfold, a longitudinal study allowed me to follow what happened over time.

2.2.3 Studying the meal-kit market

Using my qualitative and longitudinal approach, the empirical material in this thesis has been drawn from the Swedish meal-kit market, from 2010 to 2018. This market is to be considered as my wider case study for observation.

It was interesting to explore the meal-kit market because of its quest for the sustainable development of our food systems. Although it is virtually impossible to state whether or not the market or its players are sustainable, several firms were striving for sustainability. The meal-kit market therefore allowed me to study how sustainable values developed in the market and their interaction across individuals, firms and the market. This could help us learn about how sustainable initiatives can be embedded in a market and the micro-processes that enable and restrict this embedding.

Another interesting aspect of the meal-kit market was that it was happening right here and now. New markets are difficult to capture in research, as we rarely know beforehand what might develop into a market. Most attempts to create something new never result in a market. What constitutes a new market is, of course, a question of how a new market is defined and the perspectives we use to understand it. As I explained in the introduction, I define new markets as “business environments in an early stage of formation” (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009, 644), in which firms and customers meet to set prices, execute transactions and distribute goods and services (Menard, 1995), and this involves the early formation of supply (producers pushing), demand (customers pulling) and institutions (enabling the exchange) (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). But, since it is impossible to see something that does not exist until it actually exists, we cannot know what a new market *is* until afterwards. Hence, the definition of a new market is rather based on what it might *become*, rather than what it *is*. I believe this is the most important reason why longitudinal studies of new emerging markets are so rare in research, particularly research that studies the market’s early creation.

When I started studying the actors who tried to establish meal-kit businesses in Sweden, I did not see it as a market. The meal-kit concept was still taking shape, the actors were trying to get everything from recipes, packaging and distribution to work, and most potential customers did not know that the concept even existed. When I review my notes from this early stage of the market, I see that I did not actually describe it as a market. Instead, I wrote about the actors who tried to establish businesses with a new

concept, or new marketing channels, while the understanding of it as *a market* gradually grew, as supply, demand and institutions took shape. Thus, I did not know how the meal-kit initiative would develop. I could see that it had potential, but I did not know that it would develop into an established market with an international reach.

Given how we define a new market, it is appropriate to ask whether meal kits are to be considered *a new market*, or whether they are *a new product* in an already existing retail food market. It is thus not just about how we define, but also from which perspectives we interpret the meal kits based on our definition. I would respond that not all actors share the same views about this. In this thesis, I have chosen to discuss meal kits as a new market, as they differed from the retail food market in several respects in terms of supply, demand and institutions:

- I. As for supply, the meal kits were not the same as just offering food products in a retail store. The meal kits originally contained a complete dinner solution including menu planning, recipe development, a careful selection of food, shopping and delivery. It was a concept that primarily comprised a service but also well-chosen food products and recipes. The start-ups treated this as a new market opportunity to which they dedicated their entire businesses. Some retailers, however, eventually came to treat it as a product within their broader consumer market for food. For them, this became a way to attract customers to their e-commerce and to their local stores.
- II. As for demand, customers wanted convenience in their everyday lives and many of them appreciated the guidance they received towards more sustainable behaviour. It was therefore not primarily the food products that were in demand, per se, but the concept. Moreover, the meal kits were originally home-delivered, whereas the physical location was not as important as it was for the retail stores. This meant that customers were not connected to the physical location, but could be reached with a wider delivery network as long as they lived within the delivery area. This therefore gave the meal-kit concept other conditions for attracting and selecting customers, i.e. a different kind of demand, than the retail food market.

III. As for institutions, the meal-kit concept required institutions other than the retail food market in order to enable market exchanges. Offering the new meal-kit concept required everything from recipe development by nutritionists and chefs, to distribution and logistics including packing rooms, packers and transporters, to IT solutions for ordering and customer management.

In this thesis, I discuss the meal-kits as a new market. Yet, studying a market is a complex process as it is difficult to determine where one market ends and another one begins. Here, Stake (2006) argues that in choosing a particular case we also choose to study its context. And how we decide to frame contexts is also open for discussion. Hence, whether we see the meal kits as a new market or as a new part of the retail food market, we can still learn something about how new market initiatives emerge and take shape.

2.2.4 A case of multi-cases

In order to explore the meal-kit market, it was necessary to find more specific units of observation. I therefore chose to employ what Stake (2006) refers to as a ‘multi-case study’ of firms within the market. A multi-case study comprises a wider case study containing several lower-level case studies (referred to as a quintain with multi-cases by Stake, 2006). In my research, the wider case is the meal-kit market and the lower level cases are the firms offering meal-kits in the market (which I refer to as ‘business cases’).

Employing firms as my units of observation helped me to grasp the different actors and capture activities both within and between firms in the market. The founders developing their meal-kit concepts were, of course, an important source of empirical material. They were also easy to access as they were spokespersons for their firms and would ‘open doors’ so that I could see their facilities and engage in small talk with their employees and family members during my visits.

One difficulty, however, has been to balance the business cases with the wider case of the market. This is described by Stake (2006, para 1.4) as a dilemma, and he explains that both the wider case and the lower-level cases become more worthy of study as soon as they are studied. “It all becomes more complex as it becomes better known, and it cries out for being still better known”. In my multi-case study, I have tried to find a balance between my focus on the firms and on the shaping of the market. Each business case

study has been planned and organised as a single case study, as suggested by Stake (2006). This means that when I collected empirical material, I concentrated on each of the business cases almost as if it were the only one. However, by collecting empirics about the firms and their contexts, I have been able to create understandings of both them and the wider market. The phenomenon that I seek to understand is entrepreneurial processes in the context of a new market. This involves looking into the entrepreneurial processes within, around and between firms, which includes changes in individuals, firms, brands, families, communities and the market at large.

2.2.5 Selecting my business cases

When I started to study the meal-kit market in 2010, I found around 20 firms offering meal kits in Sweden. From these, I selected ten firms to follow more closely. This selection was intentional (Gartner and Birley, 2002; Pratt, 2009) because I aimed to identify firms that belonged to the same market. This was important, as I wanted to capture the interactions that took place between individuals, firms and the market. I therefore used three criteria for the selection of firms. The first criterion relates to firms that offer similar products, in this case, home-delivered meal kits with ingredients and recipes. The second criterion was that the firms would serve similar customer groups; in this case, private households. The last criterion was that the firms were geographically close and therefore delivered meal kits to overlapping geographical areas. These three criteria focused my study on central Sweden, within and around Stockholm. The selection was therefore based on *what* was offered, *who* the customer was and *where* it was offered. Of course, the firms had some differences regarding their product profile, geographical reach and typical customers. Yet, these differences were mainly evident while competing with each other (i.e. to differentiate their offer).

Table 4 provides an overview of the selected business cases. All names are fictitious and firms and founders have been given names beginning with the same capital letter, for example, Petra at Peaceful Dinner and Helena and Homer at Home Grown. This is to make it easier to keep track of which founder belongs to which firm and also to preserve the integrity of the people I have interviewed.

Table 4. Selected business cases (all names are fictitious)

| Firm <i>Founder</i> | Start | Closure, where applicable | Type |
|--|----------------|--|--|
| Peaceful Dinner <i>Petra</i> | 2007 Oct | In business | Start-up, meal-kit firm |
| Lisa's Dinner <i>Lisa and Lars</i> | 2008, Feb | In business | Start-up, meal-kit firm |
| Home Grown <i>Helena and Homer, later handed over to Harriet</i> | 2009 Sep | 2013 | Start-up, meal-kit firm |
| Organic Dinner <i>Olga and Olivia</i> | 2009 Autumn | In business | Start-up, meal-kit firm |
| Great Supermarket <i>Greg</i> | 2009 Aug | In business | Incumbent, retailer starting with meal kits |
| Emily's Dinner <i>Emily</i> | 2009 Dec | 2013 Mar | Start-up, meal-kit firm |
| Shop Around the Clock <i>Shaun</i> | 2010 Spring | 2016 | Start-up, offering e- solutions and meal kits for All Around Supermarket |
| Net Supermarket <i>Nelly</i> | 2010 Apr | In business | Incumbent, e-retailer starting with meal kits |
| All Around Supermarket <i>Alvin, later replaced by Allan</i> | 2010 Dec | In business | Incumbent, retailer starting with meal kits |
| Dinner Time <i>David</i> | 2011 Jan | 2013 Dec | Start-up, meal-kit firm |

As I have been following my business cases for eight years, a lot has happened during this time (see Figure 2 in section 4.1.1 for an overview). Many new firms have sprung up along the way and some of the firms I have followed have been handed over to new owners or closed down. Yet, I have held on to my business cases and this has been beneficial in several ways.

Firstly, keeping in touch with the business cases has allowed me to keep a timeline for studying the process. Studying change processes in a shaping market is difficult, precisely because everything is changing. Here, my

business cases have given me a fixed point to hold on to. This has given me a deeper understanding of the situations for the firms and their founders, and how their situations changed as the market developed.

Secondly, following similar firms operating in the same geographical area enabled a deeper understanding of the overall context for the firms. Because the firms are part of each other's market, they help to create understandings not only for their own part, but also on the part of others. Thus, it helped me to better understand the context of the shaping market and capture the interactions that took place between individuals, firms and the market.

Thirdly, keeping in touch with case study representatives over time is about developing trust. Sticking to the same business cases has enabled me to get to know the founders and their firms, and vice versa – they have come to know me. This has provided settings for developing trust during the interviews, which, in turn, have led to more open and relaxed conversations (McKenzie, 2007; Roos, 2021). For example, during my initial interviews I noted caution among some of the people I interviewed. This caution diminished during the follow-up interviews as the respondents spoke more freely.

Lastly, studying the same firms over a period of eight years has given me a more holistic view of the entrepreneurial process which, in some cases, has ranged from venture creation and development to exit. Entrepreneurial exit has received marginal attention compared to research on creation and development, yet it is considered to be a crucial part of the entrepreneurial process (Bird, 2014). Thus, sticking to my business cases has given me the opportunity to embrace a comprehensive view of the entrepreneurial process.

2.2.6 Collecting the empirical material

The empirical material was collected at different points in time over an eight-year period, 2010–2018. The main empirical material is derived from the multi-case study (Stake, 2006), from which narratives have been developed to address the different aims of Papers I–IV (shown in Table 1). A narrative is described as “storytelling” or “a report of a sequence of events that a group of characters have engaged in” (McKenzie, 2007, 311). In order to collect the material for most of the narratives, I interviewed the founders three times, followed them and their firms on their websites and in the media, and studied written material such as policy documents and commercial material.

The first round of interviews were loosely structured and guided by broad questions such as ‘tell me about your firm’ and ‘what’s going on right now’. This provided an opportunity for the founders to steer the conversation in the direction of what they perceived as important in their firms, their lives and in the market. Follow-up interviews enabled me to follow what had happened in the firms over time and to revisit emerging themes in order to gain a fuller explanation (Bryman, 2001; Roos, 2021). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Most of the interviews took place at the respondents’ premises and were complemented by field notes describing settings, situations and observations during, for example, tours of the premises and small talk with employees.

To complement the case narratives, I have constantly monitored the market in order to uncover events and changes. I have repeatedly created overviews of the market by documenting and searching through online registers of meal-kit actors (such as matkasse.se, hittamatkasse.nu, jamformatkasse.nu and matkassetopplistan.se), searching websites for these actors, as well as marketing material and news reports about them in the media, including Dagens Industri, Expressen and BreakIT. An overview of the collected material is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Overview of the collected material

| Time | Type of material |
|--------------------|---|
| 2010 autumn | Meetings with two of the start-ups at a food fair |
| 2010 autumn | Online search to create an overview of meal-kit firms in Sweden |
| 2010 autumn | Market analysis of the meal-kit market Supervising the development of a marketing plan in a student-run project for one of the start-ups (gaining insights into the market and situation in Sweden, competition, marketing strategies, pricing strategies, incomes and expenses, etc.) |
| 2011 spring | Online search to create an overview of meal-kit firms in Sweden |
| 2011 spring | Selecting firms and establishing contacts, reading up on the selected firms on their websites and news reports in the media |
| 2011 spring/summer | Interviews with six start-ups and three retailers |
| 2012 autumn | Interviews with five start-ups and three retailers |
| 2014 autumn | Online search to create an overview of meal-kit firms in Sweden |
| 2015 autumn/winter | Online search to create an overview of meal-kit firms in Sweden |
| 2017 summer | Searching the internet, magazines and other media to follow up on the meal-kit market in Sweden including the firms in my selected business cases |
| 2018 spring | Searching the internet, magazines and other media to follow up on the meal-kit market in Sweden including the firms in my selected business cases |
| 2018 summer | Interviews with seven start-ups |
| 2018 summer | Online search to create an overview of meal-kit firms in Sweden |

As rumours about my interest in the meal-kit market spread among friends and acquaintances, this provided me with a lot of information from the consumer side. Over the years, I was often drawn into discussions about meal kits with people who had tried various meal kits in their role as customers. I also received some help from contacts in the industry, such as a friend who works in the Swedish food sector and an acquaintance who previously worked at one of the largest meal-kit firms. Although these everyday conversations are not part of the documented empirical material, they have given me a deeper understanding of the context and provided opportunities

to reconcile my own interpretations with others. Together with my family and friends, I have also tried out some of the meal kits in the market. This has given me an idea of their products and their communication with customers.

2.2.7 Analysing and interpreting the empirical material

The analysis of the empirical material was done with a constant comparative logic, presented by Glaser (1965). This logic later became grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018) and involves a process of continuously comparing new material with extant material (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). Thus, the constant comparative logic entails an ongoing attempt to “confirm, enhance or discount the theoretical propositions under scrutiny” (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019, 266).

The analytical process was an ongoing effort and ran in parallel with the collection of empirical material. Thus, it was possible for the analysis to inform the subsequent collection of empirical material, leading to richer explanations.

The material was coded, sorted and analysed in an attempt to interpret what was going on. For the coding, I primarily employed what Saldaña (2013) has labelled a descriptive coding technique whereby interview extracts were coded into themes based on what the interviewees talked about. These themes were about anything from products, brands and customers to management issues, visions and personal feelings. According to Saldaña (2013, 88), descriptive coding is appropriate for most qualitative studies and is particularly well suited when looking into “longitudinal participant change”. For Paper III the descriptive coding was complemented by process coding (Saldaña, 2013). Here, process coding helped us to capture the branding process and how the founder’s identity interacted with the development of a brand. As Willig (2008, 164) suggests, processes are also embedded in psychological concepts such as identity, since identity is something that “people do rather than something people have”. Coding the material (descriptive coding as well as process coding) provided structure which, in the next step, allowed me to develop depth in my analytical process. This was because it allowed me to revisit and reflect on the material and also aspects that may have gone unnoticed when collecting the material (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019).

The material was then sorted and categorised based on the research questions in each paper. During this process, I strived to be sensitive to the material, as well as to my role as a researcher, as suggested by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) and Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019). This process involved the recurring interference of theory. Theory was used to try to understand the empirical material, but also to inspire the development of themes and the gathering of further material, for example, what follow up questions to ask during subsequent interviews. Thus, my inductive approach allowed research questions to emerge during this process. This can be described as an iterative process between empirics and theory (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011), in which ideas developed as I compared, combined and problematized.

In my endeavour to explain what happened when a market was being shaped, I looked for support in theoretical perspectives that provided insights into my phenomenon. I found this in literature from different theoretical fields, for example, sociology (identity work and institutional logics), entrepreneurship (embeddedness, agency and context) and marketing (corporate branding). The inclusion of different literatures is encouraged for researchers who adopt a social constructionist approach (Steyaert, 1997; Zahra, 2007; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). Zahra (2007) even describes this inclusion as important for widening the field of entrepreneurship research. In the process of shaping both empirical and theoretical understanding into a coherent contribution, I aimed to achieve what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) refer to as a *reflexive stance*. Further details about my analytical and interpretive process for the different papers can be found in appendices I–IV.

2.2.8 Empirical material in the four papers

Based on my empirical material, I have written four papers (see appendices I–IV). There has been some variation between the papers regarding which of my ten business cases that have been highlighted, and these are marked ‘X’ in Table 6. For Paper III and Paper IV, the highlighted business cases provide illustrative examples of what we found in a larger material, which is market ‘(X)’.

Table 6. Empirical material in Papers I–IV

| Firm | Paper I | Paper II | Paper III | Paper IV |
|---|----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Peaceful Dinner <i>Petra</i> | X | | X | X |
| Lisa’s Dinner <i>Lisa and Lars</i> | | | (X) | (X) |
| Home Grown <i>Helena and Homer</i> <i>/Harriet</i> | X | | X | (X) |
| Organic Dinner <i>Olga and Olivia</i> | X | | (X) | (X) |
| Great Supermarket <i>Greg</i> | | | | X |
| Emily’s Dinner <i>Emily</i> | X | X | (X) | (X) |
| Shop Around the Clock <i>Shaun</i> | | | (X) | (X) |
| Net Supermarket <i>Nelly</i> | | | | (X) |
| All Around Supermarket <i>Alvin /Allan</i> | | | | (X) |
| Dinner Time <i>David</i> | X | | (X) | X |

For Paper I, my co-author and I included all the start-ups that had their main business in meal kits and for which I had sufficient material. This concerned five of the seven start-ups. The two start-ups that we did not include were Shop Around the Clock, whose main business was in developing an e-commerce solution for a retailer, and Lisa’s Dinner, which I had too little material on at the time.

For Paper II, I focused on one of the start-ups, Emily’s Dinner. The aim was to illustrate how family members took part in the entrepreneurial process. Among my business cases, Emily’s Dinner offered insights into the entrepreneurial process from creation to exit, and was characterised by its extensive family embeddedness. Thus, this case study was chosen for its clarity and the numerous illustrative examples. I would like to add that I do not view Emily’s Dinner as a unique example of family embeddedness. In discussion with other researchers, including several researchers studying

family firms, it was clear that many of the researchers recognised this from other empirical contexts. However, as the current literature did not sufficiently address the actual mechanisms behind embeddedness and how it informs the entrepreneurial process, Emily's Dinner provided rich empirics to further understanding.

For Paper III, my co-author and I selected two of the earliest start-ups amongst my business cases; Peaceful Dinner, which was the first actor on the market and Home Grown, which was an early follower. As explained in Paper III, we chose these firms because they provided illustrative examples of what we had found in our larger material (the larger material is marked with (X) in Table 6) concerning how the founders interacted with their brands. They also gave us the opportunity to follow a founder from the early start-up phase to their exit from the firm. In both cases, such exits involved the founders handing over their firms to new owners. This also provided an opportunity to study, on a detailed level, how an exit affected the bond between a small firm brand and a founder's identity. At the same time, our chosen business cases gave us the opportunity to capture some of the differences found in the larger multi-case study, i.e. that Peaceful Dinner survived the transition to new owners and is still prospering in the market, whereas Home Grown did not and was closed down within a year of the transition.

For Paper IV, the analysis was conducted for all my business cases (marked with (X) in Table 6), amongst which I identified three interactive processes: preaching, tuning and windmilling. These processes were found in all of the business cases, but were more pronounced in some of them. However, in order to report the findings, I selected three of the business cases for illustration purposes – one for each process – to further explain what was found in the larger material. With this selection, I tried to capture the different approaches to my cases, while providing a clear illustration of my conceptual arguments.

2.3 Research quality

Most researchers agree that certain criteria are required in order to ensure the quality of research. However, there is no consensus on which quality criteria to use, particularly not in qualitative research (Morrow, 2005; Hammersley, 2007; Roos, 2021). One reason for this is that the researcher's view of quality

is affected by their ontological position (cf. Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018) as well as the purpose of the study and the method used (Patton, 2002 in Wigren, 2007). In the context of qualitative research, Hammersley (2007) suggest that we see it as *guidelines* rather than criteria, as it is above all a matter of showing judgment and honesty as a researcher in order to build trust. Thus, research is suggested to be good when it is trustworthy (Morrow, 2005; Hammersley, 2007; Wigren, 2007). In qualitative interpretivist research, as in this thesis, it is argued that trustworthiness is achieved when the research is authentic, plausible and critical (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Wigren, 2007).

2.3.1 Authenticity

Authenticity is about being genuine with your empirical material. A text is authentic to a reader when they can see that the researcher has been in the field, is genuine about his/her experiences and has grasped how participants understood their world (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Wigren, 2007). To be convincing, the text needs to include thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) in terms of richness in both detail and interpretations (Wigren, 2007).

To achieve rich material, I have gathered empirics from various sources, including interviews, websites, media and commercial material. This has helped me gain an understanding of entrepreneurship and the context in which it takes place. This is because assumptions must be understood based on their contexts, as argued by Lindgren and Packendorff (2009) and (Welter, 2011).

I have also tried to give an account of the richness of the material when creating the narratives in my four papers. The recorded interviews allowed me to reproduce word choices and wordings from the field. Van Maanen (1979) describes this as first-order concepts. These are the concepts that people in the field use in their everyday language and are somewhat associated with their interpretations and contexts.

Wigren (2007, 394) argues for the importance of researchers to “move beyond the polished stories told by and about entrepreneurs”. An example of a polished story that became clear during my study was that founders often described their firms as being focused on profitability, in which decisions and trade-offs were argued as being based on what was in the best interests of the firm. During my in-depth interviews, however, I had the opportunity to ask questions such as ‘why’ and “could you explain”. This sometimes

resulted in the interviewees providing other underlying reasons for their choices, which were more to do with life choices, family situation and personal feelings than with the firm's financial success, such as those described on company websites and during the introductory interviews. Thus, ensuring a firm's profitability seemed to be a norm, which the founders tried to live up to. It became clear to me that there could be many other interests in a firm than what was promoted on its website, in the media or even during the introductory interviews. It also became clear that one of the great values of in-depth interviews is delving into the motives that support different choices.

2.3.2 Plausibility

Plausibility is about "bridging the empirical and theoretical worlds" (Wigren, 2007, 394). This means linking the empirical material with theoretical concepts. The researcher's role here is to develop links and assumptions, and create understandings about them through theorising and communicating.

All the papers in this thesis aim to theorise and communicate the connections between empirics and theory based on the papers' different aims. Papers I, III and IV also give examples of my process of going from empirical material to theoretical concepts (see appendices I, III and IV).

In my research, the connections between the observations and the theoretical ideas emerged during the research process. An example of this is how my co-author and I came to theorise on the concept of identity work in Paper I. When we started with the first round of interviews, the questions were open and the founders were asked to talk openly about their firms and meal kits. It was not until after the second round of interviews that we started to note the connection with the identity concept and became curious about how identity played into the entrepreneurial process. Consequently, we showed more interest in the founders as people in the subsequent interviews and we read further in the literature on identity.

Wigren (2007) as well as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) suggest that the iterative process involves bringing together empirical and theoretical worlds. This makes it important to understand the theoretical perspectives that I bring to my interpretations as a researcher. This will be further discussed in the next section.

2.3.3 Criticality

Criticality means that the text offers its readers the possibility to challenge assumptions (Wigren, 2007). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993, 595) propose strategies for this such as “carving out room to reflect, provoking the recognition and examination of differences, and enabling readers to imagine new possibilities”. Thus, one of the important roles of the researcher is to take the time to reflect and be open to alternative interpretations. This is a matter of reflexivity, which I have discussed in 2.1.1. In qualitative research, it is important to understand the researcher’s role in the research, because “writing up qualitative data is about interpretations” (Wigren, 2007, 399). For a reflexive approach, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) encourage us to broaden our theoretical perspectives.

When I first started studying the meal-kit market, I had a vague idea that I would study new firms and their brands. However, as I gathered the empirical material, I tried to be open to other theoretical angles that could be important in understanding my multi-case study. Among other things, this led me to become interested in family embeddedness (after a detour around the concept of familiness), psychological ownership, and identity work. I allowed myself to fall into those rabbit holes, and then some, in my effort to understand the material from different perspectives.

I believe it is important to seek help from others to challenge your assumptions because I believe it is difficult to broaden and challenge your perspectives on your own, as this risks leaving you with your preconceptions and ideas. Thus, during the eight years that I studied the meal-kit market, I have actively sought input from others. I have revelled in discussions about the empirical material with colleagues from different fields, as well as with students, family, friends and acquaintances. Moreover, I have challenged my perspectives by taking courses, supervising students who have written their theses and engaging in academic conferences. Many of the subsequent meetings and discussions made me reconsider what I do and try out different perspectives.

Criticality also involves being open about the limitations of the empirical material (Wigren, 2007). It is important to be transparent with methodological choices, including both successes and setbacks when collecting empirical material. Successes in my case were, for example, that the market continuously grew, which meant that there was more for me to be curious about. The downside of this, however, was that it became

increasingly difficult to get an overview. Setbacks included some of the firms changing owners or managers during my study. This was a challenge, as my relationship had been with the previous owners/managers. In most cases, I was given the opportunity to also meet the new owners/managers, although developing trust in an interview setting can take time (Roos, 2021). If I had had the opportunity to deepen the new relationships, this may have led to more in-depth knowledge in these specific business cases. However, I believe that by not just focusing on the successful examples, i.e. the firms, founders and managers who did well, I further strengthened the trustworthiness of the research. This also responds to a recent call for “research that champions everyday entrepreneurs and challenges dominant ideal types” (Dodd et al., 2021, 1). Hence, studying both successful and less successful firms provides a balance in the empirical material as it sheds light on different types of business development.

Another important role of the researcher is to uncover taken-for-granted assumptions and show alternative interpretations, not just support the generally accepted interpretations (Wigren, 2007). I have also questioned taken-for-granted assumptions such as entrepreneurship being about developing profitable firms. Instead, I discuss entrepreneurship as change and look into entrepreneurial processes within their contexts. Moreover, I address environmental, social and economic values.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter describes my theoretical framework. The chapter begins with a discussion and explanation about my choice of literature. I then immerse myself in the theoretical concepts that I have chosen, to understand entrepreneurial processes when new markets are created and developed. Finally, I develop my theoretical synthesis.

3.1 Discussing the literature

In this thesis, the phenomenon studied is entrepreneurial processes, i.e. change, in the context of a new market. As my main research interest is in entrepreneurship, this is my point of departure. From being a PhD candidate in business studies, I have chosen to examine the changes that occur in firms, or more specifically when firms and individuals are involved in creating and developing a market.

Guided by my empirical material, as suggested by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), I have identified and selected three theoretical concepts that have helped me understand the entrepreneurial processes that take place in the shaping of a new market. These concepts are *embeddedness*, *identity work* and *branding*, and I have chosen them because they capture change, i.e. the process, by giving perspectives to the interactions between firms, individuals and markets. Thus, what connects these concepts is that they can be used to discuss the interactions between *agency and context* (Giddens, 1979; Welter, 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Welter and Baker, 2021). Agency is here referred to as the capacity to act (Schlosser, 2015), for example, the capacity to shape individuals, firms, including their brands, and markets. Context, on the other hand, involves conditions such as the opportunities and barriers that interact with agency.

The concept of *embeddedness* has been extensively discussed in the entrepreneurship literature (Granovetter, 1985; Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever et al., 2014; Wigren-Kristofersen et al., 2019). Embeddedness gives us insights into how individuals and their firms are embedded in, and thus interact with, a context. The concept of *identity work* captures how identities are constructed within a context. Here, identities may refer to the identities of individuals (Lindgren and Wåhlin, 2001; Watson, 2008; Danes and Jang, 2013), but also of firms (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Balmer, 2008) and markets (Jensen, 2010; Navis and Glynn, 2010). The concept of *branding* also captures the interaction between agency and context in that it highlights the process of creating a brand that is interpreted by stakeholders within a context (Hatch and Schultz, 2003), while the brand also influences the stakeholders and their contexts (cf. Welter, 2011). In this thesis I use branding to explain the development of a firm and how it interacts with its founders and the market.

In the following sections I will first discuss entrepreneurship as agency and context, followed by the three theoretical concepts: embeddedness, identity work and branding.

3.2 Entrepreneurship as agency and context

The focus of the entrepreneurship literature has traditionally been on the individual entrepreneur (Bygrave and Hofer, 1991; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Researchers have been involved in identifying what characterizes an entrepreneur by exploring personality traits, interests and psychological issues (McClelland, 1987; Zhao et al., 2010), or looking into the role an entrepreneur plays in the economic system (Shaw, 2011; Riswanto, 2016). In this way, research has tried to predict or even identify strategies to cultivate entrepreneurs (Shaw, 2011). In most theories, the entrepreneur has been the agent, and agency has been referred to as *the capacity to act* (Schlosser, 2015). However, in more recent research, ‘context’ is emphasized to understand entrepreneurship in terms of when, how and why it happens and who becomes involved (Welter, 2011). Thus, the discussion about context and agency has gained increasing interest in the entrepreneurship literature over the past decade (Welter, 2011; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Welter and Baker, 2021). In this discussion, the focus has shifted from the individual entrepreneur to the less

explored context. Much of this research about context follows a social constructionist perspective, arguing that entrepreneurship could be viewed as constructed through people's interactions and therefore as a social phenomenon (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009; Robson, 2013). As explained by Boje (1995 in Steier, 2007, 1100), "organizations cannot be registered as one story, but instead are a multiplicity, a plurality of stories and story interpretations in struggle with one another." Hence, instead of zooming in on the entrepreneur, we look at the entrepreneurial processes that take place in interaction with contexts. This takes us away from the heroic myth of an entrepreneur (Drakopoulou and Anderson, 2007; Anderson and Warren, 2011) to the co-construction with the many people, and their contexts, involved (Karami and Read, 2021).

Context has often been understood as the background, surroundings or external environments (Chappelli and Sherer, 1991) within which the entrepreneur acts (Boettke and Coyne, 2009). Thus, in most definitions, context is referred to as something that the entrepreneur relates to and acts upon. A more developed view is taken by Welter (2011) as she describes it as external circumstances, conditions, situations or environments. In this seminal work, context is explained as something multidimensional, involving the business, social, spatial and institutional dimensions that are influenced by history and time (Welter, 2011).

The contextualized view of entrepreneurship emphasizes how agency affects context and how context affects agency (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Welter, 2011). Thus, the relationship between entrepreneurship and context is a two-way interaction in which entrepreneurship also affects context. Welter refers to this as "recursive links" (Welter, 2011, 177), whereas Jack and Anderson (2002) explain this as a dynamic relationship in which value is both extracted from, and given to, the "environment" (i.e. context). These interactions and relationships are at the heart of entrepreneurship. Thus, this leads us to reflect on *how* actors become embedded in a context to enable interactions and relationships.

3.3 The process of embeddedness

Embeddedness is a concept that helps us understand "the nature, depth, and extent of an individual's ties into the environment" (Jack and Anderson, 2002, 468). Thus, embeddedness is a process that could help explain, for

example, how new markets are created and developed. In the following sections, I will first explain the concept of embeddedness in the literature and then discuss the process of embedding within the context of a new market.

3.3.1 The concept of embeddedness

Embeddedness, as a concept, focuses on the process of embedding entrepreneurs or firms into a context. It thereby captures the interactions between agency and context. In this process of embedding, the entrepreneur becomes part of the context, whether wittingly or unwittingly, which makes the entrepreneur dependent on, but also able to develop and use, the “specifics of the environment” i.e. context (Jack and Anderson, 2002, 467).

In the entrepreneurship literature, the concept of embeddedness has gained influence through several authors, but Granovetter’s (1985) work is one of the most used. He describes the extent to which economic actions are embedded in structures of social relations. By criticizing both the neoclassic economists for under-socializing economic action, and reformist economists for over-socializing these actions, he concludes that the embeddedness in structures (i.e. contexts) must be considered. While Granovetter (1985) focuses on social relations, viewing it as a process of becoming part of social contexts (cf. Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever et al., 2014), other scholars broaden the perspective to take on, for example, the embedding that takes place in business, social, institutional and spatial contexts (Welter, 2011; Roos, 2019).

Although embeddedness is often discussed as something the entrepreneur or the firm becomes or does – i.e. embedding – it should be clarified that this takes place in the interaction, i.e. in-between the entrepreneur and the context. Embedding is thus something within which both the entrepreneur and the context engage. Jack and Anderson (2002) explain how entrepreneurs embed themselves in structures to extract opportunities, implying that, to some extent, this involve making choices. Following this perspective, entrepreneurs participate in creating their own contexts and their associated opportunities and boundaries. Thus, context is not merely something to which an entrepreneur relates or acts upon, but something interchangeable that the entrepreneur takes part in creating by embedding, partly by choice. And likewise, the context may be more or less open to facilitating this embedding. This becomes an important issue when a new market is created, as not much is given at the start.

3.3.2 Embedding within the context of a shaping market

New markets are different in terms of context, as not much is given in the beginning. Most is new and the context is created and recreated over time. In the beginning there are, for example, no competitors or customers to deal with, the product has not been determined, and no supply chain has been established (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009). As actors grope their way forward, acting and interacting, the context is created on a step-by-step basis. As more firms enter the market, they co-create the context to which they relate.

When we discuss context and agency, we often assume that the context is somewhat given, i.e. it interacts with agency as it is (re)created. In a new market, however, there is certainly a context, but it is loosely structured because supply, demand and institutions are vague or undefined. Hence, expectations of what the new market is all about are open-ended. The contextual boundaries of a new market will be framed in relation to existing markets. In the case of meal-kit firms, this would, for example, be retail food stores, which constitute an important part of the consumer market for food.

3.4 The process of identity work

The concept of identity has received increased interest from scholars across multiple fields, including entrepreneurship, organization theory and marketing (Gaddefors, 2005; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Balmer, 2008, Brown, 2021). Identity has been approached on both the micro and macro level, yet few scholars have explored the ways in which the different ideas about identity interact, (i.e. how identity works between levels such as the individual level, firm level and market level) (Cornelissen et al., 2007). In this section, I will present and discuss individual identity, corporate identity and market identity. Following this, I will discuss how individual, corporate and market identity combine, and argue that the concept of identity is key to constructing new firms and markets.²

² The text in 3.4.1-3.4.4 is retrieved from Paper I (Appendix I, para 2.2) and placed here to provide an overall picture.

3.4.1 Individual identity and identity work

As I wrote in Paper I, the concept of identity in entrepreneurship literature primarily concerns an entrepreneur's individual identity (Danes and Jang, 2013). An individual's identity construction is highlighted as a theoretical body that "may contribute understandings of how people involved in entrepreneurial processes relate to each other and how the process affects their views of self" (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009, 35).

Individual identity has been understood as a product (what it is) or a process (how it is shared) (Pratt, 2003 in Danes and Jang, 2013). Identity as a process is constructed in a social context and influenced by one's own and other people's beliefs, values, feelings and actions (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). Lindgren and Wåhlin (2001, 358) refer to this as "reflexive identity construction" and explain that it is a process that builds on "social interaction and repeated self-reflexion". Hence, identity is not static but is rather constantly reformulated in interaction with others (Lindgren and Wåhlin, 2001; Watson, 2008, Brown, 2021). This processual understanding of identity has been referred to as 'identity work' (cf. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008; Brown, 2015; 2021) and is based on a distinction being made between internal self-identities and external social identities. In accordance with Watson (2008, p. 131), I understand self-identities as "the individual's own notion of who and what they are" and social identities as "cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be". Pratt (2003 in Danes and Jang, 2013) views these types of identities as two different sides of the same coin and describes them as two dimensions of identity: the personal dimension (self-reflecting on who I am) and the social dimension (self-reflecting on who we are). Thus, identity is connected to a person's sense of belonging (or not) to social groups, which provides the individual with a perceived frame of reference (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). These bases for identification sometimes compete and can appear differently in different social settings (Watson, 2008). However, the influence of discourses and social identities on a person's self-identity is not merely one-way; a person's self-identity can also influence social identities and discourses (Watson, 2008).

3.4.2 Corporate identity

Turning to the marketing literature and the corporate level, my departure point is the concept of corporate identity (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Blombäck

and Brunninge, 2009; Tourky et al., 2020). As discussed in Paper I, the meaning of corporate identity has not always been consistent in the literature, and there are several affiliated concepts (Balmer, 2008) that can sometimes cause confusion as scholars do not always specify how they define these terms. For example, a concept closely affiliated with corporate identity is *organizational identity* (Balmer, 2008; Soewarno et al., 2019). Traditionally, these two concepts have been used to address different research questions (Cornelissen et al., 2007). Whereas research in organization theory has focused on systems of shared meanings and how organizational members conceive organizational identity (Whetten and Mackey, 2002; Whetten, 2006), research on corporate identity has primarily focused on the projection of an image and how identity is communicated to an external audience (Goia, Schultz and Corley, 2000; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009). However, during the last decade, research in these two areas has become intertwined. The view of corporate identity now commonly concerns the projected image of an organization, yet includes its underlying organizational features (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Saran and Shokouhyar, 2021). Saran and Shokouhyar (2021, 2) explains corporate identity as “the sum of all the ways by which a company introduces itself to all its audiences”. In this thesis, as well as in Paper I and Paper III, I have chosen to use the concept of ‘corporate identity’ as I focus on how identity interacts with the market. I see corporate identity as being concerned about what an organization is (Balmer and Gray, 2003) and what it seeks to be (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012), i.e. the organizational features that make it unique and the intent for this identity to be translated to the market. This comprises the organization’s strategic choices (derived from its core values and culture) and how it elects to express them (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). Thus, we may include an organization’s vision and strategies in order to position and differentiate its business (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Rode and Vallaster, 2005; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Balmer (2008) tries to sort through the different perspectives on identity and suggests some schools of thought concerning identity and identification as *corporate identity* (identity of a corporation), *corporate identification* (identification from a corporation), *stakeholder identification* (identification with a corporation) and *corporate cultural identification* (identification with a corporate culture). From my perspective, these four schools of thought are reflected in the

identity work of individuals, firms and markets, which will be discussed in this thesis.

3.4.3 Market identity

Finally, let us now turn to market identity, sometimes referred to as *industry identity* (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Stigliani and Elsbach, 2018), which is a collectively shared identity between members of a market (Navis and Glynn, 2010). As explained in Paper I, market identity has been defined as “the social categories that specify what to expect of organisations and products that claim that identity” (Jensen, 2010, 40). Thus, the collective identity of a market adheres to a prototype, i.e. the best representation of what it means to be part of that specific market (Navis and Glynn, 2010). However, members of a market are not identical and thereby vary in the extent to which they conform to a prototype (Navis and Glynn, 2010). Instead, market identity becomes a common denominator to which firms have to relate. A firm’s corporate identity will thus be influenced by the industry in which it competes (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). This may create a challenge for members in navigating between the collective market identity and the identity of their organization, i.e. on the one hand what makes the firm similar to others in the market (what makes it belong) and, on the other hand, what makes the firm different and unique (Navis and Glynn, 2010). Hence, the interactions between firms in a market not only comprise competition, but also cooperation and coordination (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2016).

3.4.4 How identities interact to create new firms and markets

As noted in Paper I, the concept of identity has been approached on the individual, corporate and market levels. Yet few contributions have explored how these different levels of identity interact (Cornelissen et al., 2007) as new firms and markets are developed. Even though scholars of marketing have investigated how corporate identity is developed and sustained, their focus has been on large, established corporations (Abimbola and Kocak, 2007; Ahonen, 2008). However, relatively little research has been devoted to how corporate identity is created in start-ups (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007; Abimbola and Kocak, 2007), and there has been even less focus on new markets (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009; Jensen, 2010). Nevertheless,

exceptions can be found in the literature, such as Fauchart and Gruber (2011), who discuss how corporate identity in start-ups is constructed by the founders in interaction with context. Fauchart and Gruber (2011, 937) state that this is “both because organisational decisions are often made by a single person (the founder) and because emerging firms are typically small entities that are yet to be shaped”. Hence, the founder’s identity impacts the organization’s vision, structure and culture. An early developing identity often leaves an impression on the organization for a long time to come (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Rindova et al. (2007) show how the founder can serve as the very face of a firm, and how the founder’s identity creates legitimacy for the business. As new members become involved in an organization, they will also influence its corporate identity by bringing values, different kinds of behaviours and attitudes to the firm that will influence its organizational culture, communication with stakeholders and perhaps even its strategies and visions. Hence, “corporate identity is continuously (re)formulated, in processes that simultaneously influence internal and external audiences” (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2008, 404).

Likewise, market identity has primarily been investigated in established markets (cf. Wang, 2016) and has then been concerned with a firm’s positioning in and compliance with a market, whilst neglecting the development of a new market identity. In one of the few contributions, Jensen (2010) argues that a new market identity can be created by combining existing categories in new ways. Navis and Glynn (2010) explain that just as market identity is collectively shared, it is also collectively constructed as members emphasize similarities across firms. When a new market is taking shape, the first few actors are pivotal in constructing the emerging market identity. These actors often put a lot of effort into claiming the market, meaning they simultaneously define an identity for the firm as well as the market, so that the two become synonymous (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009). If this is achieved, the firm will become the cognitive referent for other actors as they strive to join the market. Examples of this are Rollerblades being the referent for inline skates, iPads being the referent for eReaders or tablets, and Jacuzzis being the referent for whirlpools. Thus, as new actors enter the market, they need to build on their similarities to the present members in order to claim membership (Navis and Glynn, 2010). A collective market identity thereby becomes the basis for new members, within which they develop their own distinctive identities (Navis and Glynn, 2010). New

members will, of course, impact the market context as they bring values, different kinds of behaviour and increased competition. In doing so, they become part of the constant (re)creation of the market identity as they interact with other members.

To sum up, I have explained how the identities of individuals, firms and markets combine, and have argued that these theoretical concepts can make it easier to understand entrepreneurial processes in developing firms and markets.

3.5 The process of branding

Branding has received a lot of attention in the marketing literature and has also been discussed in the entrepreneurship literature. Branding has a strategic importance for firms (Hatch and Schultz, 2001) because firms that are brand focused have an advantage over competitors that are not (Berthon et al., 2008). In this thesis, I focus on the corporate branding (henceforth, *branding* and *corporate branding* will be used synonymously) of a firm, i.e. what an organization communicates in a broader sense, which is different from product branding of a specific product (Kay, 2006). As I wrote in Paper III³, it has been suggested that corporate branding is a better choice for small developing firms, and it is about how the corporate identity is perceived by all stakeholders (Gray and Balmer, 1998). In this section, I will explain what corporate branding involves and then discuss branding in start-ups and small developing firms.

3.5.1 Corporate branding

Corporate branding is an interesting subject because it captures how firms are perceived by customers and other stakeholders and also shapes a firm's identity (see 3.4.2).

As explained in Paper III, in the literature, branding can be interpreted as involving a number of functions, of which three key functions are: to create recognition for a brand, to differentiate a brand from competing brands, and to add value (Kay, 2006). Creating brand recognition is about customers and other stakeholders knowing the brand and being able to connect it with a

³ The text in 3.5 is retrieved from Paper III (Appendix 3, para 2.1-2.2) and placed here to provide an overall picture.

vendor (Keller, 2008). Differentiating a brand is about stakeholders perceiving a difference in a brand when compared to other similar brands on the market (Keller, 2008). Yet, being different is not enough if the difference makes no sense to customers and other stakeholders (Kay, 2006). Thus, corporate branding is not just about recognizing and differentiating, but about creating a sense of belonging to core values (Urde, 2003; 2009; Barchiesi and La Bella, 2014; Yoganathan et al., 2018). Yoganathan et al. (2018) describes core values as a small set of deeply-rooted principles that underlie the defining characteristics of a corporate brand. Similarly, Urde (2003, 1017) argues that core values are “the overarching concepts that summarize the identity of the corporate brand” and that core values are to be discussed as “guiding lights for the brand building process”. Thus, the core values that are embedded in a corporate brand need to resonate with the values that are perceived and appreciated by stakeholders over time, and vice versa (cf. Urde, 2009). Adding value to a brand is thereby a continuous process in which managers specify core values, and these values are interpreted and redefined by different stakeholders (Kay, 2006).

Thus, corporate branding takes place in interaction with customers and other stakeholders (Pranjal and Sarkar, 2020). In recent decades, the firms’ work with corporate branding has been strongly influenced by the increased interest in sustainable development in society, both through pressure from stakeholders (Lahtinen and Närvänen, 2020) and by values within the internal organization (Garas et al., 2018). The seminal work by Hatch and Schultz (2001; 2003) suggests that the corporate brand is decided in the dynamics between the management and its vision for the company, the employees and their organizational culture, as well as the stakeholders and how they view the company’s image, i.e. the outside world’s overall impression of the firm. Thus, corporate branding can be understood as a social process involving multiple stakeholders (Iglesias et al., 2017), including executive management, organizational members and external stakeholders (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; 2003; De Roeck et al., 2013; Mingione, 2015). Juntunen (2012) adds that in small firms, managers often welcome assistance from stakeholders in their branding work, and that employees are particularly important. Thus, we see how involvement in the branding process is multifaceted. Branding takes place in interaction with local contexts (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2008), and it is here that our interest lies – in the process of branding and how brands develop.

3.5.2 Branding in small developing firms

The meal-kit market, which I have researched, was initially characterized by small start-ups. The literature explains that branding is vital for small firms, particularly at the start-up stage (Petkova and Rindova, 2008; Bresciani and Eppler, 2010; Maldonado-Guzman et al., 2018). Timmons (1999) suggests that if start-ups do not succeed to establish their brand in a relatively short time frame, they will disappear from the market. However, several scholars report that brand management is not necessarily prioritized in small firms and start-ups (cf. Inskip, 2004; Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Ojasalo et al., 2008).

As explained in Paper III, it has been found that branding in small firms and start-ups differs significantly from branding in larger and established companies. In small start-ups, brand management is not a given, as it is in most large and established companies (Berthon et al., 2008; Spence and Essoussi, 2010). For example, start-ups often have quite a flexible business structure, in which business concepts, values and philosophy often only exist in the mind of the founder (Rode and Vallaster, 2005). Small firms also appear to have a rather narrow interpretation of branding that is mostly associated with the brand name, logo and advertising (Inskip, 2004; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Ojasalo et al., 2008). Some small firms even fail to recognize that they have a brand (Krake, 2005; Merrilees, 2007; Bresciani and Eppler, 2010) as they are of the common opinion that branding is solely for large, established companies (Merrilees, 2007). Several authors suggest that barriers to branding, such as limited financial resources, human resources and time, impact the level of brand orientation in small firms (Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Ojasalo et al., 2008; Horan et al., 2011; Juntunen, 2012).

Thus, branding is important but is not a priority in small developing firms. Similarly, the branding literature seems to give priority to large, well-established organizations at the expense of the branding of smaller firms and start-ups, about which there is scant literature (Bresciani and Eppler, 2010; Maldonado-Guzman et al., 2018). However, this thesis focuses on how branding unfolds throughout the entrepreneurial process in small developing firms in new markets. Furthermore, in order to demarcate from the perspective of a large company, familiar in marketing theory (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2008), we have chosen to discuss firms and firm branding, instead of companies and corporate branding. We thereby focus on the efforts of

small start-ups to create and develop a brand through creating recognition, differentiation, and adding value to a market.

3.6 Theoretical synthesis

In order to explore how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of new markets, I refer to literature that provides insight into the process of change. While doing so, I adopt a contextualized viewpoint. Based on my empirical material, I explore entrepreneurial processes by providing perspectives from the interactions with founders, firms and the market. In this thesis, I discuss entrepreneurial processes using three main theoretical lenses: embeddedness, identity work and branding (see Figure 1). I chose these perspectives because they helped me develop an understanding of my empirical material in order to achieve my aim.



Figure 1. Theoretical framework. Entrepreneurial processes are discussed as embeddedness, identity work and branding.

Starting with embeddedness, this provides an understanding of how founders and their firms are embedded in contexts. The process of embedding takes place between the founder, the firm and the context. Thus, embeddedness offers an opportunity to understand entrepreneurial processes as a market is created and developed.

Secondly, identity work provides perspectives on how identities develop in interaction with a context. As I argue in Paper I, this not only concerns the identities of founders, but also the identities of firms and markets. Hence, the process of identity work offers a useful lens to discuss how the identities of individuals, firms and markets interact.

Thirdly, branding is the attempt to consolidate an identity in a market, i.e. an attempt by founders and other stakeholders to influence how a firm is perceived by others. Hence, branding is a process that includes interactions between the founder and their vision of the brand, the employees and their corporate culture, and the stakeholders and their perceived image of the firm. This involves interactions between the founder, the firm and the market, thereby offering an opportunity to understand entrepreneurial processes.

There is much we can learn between research fields in the quest to understand a phenomenon (Zahra, 2007). From a theoretical perspective, this thesis intends to further our understanding of entrepreneurial processes when a market is created and developed. Yet, and as explained in Chapter 1, new markets have the opportunity to change patterns of consumption and production, and therefore new markets are an interesting phenomena in society's quest for sustainable change. By shedding light on how new markets emerge and how different values are created and developed in a market, the idea in this thesis is to thereby also better understand how sustainable development measures can be implemented. Embeddedness can help us learn about how sustainable values are embedded and interact with actors in a market. Since values are important in identity work, the concept of identity work gives us an opportunity to understand how sustainable values are (re)created when individuals, firms and markets interact. Through branding, these sustainable values can also be communicated to and influence individuals, firms and the market at large.

4. Empirics

In this chapter I provide examples from the evolving meal-kit market. More specifically this is my account based on the founder's accounts and all the other material I have collected. I have purposefully described how the market has developed. My description is primarily based on the many accounts that people have shared with me during this research, but also other types of material. Theories and feedback from colleagues have also been part of my authorship (see Chapter 2). However, it is me who is holding the pen.

Gadamer (in Mootz, 1988) brought up the idea of fusing horizons in order to achieve a full understanding. Even though I believe it is not possible to achieve a unified horizon, I still believe that we may benefit from *trying* to fuse horizons. If we make an effort to understand others, it may provide us with new perspectives. I believe that perspectives and actions are interrelated; our perspectives guide our actions and, correspondingly, our actions affect our perspectives. Thus, by making an effort to understand, we will also bring about change.

In the following sub-sections, I will describe how the meal-kit market evolved: from the first initiative to the emerging market, to the change when giant food retailers joined the market and finally, the development that followed. But first, I will provide a brief overview of the market development and the business cases in my thesis.

4.1.1 Overview of the development of the Swedish meal-kit market

Figure 2 below is my attempt to provide an overview of the number of firms in the market from 2007–2018. This shows the number of firms at different times and includes an overview of when my selected business cases started their meal-kit businesses and, on some occasions, closed down. I started my study in 2010, when the market was nascent. At the time, around 20 firms

were operating in the Swedish market, several of which had just started, or were about to start. Out of these firms I selected ten that I studied more closely over the years. See 2.2.5 for details about my selection process.

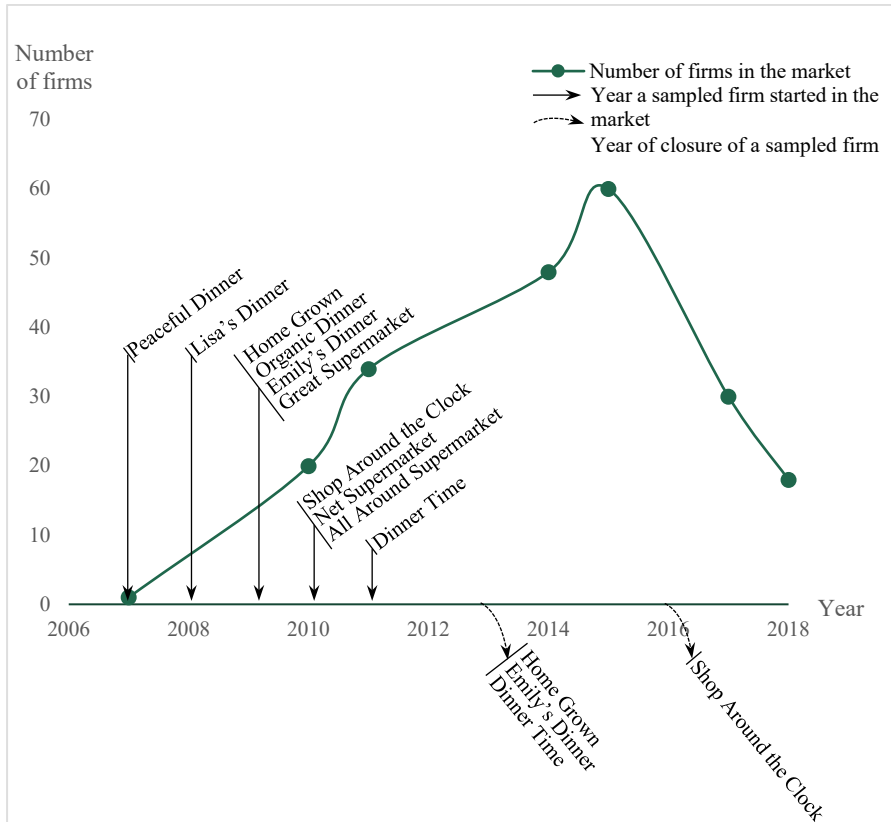


Figure 2. Number of meal-kit firms in Sweden from 2007–2018, showing the sampled business cases – when they started operating (above the year line) and their closure, where applicable (below the year line).

The development of the meal-kit market was complex and it was difficult to create an overview of how it developed. However, clarifying the timeline and a few of the key elements of the accounts is an important task.

There have been initiatives to provide registers of meal-kit firms in Sweden, such as “Matkasse.se”, “Hittamatkasse.nu”, “Jamformatkasse.nu” and “Matkassetopplistan.se”, although these registers are partially used for advertising and therefore cannot be expected to be fully reliable and comprehensive. Some firms have closed down but still appear in the

registers. Other meal kit firms do not appear in these registers as they are difficult to find or did not make the effort to appear on such lists. This particularly applies to firms that offer meal kits as a sideline, such as a restaurant or local grocery store providing meal kits as an additional service for their customers.

Hence, the overview in Figure 2 is based on my knowledge of comparing different registers, looking up firms and conducting online searches in Google for meal kits in Sweden.

4.1.2 The new initiative

When I first heard about meal kits, I was impressed by this clever solution to everyday dinner problems that so many people experience, including myself. I saw it as an ingenious way of simplifying everyday family life, introducing a more healthy diet and also guiding consumers towards more sustainable choices. The idea was to provide pre-planned meal kits for families. Every meal kit contained a dinner solution for five days and included ingredients and recipes. It worked on a subscription basis whereby meal kits were home delivered to the customers once a week. Thus, customers did not have to think about what to eat, find recipes, plan their purchases or shop, and could concentrate on cooking instead.

Sweden seemed to be an obvious place for such an initiative. In various comparative studies, Swedish consumers have been described as particularly trend conscious and open to new products, and international actors have often used Sweden as a test market when introducing new food products and concepts (Wikström, 2020). Moreover, even when the first meal-kit firms were started, there was a trend to buy household services in Sweden, and this was spurred by the gender equality debate (Regeringen, 2007; Sveriges Riksdag, 2007a) and political initiatives to reduce taxes for such services (Regeringen, 2007; Sveriges Riksdag, 2007b).

The initiative for meal kits came from Petra, a management consultant, at a time when she was looking for a change in life. She came up with the idea in May 2007 and developed it over the summer through discussions with her family and friends. Petra had always been interested in food, health and sustainability, and these values were reflected in the core values of her firm, Peaceful Dinner, which started operating in October of the same year. By this time, Petra had gathered a dedicated team around her, consisting of her husband and two students working part time.

As Peaceful Dinner was the first firm in what subsequently developed into a market, there were no direct competitors to relate to in the beginning. The meal-kit concept was something new. However, this initiative address a basic need for consumers, namely, putting food on the table. Yet, it did this in a new way. Petra wanted to create customer value not only through the food products, but through the convenience of the service. This convenience meant that someone else had taken the trouble of deciding what's for dinner, shopping and delivering meal kits, and that the recipes and ingredients had been chosen with care for their environmental, social and economic value; environmental value, in the way that the food products were selected to reduce environmental impact, for example, by taking into account the season, where and how the food had been produced, and combining menus in order to reduce food waste; social value in the sense that the food would be home cooked and healthy, free of unnecessary additives, and produced in a socially sustainable way, for example, by caring for working conditions; economic value in the sense that the meal kits were affordable and planned in such a way that all food would be consumed to avoid wasting money.

4.1.3 A new market is emerging

A market soon began to emerge from the initiative and was a collaboration between the initiators, potential customers who discussed the product, early customers who tried it out and provided feedback, and partners such as carriers and suppliers. Petra explains that it was not simply just about procuring a carrier or supplier, but that they needed to collaborate to make the concept work.

“The first week we drove to Skrå, a farming community located outside Ekerö. It took 40 minutes. I accompanied the driver who was delivering the meal kits, just to see how it worked. We had to let them [the customers in Skrå] know that we couldn't deliver there; we couldn't spend 40 minutes on a single delivery. Then we drove to the seaside town of Årsta and to Kungsängen, and we also had to exclude them. The carrier had stated a specific fee for each stop, but they couldn't manage it. Sometimes when we're dealing with carriers, we have had to think for them – telling them that they won't be able to manage this.” (Petra at Peaceful Dinner)

Thus, the service did not develop overnight but was rather a gradual process of realizing the initiative while different actors and firms cooperated as they gradually learned the ropes and developed together.

As word of the meal kits spread, more start-ups joined the market as they became inspired by the meal-kit concept. Lisa's Dinner was one of the very first start-ups and began in February 2008, just six months after Peaceful Dinner. It was founded by Lisa and Lars, who were siblings. Lisa was a trained dietitian with experience of preschool kitchens, while Lars was an entrepreneur with experience of running a charity website. Lisa wanted to work as a dietitian but found it difficult to access the labor market, while Lars was looking for a new project to take on. They had considered selling pre-packed grocery bags to be collected by customers, i.e. parents, at preschools. However, what they heard about Peaceful Dinner made them rethink and develop their concept into home deliveries instead. Thus, when they started their firm, the concept was fairly similar to Peaceful Dinner's concept, and they also had a sustainability profile that included reducing food waste to save on the environment and money, sustainable products and, eventually, also a charity (donating meal kits to Kenya). Lars put a great effort into growing the firm rapidly and Lisa's Dinner has since been one of the largest actors in the market.

Three of my business cases started up during the following year, in 2009. One of them was Home Grown, founded in September 2009 by married couple Helena and Homer. They had previous experience of running a small café and then a bakery, and as they had good contact with a local farmer, the meal-kit concept was particularly suitable for them. Helena and Homer valued locally and organically produced food and worked to support local small-scale farmers; these values were incorporated in their meal-kit business.

Another meal-kit firm that started in 2009 in the same autumn was Organic Dinner, founded by Olga and Olivia. They offered a virtually fully organic alternative and the values of their firm were based on health, sustainability and culinary pleasure. Olga and Oliva were friends who dreamed of starting a business together and had been looking for ideas about this while promoting organic food. Since this time, Organic Dinner has been a stable actor in the market offering an organically niched meal kit.

The third of my business cases that started in 2009 is Emily's Dinner. It was founded by Emily in December, at a time when she was muddling

through temporary jobs and looking for something that was longer term. Emily had no previous experience of selling or working with food. But she had worked as a marketing manager at a local pub, as a seller and manager at a telephone company, and had helped out at different firms owned by members of her family. Emily's family comprised several local entrepreneurs including an owner of a wholesale company dealing in fruit and vegetables and an owner of a carrier company. This made the meal-kit concept particularly suitable for Emily.

During the market's early development, it was mainly start-ups such as those described above that began to offer meal kits. These firms built their entire business concepts around meal kits. In 2009, most of them were small with no or only a few employees. Some of them even operated their business from their homes. However, things were about to change.

4.1.4 When the giants came to dinner

During the second half of 2009 and at the beginning of 2010, large incumbents in the adjacent retail food market gradually began to try their hand at meal kits. At the time, retailers did this on a fairly small scale. However, this was a new kind of competition because retailers could offer complementary shopping to their customers in a way that the start-ups, confined to their meal kits, could not.

The first retailer, Great Supermarket, was one of the largest retailers in Sweden with around 600 stores throughout the country. Its investment in the meal-kit market began in August 2009 when it started offering meal kits through its recent investment in an online store. At that time, however, less than 0.5% of Swedish food sales were online (Svensk Handel, 2011), so this was a very small part of its overall business.

The second retailer, Net Supermarket, was a young firm that had started just a few years earlier as an e-food retailer. Hence, it had no local stores and only operated online. In April 2010, it started to include meal kits in its product range, but without really marketing them during the first year. Nelly, who founded the firm with her husband, explains this by saying: "We thought we would include it [a meal kit], but we're still just an online grocery store" (Nelly at Net-based Grocery).

Then, in the summer of 2010, rumours circulated that All Around Supermarket, one of the largest retailers in Sweden, intended to make a major investment in the meal-kit market. I first heard about this from a friend who

had a senior role in the retailer's organization. As I was describing my interest in the meal-kit market, he quietly looked at me for a while, as if he had a secret and was evaluating whether or not to tell me. Finally, he gave me the name of one of his colleagues, and without saying anything more, suggested that I contact him straight away.

From the retailers' perspective, as always, they kept a close eye on the market, monitored the outside world, discussed and deliberated. This was part of their routine. Once they had decided that the meal-kit market was sufficiently interesting, they introduced small-scale pilot projects and evaluated them before developing a more large-scale strategy.

“We have been monitoring the market since [Peaceful Dinner] started, to see how much it grows, how big it is, where it's heading. We decided to do a pilot study. We conducted focus group surveys and talked to customers, calculated profitability and what it would require, and then we started a project. It was a fairly traditional approach.” (Alvin at All Around Supermarket)

A few of the start-ups that I spoke with during the same autumn had also heard the rumours about All Around Supermarket entering the market. Many of them had expected that the retailers would come, thinking that, of course, these giants would be interested, as selling food to consumers had been their undisputed territory. David at Dinner Time, one of the start-ups, explains:

“We change the buying behaviour of consumers, so they're [referring to the retailers] very afraid of us. [...] I don't think any retail store that starts a meal kit does so because of volume; they only do it because they're anxious that the meal-kit market might take their share.” (David at Dinner Time)

Some of the start-ups worried about the uncertainty and drastic changes that the retailers could create, and it made them hesitant about making any further investment, while others felt compelled to invest in order to assert themselves in an increasingly competitive market. However, others seemed to be more at ease, believing that their specific market niche gave them an edge, because the retailers would aim for the bulk consumers. Below are some quotes from the start-ups during this period, which reflect on the retailers and their meal-kit concepts:

“It is built to have an immediate impact [referring to the retailer’s meal-kit concept]. I believe that a number of actors will be excluded.” (Petra at Peaceful Dinner)

“All the retailers must keep up with developments [...] We have seen an explosion in a market that did not previously exist.” (Homer at Home Grown).

“The retailers are likely to do very well, although they probably represent a bigger threat to the larger players [...]. We’re still so small we can have a personal relationship with our customers.” (Olga at Organic Dinner)

However, when All Around Supermarket entered the meal-kit market, it was not as busy as some had expected. Surprised by this, one founder replied: “There must be something seriously wrong with their meal kits. They’re not selling anything at all.” (David at Dinner Time)

One explanation provided by several of the start-up founders was that customers had become accustomed to the meal-kit firms, and their commitment to sustainability seemed to be the norm in the market. Petra, who founded the first ever meal-kit firm, reflects on this and differs between *us* (the meal-kit firms) and *them* (the retailers), saying: “Their business model is that the consumer should buy as much as possible, while our business model is that the consumer should buy exactly what they need, and that no food should be wasted” (Petra at Peaceful Dinner). Olga also reflects on the fact that it is difficult for retailers to replicate her sustainability profile, saying: “I feel very safe and confident that what we [Organic Dinner] do is something unique that is difficult for others to replicate” (Olga at Organic Dinner).

Thus, All Around Supermarket had a tough start getting its centralized meal-kit concept adopted by its many stores. Using a business model similar to a franchise, the stores were free to make their own decisions about such matters. All Around Supermarket’s central meal-kit concept also had competition that could almost be considered as coming from within. This was a start-up called *Shop Around the Clock*, which specifically targeted All Around Supermarket’s stores with an e-commerce solution that included a meal kit.

However, for the retailers, it was not primarily about the short-term financial gain. Alvin at All Around Supermarket explains this saying: “We do a lot of things that are about being able to offer what the customer wants and being able to make a positive contribution to our brand.” Greg at Great Supermarket says: “We want to show that we act here as well.” Thus, for the retailers, it was largely a matter of retaining both their customers and their brand.

4.1.5 The development

Despite the fact that the major retailers had begun competing in the market, the number of firms continued to rise between 2010 and 2015 from around 20 firms in 2010 to around 60 firms in 2015 (see Figure 2). During this period Dinner Time emerged, which is the last of my selected business cases. It delivered its first meal kit in January 2011 and the firm was started by David and two of his friends. None of them had any previous experience of selling or working with food. They simply saw the meal-kit concept as a profitable business idea. After studying the market, they decided to profile their meal kit as a local option by filling it with locally produced food, even though they did not have particularly strong feelings about food and sustainability.

From 2010–2015, some actors also chose to sell or close down their businesses due to the increased competition. David talks about this saying:

“Actors are now going bust. Many of them have contacted us and want to sell their businesses. There are medium-sized businesses like us, and those that are going under now [referring to the small businesses], and then there are the large actors that are stable [referring to the largest start-ups in the market, i.e. Peaceful Dinner and Lisa’s Dinner].” (David at Dinner Time)

Finally, in 2013, the team at Dinner Time also decided to close down as they were not able to make the business profitable enough. The same year two more of my selected firms closed down. One was Emily’s Dinner, at which Emily had been struggling for years, but without being able to make ends meet. The other firm was Home Grown, at which Helena and Homer had handed over their business to a new owner the year before (for a modest compensation). Helena and Homer explained that it was taking up too much time for such a small profit and that they had therefore decided to sell. The

new owner, Harriet, was unable to make the business profitable, despite her efforts, and it eventually disappeared from the market in 2013.

The difficulties faced by these actors and other actors in the market had a lot to do with the increased competition. During developments from 2010–2015, more and more varieties of meal kits appeared, such as children’s meal kits, meal kits for couples, meal kits for three days, weekend meal kits, luxury dinner meal kits, cozy Friday meal kits, Christmas meal kits, midsummer meal kits and barbecue meal kits, to name a few.

Several of the start-ups also began selling additional products along with the meal kits. Thus, they went from being solely focused on meal kits to also offering baskets of mixed fruits, baking kits and breakfast kits. David at Dinner Time explains that they saw this as a way of meeting the competition from the major retailers. “The customer spends SEK 800 with us and I think they spend at least SEK 800 in their local store on toothpaste, toilet paper and such like [...] Maybe we could build a store around the meal kits [...] Our carrier is already out and about delivering” (David at Dinner Time).

4.1.6 The giants gain

Now, let me tell you a somewhat parallel story – the story of the retailers’ online food sales. It is difficult to understand the meal-kit market without also looking at how it interacted with the adjacent retail food market. Long before meal kits appeared, online sales had been considered by the major retailers and some of them, such as Great Supermarket, heavily invested in this concept. Online food sales would mean less dependency on a stores’ physical location and therefore represented an opportunity for business growth. Yet, alongside this opportunity lurked a threat, namely, the fear that other major retailers would expand online at their expense and steal their previously loyal store customers. Thus, the retailers’ investments in e-commerce were a way of addressing both market opportunities and threats from competitors. However, online food sales had not taken off, despite the retailers’ efforts and investments. The founders and retailers I have spoken to suggested that it was to do with it being difficult to change customers’ habits, habits that were based on regular visits to local supermarkets. David at Dinner Time sums it up saying: “It’s all about consumer behaviour”.

In this development of retailers’ e-commerce, meal kits came to play an important role. Once customers had learned to shop for meal kits online, they seemed to become open to the idea of purchasing other food online. This is

confirmed by statistics from the Swedish Digital Commerce Association, which show that purchasing meal kits online was related to the willingness to purchase other kinds of food online (Svensk Digital Handel, 2016; 2018). Actors soon started talking about these parallel markets as ‘loose picks’ (e-commerce of groceries) and ‘meal kits’ (ready-made dinner solutions). The annual reports from the Swedish Digital Commerce Association (Svensk Digital Handel, 2016; 2018) even presented it as a race – loose pick vs. meal kits (see Figure 3). It was presented as if the meal-kit firms had been leading this race for some years, and then in 2014/2015, the loose picks passed the meal kits in terms of the proportion of total sales (Svensk Digital Handel, 2018, 6). This race, and the shift it aims to show in the online food market, is illustrated in Figure 3.

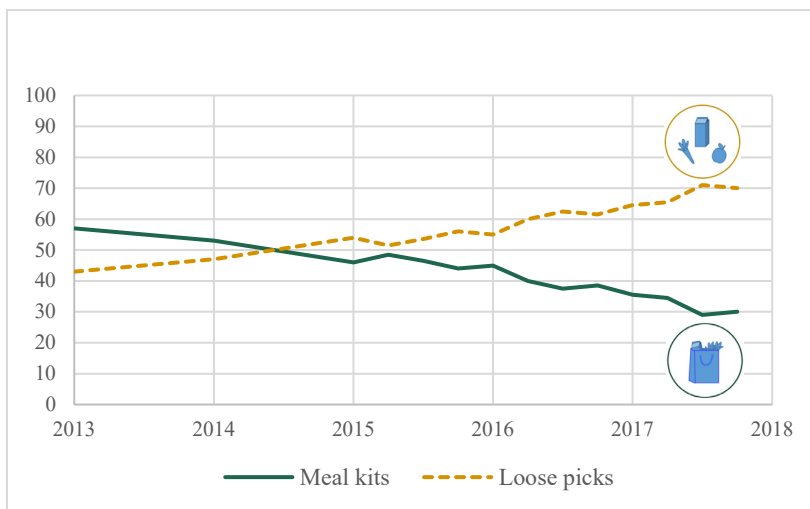


Figure 3. Proportion (in percentage) of online food sales, meal kits vs. loose picks (data source: Svensk Digital Handel, 2016; 2018).

The trend of buying food online continued to grow in Sweden in the subsequent years, 2015–2018. Looking at the overall food market, online food sales almost doubled, from 1% of the overall food market in 2015, corresponding to a turnover of EUR 300 million (Svensk Digital Handel, 2018; Post Nord et al., 2021), to almost 2% in 2018 (Post Nord et al., 2018; Post Nord et al., 2021), corresponding to a turnover of around EUR 580 million (Svensk Digital Handel, 2018). See Figure 4.

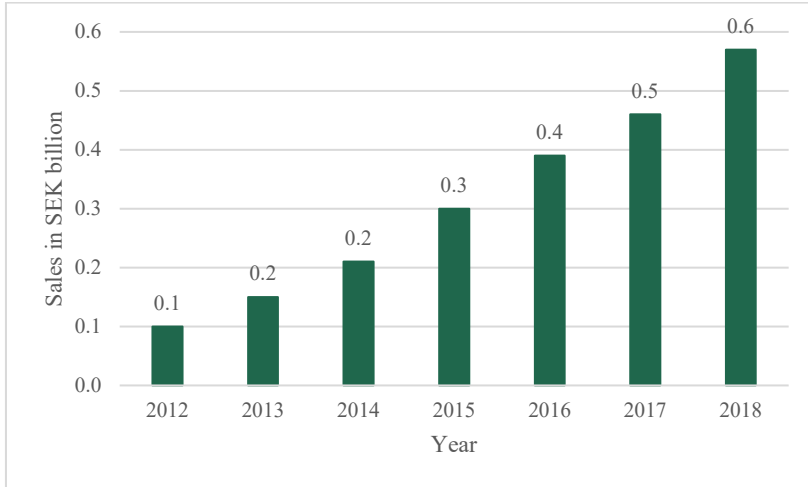


Figure 4. Food sales online in Sweden from 2012–2018. (Svensk Digital Handel, 2018; Post Nord et al., 2021).⁴

However, this increase was mainly due to the sales in loose pick. In 2018, when I stopped collecting empirical data, loose picks accounted for around 70% of online food sales and meal kits for around 30% (Svensk Digital Handel, 2018).

Now let us take a closer look at this so-called race between meal kits and loose picks. Even though it looks like loose picks were winning over the meal kits in the statistics, we can question whether this was actually ‘a race’ as in a competition for the same market. Many of the founders I interviewed believed that meal kits and loose picks were two different markets, although one could benefit from the other. David at Dinner Time exclaimed: “They have to separate them”. Shaun at Shop Around the Clock investigated the difference between customers for meal kits and customers for loose picks. He explains:

“When we did some research, we discovered that the meal-kit customer is actually another type of customer – they are not necessarily an e-commerce customer. Those customers who buy meal kits want culinary inspiration, want simplicity, want to be healthy, want to cook, want to have good family routines, and not just

⁴ I found no data before 2012. Industry organizations, such as Svensk Handel, began compiling statistics for online food in 2012. The statistics reported before 2012 are merged with other online sales of groceries, e.g. goods from pharmacies and health food stores, which do not primarily deal with food.

eat fish fingers and meatballs [implying that fish fingers and meatballs are what the typical e-commerce customer buys].” (Shaun at Shop Around the Clock)

The perspective of the founders and retail managers on the matter was that the meal-kit market had reached a point of consolidation, while there was also growth in the parallel market for e-commerce of food (loose picks). Thus, with this perspective, loose picks did not actually compete with meal kits for the same market. Instead, the real competition took place between ‘retail in store’ vs. ‘retail online’. Thus, what was embedded in the statistics was primarily the transformation of the retail food market.

Hence, the meal kits provided a boost to the retail food market. Petra at Peaceful Dinner explains: “I believe it was the meal kits that paved the way. It started with the meal kits, then these were followed by online food, because now the customer wants everything in one place”. So, when customers bought a meal kit and, in doing so, learned to shop for food online, they could just as well buy other food online. Thus, many food actors consider meal kits to be the pioneers in online food shopping, and by attracting customers away from physical stores they helped to accelerate other food sales online (Svensk Digital Handel, 2018). In this way, many actors claim that the meal kits ‘taught’ consumers to buy food online and thereby changed consumer behaviour in the adjacent retail market for food.

4.1.7 The consolidation of the market and the end of the accounts

Now let us return to the meal-kit firms, so I can provide the final accounts. From 2015–2018, a consolidation could be seen in the market, characterized by strong competition with many mergers and acquisitions. The number of actors offering meal kits significantly decreased, from around 60 firms offering meal kits in 2015 to around 20 firm in 2018 when I stopped my empirical study (see Figure 2). Greg at Great Supermarket says: “We see a merger of the firms in order to capture volume, a merger of the smaller actors. For many actors, I think this has been a hobby. They have sold 100–200 meal kits a week and have done so with the help of family members and such like” (Greg at Great Supermarket). It was primarily the firms that had specialized in meal kits that closed down their operations. Some of them, for example, Dinner Time, sold its customer base to a larger actor, while others, such as Lisa’s Dinner, brought in investors, and still others, such as Home Grown, were sold off.

As many start-ups closed down, more retailers joined the market. For the retailers who had invested in e-commerce, it was seen as a comparative advantage to also offer meal kits. As customers who bought meal kits were more open to shopping for food online, it was a matter of convenience for them to buy everything at the same time. In this way, the meal kits gave the retailers an opportunity to grow their e-commerce. It also meant that the retailers had a major advantage over firms that only offered meal kits. They could easily offer complementary shopping, i.e. the loose picks of everything from milk and eggs to toilet paper and detergent. The retailers thereby joined the meal-kit market, either through developing their own meal kits, like All Around Supermarket and Net Supermarket, or by buying a meal-kit firm. The latter was what finally happened to Petra's firm, Peaceful Dinner. By then, it was one of the largest meal-kit firms in Sweden and operated in seven other countries. After a tough period, Petra entered into negotiations with a retailer who had previously been interested investing in Peaceful Dinner. This was the same retailer that they worked with on the supply side. Petra then sold Peaceful Dinner for a reasonable profit and the sale was completed in the spring of 2017. Petra describes it as follows:

“At first, I knew quite quickly that I had what was required. But then when it got bigger with serious competition, I felt that I had reached a situation in which I was unable to do what was required. I could not turn around this firm. [...] The competition was fierce. There is no magic formula for how to get ahead on a very small budget. I believe we needed a large and stable owner. [...] So we didn't fold because I took action.” (Petra at Peaceful Dinner).

The retailer that bought Peaceful Dinner retained Peaceful Dinner's brand and therefore a large part of its core values and food philosophy. When I stopped my empirical data collection it was still one of the largest meal-kit firms in Sweden and with a sustainability-oriented profile.

So, to sum up, let me explain the status of my ten business cases in 2018, when I stopped my empirical collection. As for the retailers, all three of them were still offering meal kits. Regarding the start-ups that had built their entire business around meal kits, three out of seven of them remained in the market. In addition to Peaceful Dinner, these were Lisa's Dinner and Organic Dinner. Lisa's Dinner was by then one of the largest meal-kit firms in Sweden. Lisa and Lars had brought in large investors. Organic Dinner was still enjoying

its fully organic market niche and both Olga and Olivia were able to make a living out of their firm as owners and operators. However, the remaining four start-ups in my study had closed down and the founders had moved on to other kinds of work. Emily closed down Emily's Dinner and started working with the other firms owned by her family. David closed down Dinner Time and eventually started working as a marketing manager at an e-commerce company. Helena and Homer were close to retiring when they sold Home Grown, which the new owner then had to close down within a year. As for Shaun, he sold Shop Around the Clock to one of the retailers, All Around Supermarket, and was employed for a number of years as a project manager.

So, this is how I end my accounts of the Swedish meal-kit market. In the previous sections I have explained how the first initiative started, how the market emerged, the subsequent developments when the giant retailers entered the market and, finally, the status of the market in 2018, where I end my accounts. However, even if this is the end of the accounts in this thesis, it is certainly not the end of meal kits. Meal kits have become a regular feature in the homes of many Swedes, and the concept has spread to markets all over the globe: the UK, Germany, Japan, the USA and Canada, to name just a few.

5. Abstracts of papers I-IV

This chapter contains the abstracts of the individual papers on which the dissertation is based. The papers in their entirety are included in Appendices I-IV.

5.1 Paper I: Identities at work in developing a new market

Astner, H. and Gaddefors, J. (2021), Identities at work in developing a new market, *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRME-07-2018-0038>.

The aim of this paper is to explore the roles of identities in entrepreneurial processes during the development of a new market. Two research questions are posed: How do the founder's identity, corporate identity and market identity interact as a new market is developing, and what are the functions of identity in the entrepreneurial process?

For this paper, five of the start-ups were selected. Interviews were conducted with the founders on several occasions and accompanied by observations of websites, media performance, policy documents and commercial material. The analysis was conducted using an iterative process between empirics and theory.

The findings show how identity develops in founders, firms and the market and how the interactions between these three levels of identity affect the development of each. The authors recognize and discuss three functions of identity: a constructing function, in which identity is used to create a new firm and market; a guiding function, which navigates between identities by imposing identity work on founders, firms and markets; and a configuring function, which participates in shaping contexts.

The paper offers guidance to founders and managers in understanding and navigating different identities. Founders and managers are provided with a set of critical questions that aim to assist them regarding identity-related concerns.

There is a vast amount of literature on the development of firms and markets. Yet, start-ups in new markets operate in different contexts and face different challenges of which we know less about. This paper targets the latter and proposes identity as a useful lens for understanding the dynamics between founders, start-ups and a new market. The paper paves the way for future research on identities to advance the understanding of how new firms and markets are developing. An investigation into identity shows the importance of context to entrepreneurial processes.

5.2 Paper II: The marionette

Astner, H. (2020). The marionette: embeddedness in a community of family-controlled firms. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 260–277. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-01-2020-0011>.

Being embedded in the family has proven to provide opportunities and facilitate resources for a firm. However, it has its dark side, where too much family involvement may hamper the entrepreneur's ability to develop psychological ownership of a firm. By focusing on the role that the family plays in entrepreneurship, this paper aims to explore how embeddedness and agency interact during the entrepreneurial process. The research questions are: How does the family interact in the entrepreneurial process, and how does embeddedness inform this process?

The paper builds on a longitudinal case study of a small firm, Emily's Dinner, which is part of a local community of family-controlled firms. The narrative was based on in-depth interviews with the business owner over a period of eight years from the opening to the closure of the firm. Departing from theories of family embeddedness, the family is viewed as part of the context.

The findings show how agency operates in a community of family-controlled firms and how entrepreneurship is thus partly executed outside the firm's legal boundaries. The metaphor of a marionette illustrates how the

family may tie up and restrain an entrepreneur. This hampers the entrepreneur in developing psychological ownership of the firm, thereby restraining its development. This shows that there is a downside to having too much positive influence from embeddedness.

The paper highlights the social role of family by emphasizing the value that a family can bring to an entrepreneurial process, and thereby to society at large. Practitioners need to reflect on the effects of embeddedness. By recognizing the downside of receiving too much help from outsiders, they may instead strive to achieve a balance.

The paper contributes to the entrepreneurship literature by unfolding the mechanisms of family embeddedness and illustrating how embeddedness informs the entrepreneurial process in different ways. Even though over-embeddedness has been previously investigated, it has primarily focused on the negative control from outside the firm. This paper uses the notion of psychological ownership to shed light on the previously hidden problem of too much positive influence from the family.

5.3 Paper III: Founders and their brands

Astner, H. and Gaddefors, J. (manuscript). Founders and their brands.

Small developing firms have been criticized for not working hard enough with their brand. This paper shows that they may engage in branding, but in a different way, whereby the founder's identity is utilized to fulfill important brand functions. The aim of this paper is to improve the understanding of how the founder's identity engages with branding in small developing firms. This is guided by two research questions: 1) How is the founder's identity developed into a brand? 2) How do small firms' brands change?

The paper utilizes two of my business cases for illustration purposes: Peaceful Dinner and Home Grown. Narratives were created through in-depth interviews with the founders; from the early stages of formation until the founders exited their firms.

The findings show how small firm brands were intimately connected to the identities of the founders. The founders' identities were used to identify, differentiate and create value in the branding process, thereby fulfilling some of the key functions of a brand. As the small firm brands developed, they began to deviate from the founders' identities while finding their own

characteristics. This deviation was provoked by pressure from stakeholders both outside and within the organizations.

The paper suggest that a founder's identity is key to branding in a small developing firm, where founders can provide both opportunities and challenges to the branding process. This explains the challenges embedded in taking over a small firm brand – for both the old and the new owner. Thus, in order to utilize the potential of a founder's identity in firm branding, we need to learn how to make use of opportunities, but also manage challenges.

There is a vast amount of literature on how branding is developed in large organizations, but less is known about how branding processes develop in small firms. This paper provides novel insights into the intimate connection between a founder's identity and a small firm's brand, and discusses the implications of this as the brand develops and when ownership changes.

5.4 Paper IV: The creation of sustainable food markets

Astner, H. (manuscript). *The Creation of Sustainable Food Markets: Getting the Windmills to Turn.*

The aim of this paper is to explore how a new market, a market characterized by sustainable values, is created and developed. The research questions are: 1) How can sustainable entrepreneurship explain the creation and development of a new market, and 2) How are sustainable values shaped in a market?

In order to accomplish the transition to more sustainable food systems, there is a need to acknowledge sustainable initiatives such as new food markets (FAO, 2018). The development of firms and markets and their ability to shape values is a topic that has long been at the heart of the entrepreneurship literature (Hitt et al., 2011; Nasution et al., 2011). However, this literature has primarily focused on economic values (Anderson, 2015; Dodd et al., 2021) or development in established markets (cf. Chang and Kuo, 2008). There has been less focus on exploring how new markets are created and developed through sustainable initiatives, which is the topic of this paper.

The empirical material was gathered through my longitudinal multi-case study of firms in the Swedish meal-kit market between 2010 and 2018. The main source of empirical material was interviews with founders/managers of

ten meal-kit firms. The analysis was conducted in a process that iterated between empirics and theory.

The findings show how different entrepreneurial processes interact as a food market is created and developed. The paper identifies three different processes in play: *preaching* about sustainability, *tuning* to satisfy the market and *windmilling* to achieve and sustain efficiency. These processes take place simultaneously but somewhat sequentially and they blend to create and develop a sustainable market.

One of the implications of this paper is that in order to bring about radical change, preaching is required. However, tuning and windmilling are necessary if a market is to achieve legitimacy and efficiency in order to be sustainable in the long term.

The paper contributes to literature on sustainable entrepreneurship, and furthers the understanding of how sustainable values can be created in a new market and the entrepreneurial processes that interact.

6. Discussing the contributions

The first chapter of this thesis introduced my aim to explore how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of new markets. I also explained how this was triggered by the need to better understand how sustainable food markets unfold and to develop theoretical understandings of how entrepreneurship interacts with the context of a new and unknown market. Through a longitudinal multi-case study, I explored the Swedish meal-kit market and developed perspectives on how founders, firms and the market interact.

This chapter addresses the aim of the thesis and presents its contributions and implications, as well as some ideas for future research.

6.1 Understanding entrepreneurial processes in new markets

In the four papers that comprise this thesis, I have answered the call to study how entrepreneurial processes interact with contexts. In this section, I begin by discussing how each of the four papers relates to the aim of the thesis. I then discuss how the theoretical concepts of embeddedness, identity work and branding can help us understand how new markets develop.

6.1.1 The four papers and the thesis aim

Paper I sets the stage by highlighting the interactions that take place between founders, firms and the market. The paper discusses these interactions as identity work (Watson, 2008; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Brown, 2015; 2021). Seen through this theoretical lens, entrepreneurial processes unfold through interactions between the identities of founders (Danes and Jang, 2013; Lindgren and Wåhlin, 2001), the identities of firms (Balmer, 2008;

Cornelissen et al., 2007) and the identities of markets (Jensen, 2010; Navis and Glynn, 2010). Amongst my business cases of start-ups, it was clear how a founder's individual identity affected the firm identity by influencing everything from the firm's visions and strategies to its organizational culture, behaviour and communication (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). For example, Petra at Peaceful Dinner, Helena and Homer at Home Grown, and Olga and Olivia at Organic Dinner built their firms on their individual food philosophies. We illustrated how the firms and their founders continuously re-created their market identity by interacting with their values, strategies and behaviours. This allows sustainable values to be spread and gain a foothold in a firm and a market. Thus, identity work helps us understand the dynamics between founders, firms and the developing market. I argue that these dynamics are key to shaping the market and suggest this as a way of spreading sustainable values in firms and markets.

Paper II contributes by showing the entrepreneurial processes that take place in the embedding of a founder and their family in a firm. These processes are discussed as embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever 'et al., 2014; Welter, 2011) and in this paper the family as context is in focus (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Anderson et al., 2005). I show the mechanisms behind embedding, how a founder interacts with her family and her firm. This paper used Emily's Dinner as an example to show how a family may cooperate throughout an entrepreneurial process. Emily's family came together to create a business opportunity and to mobilize the necessary resources to start and develop the business. The family even became involved in the decision to close down the firm. This illustrates how entrepreneurial processes take place outside a firm's legal boundaries to create and extract values that are more than just economic. Hence, I question the myopic perspective of *the firm* and illustrate how it is not only economic value that is the output of entrepreneurship. I show how agency (Giddens, 1984; Welter and Baker, 2021) travels in the family context (Welter, 2011) over time and how the entrepreneurial process, i.e. change, is not limited to the boundaries of the firm. One conclusion that can be drawn about sustainability from Paper II is that family and other contexts can be important for introducing sustainable values into a firm. However, if the founder does not identify with these values, this may hamper the founder's development of psychological ownership of the firm, thereby restraining the firm's development.

Paper III discusses entrepreneurial processes as branding (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; 2003; Urde, 2003; 2009; Yoganathan et al., 2018) and identity work (Watson, 2008; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Brown, 2015; 2021). These concepts allowed us to focus on the intricate connections between brands in small developing firms and the identities of their founders. In the case of Peaceful Dinner and Home Grown, the founders built their firms on the individual values concerning sustainability that left an imprint on their ventures. In the current literature, founders have been criticized for not putting more effort into branding (Krake, 2005; Ojasalo et al., 2008). However, the findings in Paper III illustrate how the founders' identities were used to identify, differentiate and create value in the branding process, thereby fulfilling some of the key functions of a brand. This demonstrates that founders do engage in branding, either wittingly or unwittingly, as they become involved and commit to their firms, and this is an integral part of the entrepreneurial process. This presents a more elaborated and context-sensitive way of addressing branding in small developing firms. The connections between founders and their brands entail both opportunities and challenges in the branding process. The paper shows how a small firm's brand deviates from the founder's identity when the brand develops and when ownership changes. This paper explains entrepreneurial processes as the embedding of brands and identities in start-ups and illustrates how the sustainable values of a founder are utilized to create a small firm's brand.

Paper IV serves the overall aim of this thesis by explaining how sustainable values become embedded in a market (Anderson, 2000; Cardoni et al., 2020; Hart and Milstein, 2003). In the paper, I identify three processes in play using the metaphors of *preaching*, *tuning* and *windmilling*. These processes are guided by different institutional logics (Gregori et al., 2019; Schick et al., 2016; Thornton et al., 2012) and assign agency (Giddens, 1984; Welter and Baker, 2021) in different ways. *Preaching* stems from a person-oriented logic, such as when Petra attempts to persuade others about her sustainable ideas and, in doing so, challenges existing market structures. *Tuning* stems from a market-oriented logic, such as when David tunes his business to customers and other market actors in an attempt to make changes that meet their expectations. *Windmilling* stems from a production-oriented logic, such as when Great Supermarkets strives for efficiency, standards and routines. Much like a windmill, work can be effectively carried out if the wind is strong enough, i.e. if there is enough demand in the market. Thus,

the term ‘windmilling’ is about scaling up and streamlining production. These three logics come to affect a firm’s practices in the market and the entrepreneurial processes that unfold. I argue that preaching provides conditions for radical change, as it assigns agency to those who are influential in creating and promoting an entrepreneurial idea or, more specifically, an individual’s personal values. This further emphasizes the importance of the founder’s identity for creating new markets. Individuals, their identities and how they reason are important factors when new sustainable markets are being created. Thus, since identity is created in interaction with a context, we need to contextualize entrepreneurship research in order to capture sustainable values.

Table 7 summarizes the main understandings from the four papers in relation to the aim of my thesis.

Table 7. Main understandings from papers I–IV based on the aim of the thesis

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Paper I (Identity work)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposes identity work as a useful lens for understanding the dynamics between founders, start-ups and a new market. • Shows how identities develop in founders, firms and the market and how the interactions between these three levels of identity affect the development of each. • Shows how a founder’s sustainable values interact with the firm’s identity and the identity of a market. In this way, sustainable values can be spread and gain a foothold in a firm and a market. |
| <p>Paper II (Marionette)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfolds the mechanisms of (family) embeddedness and illustrates how embeddedness informs the entrepreneurial process in different ways. • Illustrates how a family may tie up and restrain a founder. This shows the downside of having too much embeddedness as it may hamper the founder’s development of psychological ownership. • Illustrates how entrepreneurship is partially exercised outside a firm’s legal boundaries. This suggests that family and other contexts are important for introducing sustainable values into a firm. |
| <p>Paper III (Branding)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests founder identity as an important key to understanding small firm branding. • Provides insights into the intimate connection between a founder’s identity and the brand of a small firm. Discusses the opportunities and challenges that this entails for the branding process. • Discusses how the brands of small firms change as they become influenced by stakeholder pressure, both outside and within the organization. • Illustrates how the sustainable values of a founder may be incorporated into a small firm’s brand. |
| <p>Paper IV (Sustainability)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops an understanding of how sustainable values are shaped in a new market. • Identifies three processes in play in the creation and development of a new market: <i>preaching</i> about sustainability, <i>tuning</i> to satisfy the market, and <i>windmilling</i> to achieve and sustain efficiency. • Argues for the need of contextualizing entrepreneurship research to capture sustainable values. |

6.1.2 Three theoretical concepts and the thesis aim

To understand how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of a new market, I used three theoretical concepts; embeddedness, identity work and branding. What led me to these concepts was that they captured the interaction with context, which helped me to problematize what first appeared to be the obvious actors in this play: the founders, the firms and the market.

Embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever et al., 2014; Welter, 2011) helped me to understand how founders and their firms were embedded in, and thus interacted with, a context (Welter, 2011; Welter and Baker, 2021). I saw how the context of a founder influenced the creation and development of a firm and how the firm and the founder influenced the context. This enabled me to illustrate how, for example, Emily's family became embedded in her firm and how this made her more of a marionette in which her family was holding the ties and controlling the firm.

Identity work (Watson, 2008; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Brown, 2015; 2021) also proved to be helpful in connecting agency and context (Welter and Baker, 2021). It was clear how the entrepreneur's identity work influenced and was influenced by the identity work of the firm and the market. These three actors – the entrepreneur, the firm and the market – were all connected and interdependent. I saw how identity work helped to build or construct the three actors, how continuous identity work was a way to navigate and even shape what was to become a new and more sustainable food market. In this way, I was able to show how, for example, Petra's sustainability values helped shape the meal-kit market and, conversely, how she was influenced by her context.

The interdependencies in the entrepreneurial processes were pertinent, as seen through the lens of identity work, and it became apparent how a founder's identity could affect both a firm and a market. In order to look more closely, I chose to engage with the concept of branding (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; 2003; Urde, 2003; 2009; Yoganathan et al., 2018), given that a small firm brand is influenced by the founder and involves how a firm is perceived by its stakeholders. Among my cases of start-ups, it became apparent that brands were intimately connected to the identities of their founders. For example, Helena and Homer created their firm Home Grown based on their values concerning sustainability and food, and used their individual identities to create brand recognition, differentiate the brand from

their competitors and add value. In this way, branding partially becomes a process of embedding identities in a firm.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

This thesis fills theoretical gaps of how entrepreneurship interacts with context as new sustainable markets are created and developed. This section explains the theoretical contributions of the literature in entrepreneurship, market development and branding.

6.2.1 Contributions to the entrepreneurship literature

This thesis contributes to the entrepreneurship literature and particularly to the contextual turn in entrepreneurship (cf. Welter, 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019; Welter and Baker, 2021). I provide practical examples of how context is important for entrepreneurship and how it interacts with entrepreneurship. I explain how new markets are created in these interactions between actors, organizations, customers and institutions. For example, I have shown how the identities of founders and firms become embedded in a market and how a family becomes embedded in the entrepreneurial process. I also explain the mechanisms behind embedding and provide illustrative examples of the role of identity work and branding in the creation and development of firms and markets.

This thesis also makes an important contribution to the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship (cf. Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010; Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Belz and Binder, 2017). Here, I show how a new market emerges and shapes sustainable values. The entrepreneurial process involves actors pushing in different directions. For example the start-ups that are driven by sustainable values push for (i.e. preach) their ideas, even though there is no established product, no demand from customers or any established institutions that facilitates exchanges in the market, while other actors primarily attempt to meet the customer's needs or focus on what is efficient to produce. The fact that actors push in different directions makes it difficult to determine what sustainable development is. Some of the sustainable values that were preached may be retained or be further developed in the firms, whereas other sustainable values may be lost or replaced by mainly economic values. In this context, sustainability perspectives can help us understand how values are created and developed

in firms and markets. Discussing my business cases as sustainable entrepreneurship helps us to shed light on sustainable values, how they are created and changed.

Furthermore, this thesis views the creation of new market as a process of co-creation (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009) in which entrepreneurship is partially exercised outside a firm's legal boundaries. Entrepreneurship is viewed as change and change occurs not only in firms and the market, but in people, families, communities, etc. This provides a broader view of the values that are extracted and created in an entrepreneurial process. Here, previous literature has primarily focused on economic values and firms (Anderson, 2015; Dodd et al., 2021), whereas this thesis contributes by furthering the research that also takes into account environmental and social values. This is particularly important in our quest to achieve the sustainable development of our food systems. Looking at sustainable values sheds light on overall change, not just change in a firm, which has been the prevailing focus of the entrepreneurship literature.

6.2.2 Contributions to the literature on market development

New markets are different from established markets, as products and customers have not been clearly defined and value chains have not been established (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005; Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009; Dew et al., 2018). Thus, supply, demand and institutions are difficult to distinguish as markets are developed from and within contexts.

In the literature on new markets, researchers have tried to generalize about how we should best approach a new market. For example, the literature on market entry has investigated whether it is better to be a first entrant or a follower in a new market (cf. Narasimhan and Zhang, 2000; Rodríguez-Pinto et al., 2008). This literature presupposes that there are markets that firms can choose to enter or not. However, if we instead view markets as social constructs, this withholds that they are created rather than discovered (Alvarez and Barney, 2007, 2020; Goss and Sadler-Smith, 2018). Hence, there are infinitely more opportunities for new markets (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). New markets are created through complex processes and we cannot know what a market *is*, in terms of supply, demand and institutions, until it has begun to take shape. Because markets are unique, and new markets emerge from within contexts, we need a more contextualized view of market creation. Here I have contributed by conducting a qualitative longitudinal

study to theorize about the processes that take place when a market is created and developed. Instead of trying to find a formula for creating and developing markets in general, I have tried to improve our understanding of the mechanisms behind market creation and development, and how founders, firms and the market interact.

6.2.3 Contributions to branding literature

This thesis contributes to the literature on small firm branding (cf. Bresciani and Eppler, 2010; Juntunen, 2012). There is a vast amount of literature on how branding is developed by marketing departments in large organizations. However, less is known about how the branding processes in start-ups and small firms unfold. This thesis provides novel insights into the intimate connection between a founder's identity and a small firm's brand, and discusses the implications of brand development and change of ownership. Here, the founders' identities bring both opportunities and challenges to the branding process.

The theses also makes an overall contribution to the corporate branding literature by showing how corporate branding can be understood through the lens of identity work. The concept of identity work can help us understand how entrepreneurs and other actors in the market influence and are influenced by a corporate brand.

6.3 Practical implications

In order to achieve the sustainable development goals, we need to rethink and bring about change to our food systems. New consumer markets offer a way to achieve changes in consumer behaviour and our food systems as a whole. Consumer behaviour is considered to be part of the food system and it governs what kind of food we buy, where and how we shop, how we eat and handle food, and how much we waste. Thus, new sustainable food markets have the potential to reduce environmental impact and achieve better health.

This thesis shows the role of new markets characterized by sustainable values and how they challenge old structures. A new market that is created from sustainable values sets the first agenda, because following actors will interact with and, in many cases, comply with, the first market identity. A market identity is continuously recreated and is part of the everyday

interactions of actors addressing their current market identity. Thus, the identity of a market and its demand, supply and institutions will continuously be recreated, thereby influencing the opportunities and boundaries that actors perceive and engage in. Hence, new markets characterized by sustainable values offer a promising context for sustainable development, as other actors participate in recreating the market.

6.3.1 Implications for policy makers

With this thesis, my intention is to help policy makers further understand the processes by which new markets are shaped and how sustainable values are created, confirmed and consolidated in a market. By identifying three entrepreneurial processes involved in developing sustainable values in a market, I show how sustainability is created and developed in a collaboration between start-ups and established firms. Start-ups that are driven by a person-oriented logic, based on values such as social welfare and environmental protection, have the agency to implement radical changes in consumer behaviour. For established firms, however, there are benefits to being market and production-oriented, and this helps confirm and consolidate the sustainable values in a market. Introducing a person-oriented logic into a firm withholds an opportunity to achieve sustainable development. This highlights the importance of cultivating sustainable values in people in society at large.

6.3.2 Implications for founders and managers

This thesis offers practical implications for founders and managers.

Firstly, it provides a better understanding of how their identities are closely intertwined with a firm and its brand and how their identities are affected by the context. This provides guidance in navigating different identities and highlights the opportunities and challenges associated with the intertwining of identities. For example, Paper I offers a set of critical questions that aim to help founders and managers address identity-related issues. These questions revolve around the following topics: *what* is the firm, *who* am I (the founder/manager), and 3) *what* is the market? (see Appendix I, Figure 2 on p. 20).

Secondly, it provides the founders of small firms with insights into how their branding takes place differently compared to large established firms regarding how the founder's identity can play a key role. This explains why

many small businesses do not benefit much from the traditional branding literature. In order to utilize the potential of the founder's identity in the small firm's branding, the founders must learn to take advantage of the opportunities, but also address the challenges. Such challenges are embedded when a firm grows or changes owner, as conflicts can arise between the identities of the founder, the firm and the new owner.

Thirdly, the thesis suggests that founders and managers need to reflect on the effects of embedding, which has both its advantages and its disadvantages. Help from or collaborations with others, e.g. family, is a great benefit when starting up a new business. Entrepreneurship is a social process whereby the new firms are co-creations. Embedding is therefore necessary. However, a founder must also reflect on the consequences of embedding. Too much involvement from others may hamper the founder's development of psychological ownership of the firm, thereby restraining the firm's development. By recognizing the drawbacks of receiving too much help from outsiders, founders and managers can strive to achieve a balance instead.

6.3.3 Implications for business growth advisors

This thesis also has some implications for business growth advisors for small developing firms who work as municipal officials, politicians or consultants.

Small developing firm need tailored advices regarding business development, as they are different from large established companies. I encourage advisors to take into account the identity of founders, firms and markets when providing support and recommendations to small developing firms. I also encourage the advisors to include the embedding of the founder and the firm in context. For example, a founder's family can play an important role in creating and developing a firm and add values and opportunities but also challenges.

There is also an important opportunity to encourage start-ups to develop a sustainable business model from the beginning. This appears to be particularly important for new solutions or ideas that may eventually have the potential to create ripples on the water and inspire others to follow their path.

6.4 Future research agenda

The creation and development of new sustainable markets is a fascinating topic that has great potential in future research. Since markets are unique, I would like to emphasize how a qualitative approach that captures context and the process can help to increase our awareness of market creation and development as a phenomenon. Entrepreneurship research that addresses the contextual turn could be a promising approach and could help increase our awareness of how individuals and firms interact with contexts to create and develop a new market. More specifically, it would be interesting to see how different dimensions of context interact when a market is created and developed. Among Welter's (2011) dimensions, I have primarily discussed business dimensions, social dimensions and institutional dimensions, and it would also be valuable to explore spatial dimensions.

This thesis paves the way for future research on identities, brands and values and how they interact, in order to advance the understanding of how new firms and markets develop. An investigation of identity, brands and values demonstrates the importance of context in entrepreneurial processes and points towards a need for researching different contexts. My research has explored a new food market in which I have seen how the founder's environmental, social and economic values about food and their identity have interacted with a firm, its brand and the market. However, food is considered to be closely associated with individual identity – something that is captured by the expression “you are what you eat”. I therefore find it interesting to also study how identity interacts with other new markets. This applies to markets in which we expect identity to be important, such as the clothing market, and to markets in which we expect identity to be less important, such as the market for spare parts for industry. In this context it would be interesting to see how identity works across all these markets and how identity interacts between founders, firms and the market.

Another area that offers a potential for increased learning is the way in which brands develop in small firms and start-ups. This thesis has shown that a person's identity can fulfil an important function for a brand, yet my focus has mainly been on the founder's identity. In my empirical material, however, I have also seen how other people's identities have interacted with a brand, for example, the chefs who fronted meal kits, celebrity customers who endorsed a brand, and even cartoon characters who were linked to

certain meal kits for children. It would therefore be interesting to further explore how such identities interact in the entrepreneurial process.

Something that I also encourage scholars in entrepreneurship to attempt is to not merely focus on the economic values of the firm. This has indeed been addressed in the research field of sustainable entrepreneurship. However, there is also potential to include a broader view of values in more traditional entrepreneurship research. We have recently seen several calls for this (cf. Dodd et al., 2021) and I believe that this is particularly important in the pursuit of sustainable development. To address this, I suggest that scholars adopt the definition of entrepreneurship articulated by Anderson (2000), who describes it as *the creation and extraction of values* (Anderson, 2000). This supports a broader perspective on entrepreneurship and facilitates the inclusion of more values that are more than just economic.

Something that I regard as being associated with the above discussion is the myopic focus of the firm, which is found in the vast majority of all entrepreneurship literature (and also to some extent in this thesis). This could cause us to miss other outcomes of entrepreneurship, such as how it affects individuals, families, communities or society. Thus, a person's commitment to entrepreneurship may not primarily be about economic values but rather social or environmental values. So instead of coming up with ideas about how to develop firms and make them financially viable, we should involve other perspectives, such as the development of people, families, communities and societies in order to create and balance the different values for sustainable change.

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Popular science summary

Having a unique business idea is rare, and it can be both exciting and scary. Starting your own business involves many challenges in itself; but doing this while creating an entirely new market, which no one has heard of before, is a challenge beyond the ordinary. One of those who was brave enough is Petra, when she started the world's first meal-kit firm. The idea was to offer pre-planned meal kits to make everyday life easier for families and households. Since this time, many others have seized the opportunity and started similar businesses. Today, 'meal kits' are well established in Sweden and have also become widespread internationally. In my research, I have followed the development of the Swedish meal-kit market so that we can learn more about how new markets are created and developed.

The topic of this thesis is entrepreneurship, which is about change. In my particular case, I looked at change within and between founders, firms and markets. In this context I posed the question 'how do new markets develop'. More specifically, the aim was to explore how entrepreneurial processes work in the creation and development of new markets.

New markets, such as the meal-kit market, can be seen as business environments at an early stage of development that try to meet customers' needs with a totally new range of goods or services. Thus, new markets are characterized by a lack of clarity: the identity of the customers is unclear, the product has not been defined, and value chains, collaborations and other institutions have not been established.

I see new markets as interesting because they offer an opportunity to change patterns of consumption and production, making new markets important in society's quest to achieve sustainable change in our food systems. Yet, there is more to learn about the processes through which new markets are created and developed. Particularly the creation of new markets

has been difficult to capture in research, as we rarely know what will become a market before it actually becomes one.

In this thesis, however, I took the opportunity to study the emerging Swedish meal-kit market, which was initiated to target sustainable values. During the market's development, I conducted regular interviews from 2010–2018 with several of the founders and managers who were involved in the market's development, but also followed the development on the firms' websites, in marketing materials and in the media.

In this thesis, I explain the micro-processes that take place when a new market is created and developed. I particularly focus on the interplay between three levels – the founders, their firms and the market – but also how these three interact with their wider contexts, i.e. their surroundings and their specific situations. In order to understand how markets are created and developed, I have used three perspectives (theoretical concepts). The first perspective is to view the creation and development as *identity work* and focus on how identities are created. An identity is not just who you are, because it is created in interaction with your surroundings. This means that it is partially shaped by how others perceive you and what others expect from you. In my thesis, I not only discuss how a founder's identity interacted with a firm and a new market, I also discuss the identity work in relation to both a firm and a market. The identity of a firm means what characterizes the firm, such as its basic values, strategies and culture; the identity of a market is about what characterizes the market. By examining identity work on these three levels – the founder, the firm and the market – we can better understand the micro-processes that occur when a new market is created and developed.

The second perspective, which helps us understand how new markets are created and developed, is *embeddedness*. Embeddedness has been used in the entrepreneurship literature to explain how a founder or a firm becomes embedded in its context. To be embedded, i.e. belong, affects the market opportunities and challenges for a founder and a firm. For example in this thesis, I show how a sole founder received a lot of help from her family, but also the difficulties this created when family members had control of her firm.

The third perspective, which helps us understand what happens when a market is created and developed, is *branding*. Many of the founders who participated in my study used their own identity in a similar way as large firms use their brand, that is, to 1) help the customer recognize the product,

2) differentiate the product from competing products and 3) create and communicate value. In the thesis, I explain how founders become an important part of the branding work, whereby their identities are woven into the brand. In this way, the process of developing brands and identities is closely linked.

To sum up, the thesis explains how new markets are created and developed through micro-processes that take place when founders, firms and the market interact with each other and with their specific contexts. In these interactions, identities, values and brands are created and developed, all of which provide opportunities to influence the development of our food systems to become more sustainable. Founders not only prove to be important to their firms; they also affect the market as a whole. New markets are like blank pages, which becomes filled with the values created by the first founders. Then, other firms that want to start operating need to embrace these values so that they fit in. This demonstrates that, in order to incorporate sustainability into a market, the founder's role is important; and in order to succeed in creating new and more sustainable food markets, we need to focus on sustainable values and on other kinds of development than just a firm's development, for example, development concerning founders, as well as families and communities.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Att ha en unik företagsidé är få förunnat, och det kan upplevas som både spännande och skrämmande! Att starta eget innebär många utmaningar i sig, men att också starta upp en ny marknad, som ingen tidigare har hört talas om, är en utmaning utöver de vanliga. En av dem som har vågat är Petra, när hon startade världens första matkassaföretag. Idén gick ut på att erbjuda färdigpackade matkassar för att göra vardagen enklare för familjer och hushåll. Sedan dess har många andra gripit möjligheten och startat liknande verksamheter. Idag är 'matkassarna' väl etablerade på den svenska marknaden och har även fått stor internationell spridning. I min forskning har jag följt den svenska matkassemarknadens utveckling för att vi ska få lära oss mer om hur nya marknader skapas och utvecklas.

Ämnet i den här avhandlingen är entreprenörskap, vilket handlar om förändring. I mitt fall intresserar jag mig för förändring inom och mellan företagare, deras företag och marknader. Här ställer jag frågan hur det går till när nya marknader skapas. Syftet mer specifikt är att utforska hur entreprenöriella processer fungerar i skapandet och utvecklingen av nya marknader.

Nya marknader, såsom matkassemarknaden, kan ses som företagsmiljöer i ett tidigt utvecklingsskede som försöker tillgodose kundernas behov med helt nya varor och tjänster. Nya marknader kännetecknas därför av en otydlighet, där det är oklart vilka kunderna är, där produkterna ännu inte är definierade och där värdekedjor, samarbeten och andra institutioner ännu inte har etablerats.

Jag ser nya marknader som intressanta, eftersom de erbjuder en möjlighet att förändra mönster kring konsumtion och produktion. Detta gör nya marknader viktiga i samhällets strävan efter hållbar förändring av våra livsmedelssystem. Ändå finns det mer att lära om de processer genom vilka

nya marknader skapas och utvecklas. Särskilt skapandet av nya marknader har varit svårt att fånga i forskning, eftersom vi sällan vet vad som kommer att bli en marknad innan den faktiskt har blivit till.

I den här avhandlingen tog jag dock möjligheten att studera framväxten av den svenska matkassemarknaden, vilken initierades för att skapa hållbara värden. Under marknadens utveckling har jag gjort regelbundna intervjuer med flera av de företagsledare som varit med under marknadens utveckling 2010-2018, men också följt utvecklingen på företagens hemsidor, i marknadsföringsmaterial och i media.

I avhandlingen förklarar jag de mikroprocesser som sker när en ny marknad skapas och utvecklas. Jag förklarar särskilt samspelet mellan tre nivåer – grundarna, deras företag och marknaden – men också hur dessa tre interagerar med sin bredare kontext, det vill säga sin omgivning och sitt sammanhang. För att förstå hur marknader skapas och utvecklas har jag använt tre perspektiv (teoretiska begrepp). Det första perspektivet är att se utvecklingen som *identitetsarbete* (identity work) och fokusera på hur identiteter skapas. En identitet är inte bara 'vem du är', eftersom den skapas i samspel med sin omgivning. Det betyder att den delvis formas av hur andra uppfattar dig och vad andra förväntar sig av dig. I min avhandling diskuterar jag inte bara hur grundarens identitet samspelade med företaget och den nya marknaden, utan jag diskuterar även identitetsarbetet kring företagets identitet och marknadens identitet. Med företagets identitet menas vad som karaktäriserar företaget, såsom dess grundläggande värderingar, strategier och kultur, och med marknadens identitet menas vad som karaktäriserar marknaden. Genom att titta på identitetsarbete på dessa tre nivåer – grundaren, företaget och marknaden – kan vi bättre förstå de mikroprocesser som sker när en ny marknad skapas och utvecklas.

Det andra perspektivet som hjälper oss att förstå hur nya marknader skapas och utvecklas är *inbäddning* (embeddedness). Inbäddning har använts i entreprenörskapslitteraturen för att förklara hur en grundare eller ett företag blir inbäddat i en kontext. Att vara inbäddad, det vill säga höra till, påverkar möjligheter och utmaningar för grundaren och företaget. Till exempel visar jag i avhandlingen hur en ensam grundare fick mycket hjälp av sin familj, men också vilka svårigheter det förde med sig när familjemedlemmar hade kontroll över hennes företag.

Det tredje perspektivet, som hjälper oss att förstå det som sker när en marknad formas, är *varumärkesbyggande* (branding). Många av grundarna

som deltog i studien av matkassemarknaden använde sin egen identitet på ett liknande sätt som stora företag använder sitt varumärke; det vill säga för att 1) hjälpa kunden att identifiera produkten till en avsändare, 2) differentiera produkten från konkurrerande erbjudanden och 3) skapa och förmedla värden. I avhandlingen förklarar jag hur grundarna blir en viktig del av varumärkesarbetet, där deras identiteter vävs in i varumärket. På så sätt är processerna kring att utveckla varumärken och identiteter nära sammanlänkade.

Sammanfattningsvis förklarar avhandlingen hur nya marknader skapas och utvecklas genom mikroprocesser, vilka sker när grundare, företag och marknaden interagerar med varandra och med sina specifika sammanhang. I dessa interaktioner skapas och utvecklas identiteter, värden och varumärken, vilka alla innebär möjligheter att påverka utvecklingen av våra livsmedelssystem till att bli mer hållbara. Grundaren visar sig inte bara vara viktig för företaget som sådant, utan påverkar också marknaden i stort. Nya marknader är som oskrivna blad, som fylls med de värderingar som de första grundarna väljer att fylla dem med. Sedan behöver andra grundare som vill starta företag på marknaden förhålla sig till dessa värden för att passa in. För att bygga in hållbarhet på en marknad har grundaren därmed en viktig roll. Avslutningsvis, för att lyckas skapa nya hållbarare livsmedelsmarknader behöver vi fokusera på hållbara värden och annan utveckling än enbart företagets utveckling, t.ex. utveckling kring grundare men också kring familjer och samhällen.

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My sister Linda and brother Peter, you have also shaped me into the person I am today. From time to time, you have 'volunteered' to discuss my work. I particularly enjoyed our discussion about 'the active context', which has become a bit of a joke. Sure, that's how we social scientists save the world :-).

Freja, Tyra and Steira, you are a reminder of the importance of creating a more sustainable world. You are also a reminder of what is important in life, such as playing ‘knutgumman med pärlplattor’ (very complicated rules...), sneaking out in the winter cold after bedtime to look for the Northern Lights or just cuddling up together on the sofa. Moreover, you have expanded my understanding of concepts, such as the concept of *vacation*. Now it is clear to me that if you do not meet a particular bear and giraffe, then it is actually not a real vacation. You are my sunshine, even when it thunders. As in Peter Pan, you are my happy thoughts. You fill my heart with love and joy so that I can fly.

Maria Skargren, I know you’re not expecting this, but you really deserve a special thank you for your support and friendship during my journey as a PhD student. You have significantly influenced this thesis, as it was you who first gave me the idea to study meal kits. Filip and I have had so much fun with you and Per. We’ve also enjoyed several dinner parties with you and Per, often with food prepared from various meal kits, after which we watched ‘Farmer seeks wife’. Maria, you are also my compass for navigating work and leisure. Our lunch meetings at ‘Logen’ always leave me with a warm and happy feeling inside.

Finally yet importantly, a big and heartfelt thank you to all the founders and managers of the meal-kit firms who offered their time and patiently answered my many questions. Without you, this dissertation would not exist!

I think I’m almost there! Given the number of people involved in this project, it almost sounds like *my* role has been insignificant. So, let me follow my good friend and colleague Annie’s example and also thank myself. *How* I have struggled! *How* I have made sacrifices! Since my doctoral position has been part-time and I have mainly worked as a teacher, it has often been difficult to squeeze in article writing, grant applications and meet submission deadlines. It has sometimes been stressful but nearly always fun! I will miss this time, being on this journey. At times, particularly when I struggled to meet submission deadlines, I have lived, breathed and dreamed my texts. The fact that I will soon be out on ‘the other side’ leaves me feeling a bit empty but, at the same time, excited. Now I have the opportunity to look forward to new projects and challenges – and there is so much to do and learn. So thank you Hanna for your commitment, your sacrifices and your hard work!

Now, my very last thank you goes to you, the reader, for reading this thesis. I hope you have found it useful! See you on the other side!

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New markets can change patterns of consumption and production. This makes new markets interesting in society's quest towards more sustainable food systems. Therefore, we need to better understand the processes that lead to this development. This thesis explores entrepreneurial processes in the creation and development of the Swedish meal-kit market. The processes are explained to take place in the interactions between founders, firms and markets, and involve the co-creation of values, identities and brands.

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