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Doctoral dissertation

Entrepreneurial strategies in the craft beer industry

Strategie przedsiębiorcze w branży piw rzemieślniczych

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of entrepreneurship is characterised by volatility, uncertainty and the fragmentation of traditional market structures. These transformations intensify the need to investigate how entrepreneurial actors create, negotiate and sustain their ventures under conditions that challenge the core assumptions of classical strategic management. While conventional strategy research conceptualises strategy as a rational, plan-based and analytically derived orientation toward competitive advantage, recent developments in entrepreneurship and organisation studies indicate that, for many small firms, strategy is not a pre-formulated blueprint but a situated, relational and emergent process shaped by everyday practices, cultural meanings and material constraints.

This shift is particularly relevant in industries marked by strong cultural anchoring, artisanal traditions and local embeddedness. Among these, the craft beer sector occupies a distinctive position. Over the last decade, craft breweries have evolved from a marginal subculture into a dynamic socio-economic field across Europe, North America and beyond. Craft breweries function not only as producers of differentiated beverages but also as carriers of local identity, nodes in community networks and actors contributing to the creative and experience-based economy. Their emergence contests industrial logics of standardisation, efficiency and mass distribution, replacing them with values such as authenticity, experimentation, locality and embodied craft knowledge. Consequently, the craft beer sector constitutes a fertile context for rethinking entrepreneurial strategy from the perspective of lived practice rather than abstract planning.

Despite growing interest in craft brewing, scholarly work on the entrepreneurial strategies of craft breweries remains limited, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Existing research often focuses on macro-level market trends, consumer behaviour or regulatory developments, while relatively few studies analyse how entrepreneurs themselves conceptualise, enact and narrate strategic action in their everyday work. Even rarer are comparative analyses examining how different socio-institutional contexts shape entrepreneurial practices within the same industry. This dissertation addresses these gaps by exploring the entrepreneurial strategies of craft brewery founders in Poland and Ukraine-two countries located in the broader post-socialist region yet shaped by distinct historical trajectories, institutional configurations and socio-economic conditions.

The environments in which Polish and Ukrainian microbreweries operate further underscore the relevance of examining strategy as emergent practice. In Poland, craft brewing has developed under conditions of relative market stability and regulatory clarity, albeit with tensions characteristic of post-transformation systems. In Ukraine, entrepreneurial activity is conditioned by political instability, institutional voids, infrastructural weaknesses and-since 2014, and especially since 2022-wartime disruptions. Under such conditions, long-term planning or robust forecasting becomes nearly impossible. Entrepreneurs must instead continuously adapt, improvise and renegotiate their strategic orientations in response to shifting threats, opportunities and expectations. Both contexts thus offer unique empirical entry points for studying entrepreneurial strategy as an emergent, situated and contextually embedded phenomenon.

Pachura et al. (2016, pp. 85-87) similarly noted that in highly volatile and uncertain contexts, conventional long-term strategy gives way to continuous improvisation and adaptation. Entrepreneurs develop dynamic, collaborative tactics "under uncertain market conditions" as a means to sustain their ventures when predictive control is unfeasible. Such conditions demand real-time strategic adjustments rather than fixed plans. Lenart-Gansiniec and Sułkowski (2020, pp. 323–325) similarly noted that in environments marked by institutional uncertainty and dynamic change, strategic action shifts away from predictive planning toward adaptive and participatory processes. Under such conditions, organizations rely on continuous learning and real-time adjustment rather than fixed long-term strategies.

Sztangret's work on marketing knowledge and networked relationships supports the view that entrepreneurial strategy is constituted through interaction and learning rather than only through planning. She shows that market knowledge (about customers, competitors, and value) becomes a strategic resource when it is organised structurally and shared within communities of practice (Sztangret, 2013).

From an epistemological perspective, this dissertation adopts a constructivist grounded theory approach, which rejects the notion of strategy as an externally discoverable, objective phenomenon. Instead, strategy is viewed as co-constructed through interactions between entrepreneurs, researchers and socio-material contexts. Within this framework, strategy is embedded in practice: not a formal document but a lived, dynamic pattern of actions, improvisations and meaning-making processes unfolding over time. Accordingly, research aims, hypotheses and questions are treated as

sensitising rather than prescriptive-they orient inquiry while remaining open to modification through empirical engagement. This epistemological stance resonates with how small craft breweries navigate uncertainty through embodied skills, sensorial experimentation, relational networks and adaptive improvisation.

Justification of the research problem

The research problem addressed in this dissertation concerns the identification and conceptualisation of entrepreneurial strategies in craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine, viewed through the lens of emergent, practice-based and contextually embedded action.

Although the economics of craft brewing and beer markets has been increasingly studied, there remains a significant gap in understanding how micro-level strategic practices unfold within post-socialist contexts. Existing perspectives grounded in business models, competitive advantage or formal strategic planning prove insufficient to capture the relational, cultural and embodied dimensions of entrepreneurial action that characterise small-scale craft production.

This multidimensional research problem requires consideration of:

- the strategic orientations, practices and narratives of brewery founders;
- the social and cultural environments in which they operate;
- the institutional and regulatory contexts of Poland and Ukraine;
- the material constraints shaping everyday decisions;
- and the interplay of innovation, quality, cooperation, locality and adaptation under conditions of scarcity and uncertainty.

A critical review of the literature reveals a lack of studies that:

- adopt an interpretive, practice-based perspective on strategy in craft breweries,
- focus explicitly on Poland and Ukraine in comparative perspective,
- and employ constructivist grounded theory to generate a context-sensitive theoretical model of entrepreneurial strategising.

This dissertation responds to these gaps by offering an empirically grounded, theoretically informed analysis of the strategic practices of craft microbreweries in both countries.

Research hypotheses

In line with constructivist grounded theory, the dissertation does not formulate hypotheses in a strictly deductive, predictive sense. Instead, it adopts sensitising hypotheses, which provide theoretical orientation while remaining open to revision.

The main sensitising hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H (main): Entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is a practice-based, emergent and contextually embedded process that cannot be adequately explained by classical, plan-based models of strategic management.

On this basis, the following specific sensitising hypotheses are derived:

H1: Entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is predominantly practice-based rather than plan-based, emerging from relational and embodied engagement rather than formal analysis.

H2: Innovation in craft breweries manifests as a continuous, experimental and identity-producing practice, rather than as a conventional market-oriented differentiation tool.

H3: Locality performs different strategic functions across contexts-primarily symbolic and identity-related in Poland, and adaptive and survival-oriented in Ukraine.

H4: Contextual barriers-such as financial constraints, institutional voids and infrastructural vulnerabilities-actively shape entrepreneurial practices by generating new forms of improvisation, collaboration and resilience.

H5: Competitiveness in craft microbreweries arises from the integration of relational, cultural and material practices rather than from classical strategic positioning.

These sensitising hypotheses guide the empirical inquiry and analytical work but do not constrain the emergence of new conceptual insights arising from the data.

Main aim and specific aims

The main aim of the study is:

to reconstruct and theoretically interpret the emergent forms of entrepreneurial strategising practiced by craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine, understood as situated, relational and dynamically negotiated practices.

This main aim is supported by the following specific aims:

1. To identify and analyse the dominant modes of entrepreneurial action in craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine, with particular attention to how these modes arise from everyday practices such as brewing, experimenting, engaging with consumers and responding to constraints.
2. To examine innovation as a rhythmic, embodied and identity-forming practice, rather than as a solely market-oriented tool of differentiation.

3. To analyse the role of locality, relationality and socio-cultural embeddedness in shaping strategic practices in both relatively stable (Poland) and crisis-conditioned (Ukraine) environments.

4. To interpret contextual barriers as generative forces that catalyse improvisation, cooperation, bricolage and resilience, rather than functioning merely as obstacles.

5. To synthesise these insights into a grounded theoretical model that explains how microbreweries achieve competitiveness through the dynamic interplay of authenticity, innovation, locality, cooperation and adaptive pragmatism.

The utilitarian aim of the dissertation is to provide conceptually informed insights and recommendations that may support practitioners, policymakers and support institutions working with small craft breweries and similar creative enterprises in contexts of uncertainty and resource constraints.

Scope of the dissertation

The scope of the dissertation can be described along several dimensions:

Subject scope:

The subject of the research is the emergent entrepreneurial strategies of craft microbreweries, conceptualised as practice-based, relational and contextually embedded processes.

Object scope:

The object scope includes selected craft breweries operating in Poland and Ukraine, understood as small or medium-sized enterprises oriented towards independent, craft-based beer production.

Spatial scope:

The spatial scope covers two national contexts-Poland and Ukraine-analysed in a comparative perspective, with attention to their different institutional and socio-economic conditions.

Temporal scope:

The temporal scope of the empirical material and analysis covers the period 2011-2024, corresponding to the key phase of the development of the craft beer sector in both countries and encompassing periods of relative stability as well as crisis and war.

Substantive scope:

The substantive scope comprises key domains of entrepreneurial strategising in craft breweries: innovation, quality and ethos, local embeddedness, relational cooperation and adaptation under conditions of uncertainty and scarcity.

Research methods

The methodological framework of the dissertation is based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This approach is particularly suited to studying complex, contextually embedded phenomena such as entrepreneurial strategising in small craft enterprises.

The following research methods and procedures were applied:

1. Critical review of the literature, covering strategic management, entrepreneurship, craft industries and the economics and culture of beer.
2. Qualitative in-depth interviews with owners and founders of craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine, conducted according to principles of theoretical sampling.
3. Memo-writing and constant comparative analysis, enabling iterative movement between data, emerging categories and theoretical abstraction.
4. Open, axial and selective coding, carried out in line with constructivist grounded theory, to identify core categories, processes and relationships.
5. Contextual and comparative analysis, examining how similar entrepreneurial logics manifest differently under divergent institutional and socio-economic conditions.

These methods made it possible to develop a grounded theoretical model of entrepreneurial strategising in craft breweries, anchored in empirical material and sensitive to contextual specificities.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. The first three chapters are theoretical and methodological, while the fourth and fifth chapters are empirical and interpretive in nature. The work is complemented by a list of figures, a list of tables, a bibliography and annexes.

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical foundations of entrepreneurship and strategy. It discusses the evolution of entrepreneurship research, the limitations of classical models of strategic management and the development of approaches that conceptualise strategy as practice. Particular attention is paid to embedded, situated and effectual perspectives on entrepreneurship, which constitute the conceptual background for the empirical study.

Chapter 2 outlines the genesis and development of the craft beer sector in Poland and Ukraine. It examines institutional, regulatory and cultural conditions shaping the operation of craft breweries, the emergence of the craft movement, its role in local communities and economies, and differences arising from the distinct socio-economic contexts of the two countries.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological foundations of the study, focusing on constructivist grounded theory. It describes the logic of theoretical sampling, the process of generating empirical material, the coding procedures (open, axial, selective), the role of memo-writing and the principles of theoretical saturation. The choice of a qualitative, interpretive research strategy is justified.

Chapter 4 is empirical in character and presents the collected research material as well as an analysis of key entrepreneurial practices in Polish and Ukrainian craft breweries. It reconstructs the processes and mechanisms through which entrepreneurs interpret and construct strategic action under conditions of uncertainty, resource constraints and local embeddedness.

Chapter 5 provides an integrative and interpretative synthesis of the empirical findings generated in the course of the study. It examines the interrelations between the analytically identified categories and analyses the ways in which they operate across differing institutional and socio-economic contexts in Poland and Ukraine. In doing so, the chapter not only advances the theoretical interpretation of the data but also systematically verifies the achievement of the main research aim and the fulfilment of all specific aims of the dissertation, as well as the verification of the formulated sensitising hypotheses.

The dissertation concludes with a Conclusion chapter, which synthesises the overall theoretical and empirical contributions of the study, situates the findings within broader debates on entrepreneurship and strategic management, discusses the limitations of the research, and outlines directions for future inquiry.

The final part of the dissertation contains the bibliography, a list of figures, a list of tables, and an annex, including the interview guide.

CHAPTER 1.
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND STRATEGIC ACTION

Entrepreneurship is increasingly conceptualised as a foundational, multi-layered phenomenon that transcends traditional economic boundaries. It is not merely a mechanism for generating economic value, but a complex socio-cultural, cognitive, institutional and practice-based process that shapes the trajectories of individuals, organisations and entire economic systems (Aldrich and Ruef, 2018, pp. 25-28; Steyaert, 2007, pp. 470-475). Historically rooted in early commercial exchange, yet dynamically evolving in response to technological, institutional and cultural transformations, entrepreneurship operates simultaneously at the micro (individual), meso (organisational and network) and macro (institutional and societal) levels. As contemporary scholarship shows, entrepreneurial activity embodies a configuration of opportunity recognition, resource mobilisation, identity construction, relational embeddedness and interpretive sensemaking (Aldrich and Ruef, 2018, pp. 44-47).

In modern societies characterised by volatility, uncertainty and complexity, entrepreneurship has become a crucial adaptive mechanism. It enables individuals and organisations to generate novel solutions, respond to disruptions and navigate institutional turbulences. Entrepreneurial capabilities are therefore increasingly understood not only as economic drivers but as essential cultural and cognitive competencies. These competencies encompass creativity, resilience, strategic imagination and the capacity to interpret ambiguous environmental signals-skills that facilitate effective action under conditions where formal planning becomes insufficient (Stead and Stead, 2008, pp. 12-16; Weick, 1995, pp. 14-20). In this sense, entrepreneurship is a multidimensional construct positioned at the intersection of cognition, behaviour, culture, structure and practice.

Despite its centrality, entrepreneurship research remains theoretically fragmented. Traditional economic perspectives-classical, neoclassical, Schumpeterian and Austrian-provide valuable foundations but often operate under assumptions of rationality, equilibrium and linearity. Psychological approaches illuminate motivational and cognitive determinants but struggle to account for environmental complexity.

Sociological perspectives highlight networks, institutions and embeddedness, yet rarely integrate micro-level agency. Anthropological frameworks reveal cultural and symbolic dimensions, but offer limited predictive structure. This conceptual fragmentation underscores the need for integrative theoretical lenses capable of capturing entrepreneurship as a relational, situational and emergent process rather than a static set of traits or behaviours (Landström and Lohrke, 2010, pp. 3-15; Gartner, 1988, pp. 12-18).

The limitations of classical approaches become especially evident in sectors characterised by creativity, craftsmanship, cultural heritage, sensory value and local embeddedness-such as the brewing industry. Historically shaped by artisanal knowledge, tacit skills, regional traditions and community-based practices, the brewing sector has evolved through successive phases of industrialisation, corporatisation and post-industrial diversification (Stack, 2003, pp. 1-6). Today, it encompasses large global corporations, mid-sized regional breweries, family-owned enterprises and innovative small-scale producers. These diverse organisational forms embody multiple entrepreneurial logics: technological optimisation, economies of scale, experiential differentiation, authenticity-driven branding, cultural storytelling and local identity work (Murray et al., 2017, pp. 18-26; Schnell and Reese, 2014, pp. 47-54).

This diversity requires theoretical frameworks that acknowledge the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial strategies, the interaction between tradition and innovation, and the role of context in shaping decision-making. In brewing-as in many food and beverage sectors-entrepreneurial action is deeply embedded in material artefacts (ingredients, equipment, technologies), embodied skills (tacit knowledge, craftsmanship), socio-cultural narratives (locality, heritage, authenticity), and relational infrastructures (supplier networks, customer communities, regulatory actors). These characteristics challenge traditional notions of strategy based on formalised planning and instead align more closely with contemporary processual, practice-based and interpretive perspectives (Whittington, 2006, pp. 614-623; Jarzabkowski, 2005, pp. 1-30).

This chapter adopts a broadened theoretical synthesis that integrates classical economic theories of entrepreneurship, behavioural and sociological frameworks, and modern interpretivist approaches such as embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985, pp. 487-493), situated action (Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 469-476), effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 248-258), entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005, pp. 332-345) and

practice-based strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2005, pp. 1-30; Whittington, 2006, pp. 614-623). Collectively, these theories enable entrepreneurship to be conceptualised as:

- context-dependent (embedded in place, time and institutions),
- relational (co-created through interactions and networks),
- emergent (developing iteratively, not through formal planning),
- interpretive (rooted in sensemaking and subjective meanings),
- materially mediated (shaped by tools, technologies, artefacts),
- culturally framed (embedded in values, traditions and symbolic systems).

Such a multi-dimensional approach is essential for analysing entrepreneurial strategies in industries like brewing, where innovation and tradition coexist; where resource constraints coexist with creativity; and where market differentiation depends not only on efficiency but on narrative, identity and sensory experience.

Furthermore, this theoretical synthesis aligns with the constructivist grounded theory methodology guiding the empirical component of this dissertation. Constructivist grounded theory assumes that meanings, strategies and entrepreneurial actions are socially constructed, historically situated and relationally co-produced by participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 10-15, 149-160). This epistemological position resonates strongly with interpretive theories of entrepreneurship, which view opportunities, actions and strategies as emergent from the interplay of agency and context. Thus, the theoretical frameworks presented here are not abstract models imposed on the data but conceptual resources that support the interpretation of emergent categories derived from empirical analysis.

By integrating these perspectives, the analysis establishes a comprehensive and well-grounded theoretical basis for examining entrepreneurial strategies in the brewing industry in Poland and Ukraine. It provides the conceptual scaffolding necessary for understanding entrepreneurship as a living, evolving, socially embedded and practice-based phenomenon that unfolds across multiple levels of analysis and cannot be adequately explained through classical or reductionist models alone.

1.1. Historical and conceptual development of entrepreneurship

The study of entrepreneurship has undergone a profound and multidimensional evolution, marked by the interplay of economic theory, sociological reflection, cultural interpretation and practice-oriented inquiry. The contemporary understanding of entrepreneurship is the result of centuries of intellectual accumulation, reinterpretation

and debate. What distinguishes the present moment is not merely the availability of new theories but a fundamental shift in how scholars conceptualise human agency, uncertainty, innovation and the embedded nature of economic life. Rather than being a fixed, universal category, entrepreneurship emerges as a historically contingent, socially mediated and theoretically pluralistic construct.

Although the canonical narrative often locates the origins of entrepreneurship within the emergence of capitalist markets, a more historically sensitive reading reveals that entrepreneurial behaviour long predates modern economic structures. Archaeological and socio-historical evidence demonstrates that early Mediterranean and Middle Eastern trade networks, medieval European guilds, monastic production systems and interregional caravan exchanges relied on sophisticated mechanisms of risk diversification, contract governance, tacit knowledge transmission and opportunity exploitation (Heilbroner, 1993, pp. 18-22). These proto-entrepreneurial formations were not theorised in contemporary terms, yet they embodied core elements that would later become central to modern entrepreneurship theory: the management of uncertainty, purposive coordination of resources, and active engagement with emerging opportunities.

The brewing sector exemplifies this early development particularly well. Monastic breweries in the medieval period institutionalised systematic fermentation processes, codified production standards, and created identifiable product distinctions-rudimentary, but recognisable antecedents to modern branding, quality signalling and market differentiation (Hornsey, 2003, pp. 131-137). Such examples underscore that entrepreneurship has always been entangled with local knowledge systems, craft competencies and cultural traditions.

The first coherent theoretical articulation of entrepreneurship emerged only in the eighteenth century with the classical economic writings of Richard Cantillon. Conceptualising the entrepreneur as the economic actor who assumes uncertainty-paying known input prices while facing unknown output prices-Cantillon introduced disequilibrium and uncertainty as structural features of market life (Cantillon, 1959, pp. 38-42). Jean-Baptiste Say expanded this understanding by assigning entrepreneurs a coordinating function in production, emphasising judgment, foresight and the mobilisation of productive factors (Say, 1960, pp. 74-80). While these classical frameworks succeeded in positioning entrepreneurship within economic analysis, their mechanistic assumptions and narrow focus on market allocation left little room for social, cultural or institutional dynamics.

Industrialisation marked a decisive epistemic shift. Entrepreneurial identity became increasingly associated with technological invention, mechanisation and organisational scale. The industrial entrepreneur was not merely a market intermediary but a designer of technological systems and production regimes. Developments in brewing further illustrate this transition: Pasteur's microbiological discoveries transformed the scientific understanding of fermentation, while Linde's mechanical refrigeration made year-round lager production possible, enabling breweries to expand, standardise and export on an unprecedented scale (Murray et al., 2017, pp. 21-24). Entrepreneurship thus came to be linked with scientific rationality, system-building and efficiency.

Joseph Schumpeter subsequently redefined entrepreneurship as the engine of economic evolution. For Schumpeter, entrepreneurs introduce "new combinations"-products, processes, markets and organisational forms-that disrupt existing equilibria, unleashing waves of "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1934, pp. 66-72). This reconceptualisation placed innovation at the centre of entrepreneurial action and profoundly shaped theories of industrial change. Yet Schumpeter's individualised and heroic depiction of the entrepreneur underestimated the collective, relational and institutional dynamics underlying innovation processes.

Israel Kirzner's contribution reframed entrepreneurship through a cognitive lens. Kirzner argued that entrepreneurial action arises not from radical innovation but from alertness: an interpretive capacity to notice profit opportunities that others overlook due to information asymmetries (Kirzner, 1973, pp. 30-38). This perspective introduced a subtler and more epistemic dimension, but retained an essentially individualistic ontology.

In the mid-twentieth century, psychological approaches attempted to isolate personal attributes that predispose individuals to entrepreneurial action. Achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961), internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and risk propensity (Begley and Boyd, 1987) were identified as relevant traits. Although influential, such perspectives attracted criticism for methodological limitations, weak predictive validity and a tendency to abstract entrepreneurial behaviour from its social and institutional context (Gartner, 1988).

A more relational perspective emerged with sociological and institutional theories. Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) demonstrated that entrepreneurship is fundamentally embedded within networks of social relations that determine access to

information, resources and legitimacy. North (1990) underscored the constraining and enabling functions of formal institutions and informal norms. This line of scholarship shows that entrepreneurial action is shaped by historically sedimented regulatory frameworks, cultural expectations and patterns of social order. In brewing, for instance, the German Reinheitsgebot not only regulated production inputs but embedded a cultural logic that influenced competitive strategies, consumer expectations and the identity of brewers for centuries.

Anthropological approaches extended the field even further by foregrounding the symbolic and identity-based dimensions of entrepreneurial practice. Berger (1991) and others emphasised that entrepreneurship unfolds within culturally meaningful narratives, rituals and symbolic systems. In craft brewing today, authenticity, locality, artisanal heritage and craft identity are not peripheral embellishments but central elements of entrepreneurial strategy and legitimacy (Schnell and Reese, 2014). These interpretations make clear that entrepreneurship is as much a cultural and identity-driven process as an economic one. To capture this progressive expansion of theoretical lenses, it is useful to synthesise these intellectual shifts within a structured analytical overview. The Table 1.1 does not serve merely as a summary of authors but as a conceptual map that visually organises the evolving emphases, contributions and limitations of each paradigm. Its purpose is to show how each theoretical stage emerged in response to the constraints of its predecessors.

Table 1.1. Evolution of entrepreneurial thought: key contributions and limitations

Stage of development	How entrepreneurship was understood	Key contribution to contemporary theory	Main limitations
Proto-entrepreneurship (ancient-medieval)	Practical trade, risk management, craft organisation	Reveals pre-theoretical roots; early opportunity exploitation	No formal conceptual framework
Classical economics (cantillon, say)	Uncertainty-bearing agent; coordinator of resources	Establishes entrepreneurship as an economic function	Mechanistic, ignores social dimensions
Industrial era	Technological innovator; organiser of large-scale production	Connects entrepreneurship with science, mechanisation and scaling	Marginalises cultural and institutional contexts
Schumpeterian perspective	Creator of innovation and “creative	Explains disruption and sectoral	Overly heroic, under-socialised

Stage of development	How entrepreneurship was understood	Key contribution to contemporary theory	Main limitations
	destruction"	transformation	view
Austrian economics (kirzner)	Interpreter of opportunities; cognitive alertness	Introduces cognitive and interpretive dimensions	Neglects institutional structures
Psychological approaches	Traits, motivations, risk preferences	Highlights individual agency and behavioural patterns	Limited predictive validity; ignores context
Sociological and institutional theory	Product of networks, norms and formal rules	Demonstrates embeddedness, power and legitimacy	Less attention to micro-level practices
Cultural and anthropological views	Cultural actor creating narratives and identity	Explains symbolic and place-based entrepreneurship	Harder to operationalise empirically
Interpretive/practice-based approaches	Emergent, relational, co-created and materially grounded process	Offers the most holistic and context-sensitive model	Lower generalisability; high complexity

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Cantillon (1959), Say (1960), Marshall (1890/1930; 1920), Schumpeter (1934; 1960), Kirzner (1973; 1979), Knight (1921), McClelland (1961), Granovetter (1985), Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), DiMaggio (1988), Welter (2011), Steyaert (2007), Gartner (2007), Jarzabkowski et al. (2007), Johannisson (2011), and Hjorth (2013).

The integration of the preceding table serves not merely as a classificatory device but as a conceptual lens through which the intellectual logic binding successive paradigms becomes explicit. The historical progression of entrepreneurship research reveals a cumulative, reflexive expansion of the field: each theoretical perspective introduced novel insights-uncertainty in classical economics, innovation in Schumpeterian analysis, cognition in Austrian theories, networks and institutions in sociological approaches, and symbolic meaning in anthropological frameworks. Yet each paradigm simultaneously generated epistemic blind spots, often by privileging specific ontologies (e.g., rationalism, individualism, technological determinism) while marginalising others. These omissions created conceptual tensions that catalysed the emergence of subsequent approaches.

In this sense, contemporary interpretive and practice-based perspectives do not supersede earlier theories in a linear, replacement-oriented manner. Rather, they represent the culmination of a long process of theoretical deepening in which the economic, psychological, sociological and cultural dimensions of entrepreneurial activity are progressively integrated. What emerges is a richer understanding of entrepreneurship as

a relational, materially mediated, and contextually embedded phenomenon-one that cannot be reduced to market mechanisms, individual traits or isolated acts of innovation.

The interpretive turn constitutes the most decisive epistemological rupture in this trajectory. Instead of conceptualising entrepreneurial opportunities as objective, pre-existing features of the market environment, interpretivist scholars foreground their socially constructed, negotiated and narratively constituted nature. Steyaert (2007, pp. 470-475) emphasizes entrepreneurship as an emergent, performative process of meaning-making, shaped through discourse and situated practice. Jack and Anderson (2002, pp. 469-476) demonstrate that entrepreneurial action is inseparable from its social, spatial and historical embeddedness, highlighting the constitutive role of local networks and community relations. Sarasvathy's (2001, pp. 248-258) effectuation theory articulates a logic of action grounded not in prediction but in co-creation, illustrating how entrepreneurs collaboratively shape possible futures under conditions of deep uncertainty. Baker and Nelson (2005, pp. 332-345) further extend this perspective by conceptualising bricolage as a creative recombination of neglected or non-standard resources-a particularly salient dynamic in resource-scarce environments such as small-scale brewing. Strategy-as-practice scholarship adds an additional layer by demonstrating that entrepreneurial strategy is not a top-down plan but an ongoing accomplishment enacted through mundane routines, material artefacts, tools, and embodied interactions (Whittington, 2006, pp. 614-623).

Taken together, this historical-conceptual arc provides a compelling rationale for adopting an interpretive, practice-sensitive analytical orientation in the present dissertation. It aligns closely with the epistemological commitments of constructivist grounded theory, which treats knowledge, categories and strategies as co-constructed through interaction, interpretation and situated experience. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for investigating entrepreneurial strategies in craft brewing, where tacit knowledge, embodied skill, artisanal identity, locality, sensory valuation and material practices form an inseparable part of entrepreneurial action. Under these conditions, entrepreneurship cannot be meaningfully understood through purely economic or trait-based lenses; it must instead be analysed as a socially embedded, meaning-intensive and emergent process.

1.2. Classical entrepreneurial theories

Classical entrepreneurial theories provided the first coherent and theoretically articulated framework for understanding entrepreneurship as a distinct mode of economic agency rather than as an incidental aspect of commercial life. Their emergence marked a decisive epistemic shift in the history of economic thought: from descriptive accounts of trade and craft to systematic theorisation grounded in the rationalist logic of early economic science. These theories did not merely classify entrepreneurial behaviour; they constructed an ontology of the entrepreneur-an implicit set of assumptions about the nature of economic action, the structure of market environments and the mechanisms through which individuals generate economic change. Although later developments in behavioural, sociological and interpretive research have exposed important limitations of this paradigm, the classical tradition remains foundational because it established the conceptual coordinates-uncertainty, judgment, innovation, opportunity, equilibrium-around which the field continues to evolve (Schumpeter, 1960; Kirzner, 1980; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

Long before entrepreneurship was identified as a distinct analytical category, entrepreneurial behaviour existed in practice. Medieval merchants, artisan guild masters, shipowners, monastic brewers and early industrialists all undertook activities that today would be described as entrepreneurial: they bore risk, coordinated resources, experimented with new products and sought to exploit emerging opportunities. Yet in pre-modern societies such behaviour was embedded in broader social, religious and moral frameworks and not conceptualised as a separate economic function. The classical theorists were thus the first to undertake the intellectually demanding task of extracting entrepreneurship from this dense social fabric and presenting it as a discrete object of scientific reflection. In doing so, they contributed to the broader modern project of "economising" social life-reframing complex social practices in terms of rational decision-making and market coordination.

From the perspective of early economic theory, entrepreneurship quickly came to be regarded as a key driver of development. Economic growth was increasingly understood as dependent on entrepreneurs, conceptualised as action-oriented, highly motivated individuals willing to incur risk in pursuit of profit and innovation. In this line of thinking, the entrepreneur is portrayed as someone who identifies and pursues opportunities, mobilises resources, introduces new products and processes and, in doing so, contributes to structural change in the economy. This understanding is reflected both

in early economic writings that link entrepreneurship with adventurism, creativity and dynamic change in production, and in later syntheses that highlight its role in reallocating resources to higher-value uses (Casson, 1982; 1987). Although stylised and abstract, this figure of the entrepreneur laid the groundwork for subsequent theoretical formulations, including those that would later be applied to specific sectors such as brewing.

Central to the classical paradigm is the assumption that entrepreneurship is fundamentally individual, rational and opportunity-driven. Markets are conceptualised as structured arenas governed by stable regularities, where price signals communicate information in a relatively transparent and predictable manner. Economic actors are assumed to evaluate alternatives through calculation and foresight. Within this framework, opportunities are treated as objective features of the environment, existing independently of human interpretation. The entrepreneurial task is therefore to identify, evaluate and exploit these opportunities more effectively than others. This epistemological stance is consistent with the methodological individualism characteristic of early economics, which explains economic outcomes through the decisions of autonomous agents rather than through embedded social, institutional or cultural processes (Hodgson, 2001, pp. 77-83). Both international and Polish scholarship point out that such a model reproduces a heroic, decontextualised image of the entrepreneur, one that continues to influence policy discourses even where its empirical adequacy is contested.

Within this rationalist ontology, classical theories articulate several defining mechanisms of entrepreneurial action. One of the earliest and most influential concerns uncertainty-bearing, formulated by Richard Cantillon. Cantillon conceptualised the entrepreneur as an agent who purchases inputs at known prices and sells outputs at uncertain prices, thereby assuming the risk inherent in fluctuations of supply and demand (Cantillon, 1959, pp. 38-42). Uncertainty, in this view, is not a marginal or pathological feature of economic life; it is structurally embedded in market processes. By taking decisions under such conditions-without guaranteed outcomes-entrepreneurs occupy a unique position in the economic system. Cantillon's insight prefigured later distinctions between calculable risk and unquantifiable uncertainty, as elaborated by Frank Knight (1921, pp. 19-26). Knight argued that genuine entrepreneurial profit arises from bearing uncertainty that cannot be insured or statistically forecast, thus reinforcing the centrality of judgment in contexts where future states of the world cannot be reduced to probability distributions. Both Cantillon and Knight therefore locate the essence of entrepreneurship

in the capacity and willingness to act in the face of irreducible unknowability. In this regard, Lenart-Gansiniec and Sułkowski (2020, pp. 321–322) argued that strategic behavior is inherently context-sensitive and shaped by local institutional and social conditions, challenging the applicability of universal strategic models in volatile environments.

Jean-Baptiste Say shifted the focus from uncertainty-bearing to coordination. Say argued that the entrepreneur's primary function is to combine productive factors-labour, capital and natural resources-into a coherent and efficient production process (Say, 1960, pp. 74-80). In Say's framing, entrepreneurs do more than simply accept risk; they exercise judgment, foresight and organisational skill. They reallocate resources from less productive to more productive uses, anticipate consumer needs and design new combinations of inputs that generate added value. Importantly, Say emphasised that entrepreneurs need not provide their own capital; what distinguishes them is not ownership but the ability to perceive and mobilise opportunities. This conceptualisation extends entrepreneurship beyond trade and speculation and positions it at the heart of production. Retrospectively, Say's work can be read as an antecedent of resource-based and capability-oriented views, in which competitive advantage stems from the distinctive ability to orchestrate and recombine resources.

The attitude of classical English political economy toward entrepreneurship was more ambivalent. Many classical economists focused primarily on the "invisible hand" mechanism, assigning decisive importance to impersonal price adjustments and treating the economy as a largely self-regulating system (Smith and Stevens, 2010). In this context, the explicit category of the entrepreneur sometimes recedes into the background, overshadowed by analyses of rents, wages and capital accumulation. David Ricardo, for instance, scarcely employed the concept of the entrepreneur, directing his attention instead to distributional issues between landlords, workers and capitalists. John Stuart Mill discussed profit and interest but did not systematically differentiate entrepreneurial functions from general capital ownership.

Adam Smith occupies a somewhat special position in this tradition. Although he more frequently used the term "capitalist" than "entrepreneur", he nevertheless acknowledged the active, creative and risk-taking capacities of those who organise production and exchange. Smith described such actors as individuals who transform demand into supply, allocate capital across different sectors-agriculture, manufacturing, wholesale and retail- and respond intelligently to changing market conditions (Smith,

2010; Heilbroner, 1993). In highlighting their adaptability, prudence and foresight, Smith implicitly distinguished between passive capital ownership and active entrepreneurial decision-making. His reflections anticipate later debates about managerial versus entrepreneurial functions within the firm and the role of judgment in dynamic markets.

With the rise of neoclassical economics, particularly in the work of Alfred Marshall, entrepreneurship lost some of its earlier analytical prominence. Marshall developed a sophisticated framework for analysing market equilibrium under assumptions of near-perfect information, homogeneous goods and relatively frictionless competition (Marshall, 1890/1930). Within such a framework, markets resemble "black boxes" that transform individual decisions into smoothly equilibrated outcomes. If all actors have access to the same information and follow similar rationales, the conceptual space for distinctively entrepreneurial judgment diminishes. Entrepreneurship becomes either implicit or absorbed into the generalised category of the firm. Critics such as Loasby (1982) argue that this perspective obscures precisely those aspects of economic life-ignorance, surprise, learning and creativity-that make entrepreneurship theoretically interesting and practically consequential. It is significant that in many neoclassical models, innovation and structural change are treated as exogenous shocks, rather than as outcomes of entrepreneurial agency.

A corrective to this tendency emerged within the Austrian School of Economics, which explicitly placed human action, subjective knowledge and dispersed information at the centre of market processes (von Mises, 2007). Within this tradition, Joseph Schumpeter and Israel Kirzner developed two highly influential, though conceptually divergent, interpretations of entrepreneurship. Schumpeter reconceptualised entrepreneurship as the engine of economic evolution. For him, entrepreneurs are not primarily coordinators of existing resources but innovators who introduce "new combinations" into the economy-new products, new production methods, new markets, new organisational forms and new sources of supply. These innovations disrupt existing equilibria and generate waves of "creative destruction" that transform entire industries and economic structures (Schumpeter, 1934, pp. 66-72; 1960; 1995). In Schumpeter's view, entrepreneurship is fundamentally transformative rather than adaptive; it reshapes the opportunity landscape itself. Although his work retains elements of methodological individualism and often portrays entrepreneurs in heroic terms, it had enormous impact on theories of industrial change, innovation and sectoral dynamics, including in areas

such as brewing where product and process innovations have repeatedly redefined competitive positions.

Israel Kirzner, while operating within the Austrian tradition, advanced a different emphasis. Rather than viewing entrepreneurship as disruptive innovation, Kirzner conceptualised it as alertness to previously unnoticed opportunities (Kirzner, 1973; 1979; 1989). Opportunities arise from market imperfections, coordination failures and information asymmetries. Entrepreneurs are those who, owing to particular sensitivity or interpretive capacity, perceive these opportunities and act upon them. Their activity is, in this sense, equilibrating rather than disequilibrating: by exploiting unnoticed price differentials or unmet needs, they help restore markets to a more coherent state. Kirzner thus introduced a subtle but important cognitive dimension into classical theory-entrepreneurship as interpretation, not solely invention. While he continued to treat opportunities as objective features of the environment, his focus on alertness foreshadowed later interest in cognition, sensemaking and opportunity recognition processes.

Subsequent economic theorists further refined these classical ideas. Casson (1982; 1987) argued that entrepreneurs specialise in making judgmental decisions under conditions of costly and unevenly distributed information. In his view, entrepreneurship consists in making difficult choices about resource allocation where no obvious or universally accepted decision rule exists. By emphasising the heterogeneity of information and the centrality of judgment, Casson expanded the analytical framework beyond simple notions of discovery. Baumol (1990), in turn, integrated entrepreneurship more firmly into mainstream economics by arguing that entrepreneurial activity is a permanent and invariant feature of societies, but its outcomes-productive, unproductive or destructive-are shaped by the institutional environment. This argument presaged the now substantial literature on institutional entrepreneurship and the role of formal and informal rules in channelling entrepreneurial effort. Alvarez and Barney (2007) added an important nuance by proposing that opportunities are not only discovered, as in Kirzner's formulation, but can also be created through entrepreneurial action, creativity and resource recombination. This insight begins to erode the objectivist assumption underlying much of the classical paradigm and prepares the ground for more interpretivist approaches.

Parallel to these economic formulations, mid-twentieth-century research introduced a psychological strand of "classical" thinking about entrepreneurship. The

psychological approach sought to explain entrepreneurial behaviour through relatively stable individual traits and motivations. Research on the need for achievement (McClelland, 1961), internal versus external locus of control (Rotter, 1966), risk-taking propensity (Begley and Boyd, 1987), tolerance for ambiguity (Budner, 1962) and related constructs tested the hypothesis that entrepreneurs differ systematically from non-entrepreneurs in their psychological profile. Empirical studies often suggested that entrepreneurs display higher levels of achievement motivation, a stronger internal locus of control, greater tolerance for ambiguity and higher, though usually calculated, risk tolerance than comparison groups (Johnson, 1990; Hornaday and Aboud, 1971; Rauch and Frese, 2007). The concept of self-efficacy-belief in one's capacity to accomplish tasks-was also found to be important; entrepreneurs with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of obstacles and to mobilise resources effectively (Bandura, 1989; 1997). More recent psychological work has highlighted entrepreneurial passion and optimism as factors that can energise action and attract stakeholders, while also recognising that excessive optimism may impair judgment and increase the likelihood of failure (Cardon et al., 2009; Hmieleski and Baron, 2009).

This psychological strand enriched the classical paradigm by adding nuance to the question of who becomes an entrepreneur and why. However, it also remained largely faithful to the underlying assumptions of methodological individualism and rational agency. The focus on traits and internal dispositions tended to marginalise contextual influences and led to critiques concerning cultural bias, methodological inconsistency and limited predictive validity (Gartner, 1988). Nevertheless, the psychological literature exerted a significant influence on policy, education and popular discourse, sustaining the image of the entrepreneur as a particular type of person, rather than as a role embedded in networks, institutions and practices.

Taken together, these classical economic and psychological theories made substantial contributions. They established entrepreneurship as a distinct object of scientific inquiry, articulated core mechanisms of entrepreneurial agency and linked individual decision-making with macroeconomic development. They clarified the roles of risk, uncertainty, innovation, coordination and judgment, and they provided operational constructs for empirical research and policy design. Yet these contributions rest upon a set of assumptions that restrict the explanatory scope of the classical paradigm. Most notably, classical theories tend to treat opportunities as pre-existing, objective phenomena, overlooking the socially constructed, interpretive and emergent nature of

opportunity formation (Steyaert, 2007, pp. 470-475). Their commitment to rationality underestimates the ambiguity, improvisation and experimental reasoning that characterise entrepreneurial practice in real-world settings, especially in environments of radical uncertainty. Their methodological individualism obscures the collective and networked dimensions of entrepreneurial action (Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986, pp. 13-18). They conceptualise markets as neutral coordination mechanisms rather than as institutional and cultural formations shaped by norms, regulations and shared meanings (North, 1990, pp. 3-7). Finally, they remain largely silent on the role of materiality and embodied practice, despite the growing recognition that entrepreneurial action is mediated by tools, technologies, spatial contexts and tacit knowledge (Orlikowski, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2005).

In order to consolidate the extensive conceptual discussion presented above, it is useful to introduce a visual tool that systematises the internal logic of classical entrepreneurship theory. Table 1.2 fulfils this function by providing a structured overview of the main classical perspectives, showing how each conceptualisation understands entrepreneurship, what mechanisms it emphasises, which assumptions about opportunities and markets it adopts, and what limitations it exhibits from a contemporary interpretive standpoint. The table does not simply aggregate definitions; it maps the intellectual terrain of classical entrepreneurship research, making the underlying ontological and epistemological commitments visible at a glance and allowing the reader to see how individual contributions relate to one another.

Table 1.2. Classical perspectives on entrepreneurship

Perspective	How entrepreneurship is understood	Dominant mechanism	Assumptions about opportunities and markets	Main limitation from contemporary viewpoint
Early economic view (Cantillon (1959); Knight (1921))	Entrepreneur as uncertainty bearer	Accepting unknown output prices; managing uncertainty	Opportunities and prices treated as given; markets tending toward equilibrium	Under-theorises social context; treats uncertainty as exogenous
Coordinating view (Say (1960))	Entrepreneur as organiser and coordinator of resources	Combining labour, capital and land; reallocating resources	Opportunities seen as objectively existing possibilities	Neglects institutions, culture and collective practices
Industrial / neoclassical view	Entrepreneur as industrial organiser and	Organisational coordination; technological	Nearly perfect information; perfect	Minimal space for innovation, learning and

Perspective	How entrepreneurship is understood	Dominant mechanism	Assumptions about opportunities and markets	Main limitation from contemporary viewpoint
(Marshall (1890/1930; 1920))	manager	adaptation	competition; self-regulating markets	ignorance
Schumpeterian view (Schumpeter (1934; 1960; 1995))	Entrepreneur as innovator and agent of "creative destruction"	Introducing "new combinations"; disruptive innovation	Opportunities tied to innovation; markets repeatedly displaced from equilibrium	Overemphasises heroic individual; weak account of networks and institutions
Austrian / Kirznerian view (Kirzner (1973; 1979; 1989))	Entrepreneur as alert discoverer of unnoticed opportunities	Alertness; interpretation of information asymmetries	Opportunities pre-exist "out there"; markets move toward coordination	Treats opportunities as objective; underplays opportunity creation
Decision-theoretic view (Casson (1982; 1987); Baumol (1990))	Entrepreneur as specialist in judgment under information costs	Judgemental decisions in uncertain environments; productive vs. unproductive entrepreneurship	Information unevenly distributed, but knowable; institutions shape incentives	Limited attention to practice, embodiment and day-to-day entrepreneurial action
Psychological trait view (McClelland (1961); Begley and Boyd (1987); Rauch and Frese (2007))	Entrepreneur as individual with distinctive personality traits	Achievement motivation, locus of control, risk-taking, self-efficacy	Opportunities given; traits explain who exploits them	Reductionist; weak predictive power; insufficient attention to structure and context

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Cantillon (1959), Knight (1921), Say (1960), Marshall (1890/1930; 1920), Schumpeter (1934; 1960; 1995), Kirzner (1973; 1979; 1989), Casson (1982; 1987), Baumol (1990), McClelland (1961), Begley and Boyd (1987), and Rauch and Frese (2007).

Presented as Table 1.2, the classical tradition reveals a coherent yet internally differentiated paradigm that shaped the foundational vocabulary of entrepreneurship research. Despite the diversity of contributions-from Cantillon's uncertainty-bearing entrepreneur and Say's coordinating agent, through Marshall's organiser of industrial production, Schumpeter's innovator and disruptor and Kirzner's alert interpreter, to Casson's decision specialist and the psychological theorists concerned with individual dispositions-these frameworks share a recognisable ontological core. Entrepreneurship is conceptualised as fundamentally individualised, rationalised and opportunity-driven, rooted in the entrepreneur's capacity for judgment, foresight and efficient decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. What the table makes explicit is that each

classical theorist extends the conceptual boundaries of entrepreneurship in a particular direction-toward uncertainty, coordination, industrial organisation, innovation, cognitive alertness or personality attributes-while remaining anchored in shared assumptions about the nature of markets and opportunities. Opportunities are treated as objective and discoverable features of the external environment; markets are viewed as self-regulating mechanisms governed by price signals; and entrepreneurial action is framed as an outcome of individual agency rather than relational or institutional processes (Hodgson, 2001). These common premises ensured analytical clarity and facilitated the construction of parsimonious models, but they also produced a degree of conceptual narrowing.

The strength of the classical paradigm lies precisely in this internal coherence. By constructing entrepreneurship as a distinct economic function and grounding it in rationalist, individualistic and opportunity-centric logic, classical theorists provided the first systematic framework for understanding entrepreneurial agency. They created the intellectual infrastructure that later allowed the field to expand into more complex and interdisciplinary directions. At the same time, however, the classical framework generated a set of epistemological blind spots that would become fertile ground for theoretical critique and innovation. Among the most significant limitations revealed by the comparative logic of Table 1.2 are a persistent individualism, an objectivist view of opportunities, a neglect of cultural meaning and symbolic action and a limited engagement with materiality and practice. Classical theories do not adequately explain how networks, institutions and communities shape entrepreneurial possibilities; how opportunities emerge from social interactions and narratives; or how everyday practices, tools and artefacts mediate entrepreneurial activity in concrete settings such as breweries, local markets or regional production systems.

These limitations do not diminish the historical importance of the classical paradigm. On the contrary, they highlight why the field necessarily expanded beyond economic rationalism into behavioural, sociological, anthropological and interpretive domains. The turn toward psychological theories of motivation and cognition, toward sociological accounts of networks and embeddedness, and toward anthropological perspectives on culture and identity reflects an effort to address precisely those blind spots. Similarly, the emergence of processual and practice-based research on entrepreneurial orientation and venturing (Gartner, 1985; Covin and Slevin, 1989; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996) reflects a shift away from static portraits of heroic individuals

toward dynamic analyses of how organisations enact entrepreneurship in everyday practice.

Strategic processes within organisations are increasingly understood as mediated by interpretive frameworks that shape what is recognised as legitimate, valuable, or strategically relevant. Strategic meaning is continuously reconstructed through communication practices in which organisational actors negotiate interpretations in the course of everyday interaction (Gębarowski, 2015, pp. 42–47). From this perspective, strategy emerges not as a fixed plan, but as a dynamic outcome of ongoing sensemaking embedded in organisational discourse.

In this sense, the classical theories presented and synthesised in Table 1.2 constitute the conceptual point of departure rather than the endpoint of entrepreneurship research. They provided the foundational grammar of the field-uncertainty, innovation, coordination, opportunity-but subsequent traditions have reinterpreted, critiqued and expanded these concepts in ways that better reflect the complexity of entrepreneurial phenomena. As the following parts of the theoretical chapter demonstrate, contemporary scholarship reconceptualises entrepreneurship as a relational, embedded, situated and materially grounded process, shaped not only by individual cognition but also by networks, institutions, cultural meanings and embodied practices. The transition from classical to contemporary interpretive perspectives thus represents an evolution from entrepreneurship understood primarily as rational decision-making to entrepreneurship understood as socially constructed action.

1.3. Contemporary interpretive approaches to entrepreneurship

The emergence of contemporary interpretive approaches in entrepreneurship research reflects a profound epistemological reorientation driven by the growing recognition that much real-world entrepreneurial activity cannot be meaningfully understood through the assumptions of classical economic or psychological theories. While classical frameworks provided analytical clarity by defining entrepreneurship as an individualised, rational, opportunity-driven function, the empirical richness and heterogeneity of entrepreneurial contexts gradually exposed the limitations of viewing economic action through purely calculative, equilibrium-oriented or trait-based lenses. Across multiple disciplines, scholars began to recognise that entrepreneurship unfolds within complex webs of social relationships, institutional structures, cultural meanings

and material practices-phenomena that require interpretive, rather than deterministic, theoretical tools.

The interpretive shift is deeply rooted in broader transformations in the social sciences, particularly the turn toward understanding economic behaviour as embedded in social, cultural and institutional environments. Early signals of this transition can be traced to the work of economic sociologists who demonstrated that entrepreneurial action is inseparable from networks of trust, reciprocity and social capital. Aldrich and Zimmer (1986, pp. 3-7) argued that entrepreneurs do not operate in isolation; instead, they navigate opportunity structures that are fundamentally shaped by their relational positions. This insight challenged the methodological individualism that dominated classical theory and introduced the idea that opportunities may emerge through interpersonal connections rather than through the solitary cognitive alertness assumed by Kirzner. Similar arguments appeared in institutional economics, where North (1990, pp. 4-9) demonstrated that entrepreneurial behaviour is structured by formal rules, informal norms and historically sedimented institutional arrangements. This body of work made visible the hidden scaffolding-legal frameworks, cultural conventions, social expectations-that shapes what entrepreneurs can legitimately do, and how markets themselves are constituted.

These early insights gained urgency as empirical research documented entrepreneurial phenomena incompatible with classical assumptions. Studies across high-technology industries revealed that opportunities often take shape through interactive processes rather than through individual recognition. For example, research on medical device development shows that innovations frequently emerge from joint interpretation between clinicians, engineers and regulatory actors, who collectively make sense of ambiguous technological possibilities and translate them into workable solutions. Such processes cannot be reduced to the discovery of exogenous opportunities; they depend on negotiation, iterative experimentation and the alignment of multiple institutional logics. Similar patterns appear in biotechnology, where the commercialisation of genomic technologies results from complex interactions among researchers, investors, regulators and users rather than from the isolated cognition of an alert individual. In rapidly evolving AI sectors, entrepreneurial outcomes depend heavily on interpretive work: entrepreneurs must translate abstract algorithmic capabilities into socially intelligible value propositions for customers, partners and regulators.

Further evidence emerged from studies of entrepreneurship in emerging markets and low-resource settings. In contexts marked by institutional voids, infrastructural weaknesses and high environmental uncertainty, entrepreneurs frequently rely on improvisation, bricolage and culturally embedded social networks rather than on predictive strategy or stable market information. Research on informal economies across Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia has shown that entrepreneurs often construct opportunities through adaptive recombination of available resources, mobilising kinship ties, community obligations and improvised production techniques. These actions unfold in environments where formal market signals are weak or contradictory, making classical assumptions of perfect or even partial information analytically untenable. Interpretive approaches thus provide a more accurate lens through which to understand how entrepreneurs navigate uncertainty when calculative rationality is insufficient.

Sztangret argues that knowledge in organisations-especially marketing knowledge-does not function primarily as static information but as a relational resource produced through interaction. Her analysis of knowledge communities emphasises that value is shaped through processes of sharing, translation, and collective interpretation (Sztangret, 2013). This shift toward interpretive reasoning also reflects growing recognition of the cultural and symbolic dimensions of entrepreneurship. Berger (1991, pp. 22-29) and later authors demonstrated that entrepreneurial action is deeply entangled with identity, meaning-making and the construction of legitimacy. Entrepreneurs do not simply allocate resources; they craft narratives that position their ventures within culturally meaningful frames. This is evident in creative industries-film, design, culinary arts, fashion-where value is inseparable from symbolic meaning, aesthetic norms and cultural resonance. Yet it is equally visible in scientific innovation, where legitimacy depends on articulating compelling visions of technological futures, or in social entrepreneurship, where ventures are sustained by moral narratives about justice, community or sustainability. These culturally mediated processes remain invisible within classical economic models but constitute central mechanisms of entrepreneurial survival and growth.

The interpretive turn is further propelled by practice-based perspectives that view entrepreneurship not as a discrete moment of opportunity recognition but as an ongoing set of activities, interactions and material engagements. Jarzabkowski (2005, pp. 15-21) emphasised that economic action is enacted through routines, tools, artefacts and embodied practices. Entrepreneurs construct business models through everyday

experimentation with prototypes, pricing schemes, pitches, customer dialogues, digital platforms and technological infrastructures. These interactions reveal the materiality of entrepreneurial work-the role of instruments, technologies, spaces and objects in shaping what entrepreneurs perceive as possible. In digital platform contexts, for example, algorithmic systems shape entrepreneurial agency by filtering visibility, structuring transactions and defining metrics of legitimacy. Understanding these intricacies requires analytical tools that go beyond rational choice models, instead tracing how practices and materialities co-create entrepreneurial outcomes.

Across all these domains, interpretive approaches offer a more comprehensive ontology of entrepreneurship-one that views economic action as situated, emergent and deeply intersubjective. Rather than treating opportunities as objective, pre-existing entities, interpretive scholars argue that opportunities take shape through processes of social construction, negotiation and enactment. Steyaert (2007, pp. 470-475) describes entrepreneurship as an ongoing storytelling process in which actors make sense of uncertain futures, mobilise others around shared narratives and co-create trajectories of action. Sarasvathy (2001, pp. 250-256) similarly rejects predictive models in favour of effectual reasoning, emphasising that entrepreneurs often begin with available means and iteratively construct ends through stakeholder interaction. In these formulations, the locus of entrepreneurship is not an isolated individual making rational calculations but a dynamic interplay of identities, relationships, cultural meanings, institutional constraints and material artefacts.

The interpretive perspective does not discard the contributions of classical theory; instead, it situates them within a broader and more nuanced understanding of economic life. Innovation remains central, but its origins are viewed as emergent and relational rather than heroic and individual. Judgment remains important, but it is seen as situated and culturally informed rather than as abstract optimisation. Uncertainty remains fundamental, but it is framed as irreducible and socially navigated rather than as a calculable deviation from expected outcomes. These conceptual shifts allow entrepreneurship scholarship to account for phenomena that classical theory cannot easily explain: collective innovation, cross-sectoral collaboration, opportunity creation, improvisational resource use, cultural legitimacy work, and material-mediated decision-making.

In this way, contemporary interpretive approaches provide the intellectual foundations for analysing entrepreneurship as a lived, evolving and contextually

embedded practice. They reflect a recognition that the entrepreneurial world is richer, messier and more socially complex than classical theory assumed-or indeed was capable of modelling. They offer a conceptual vocabulary that resonates with empirical realities across industries, regions and organisational forms, capturing the relational, cultural and practical dimensions of entrepreneurial life with far greater fidelity.

The breadth of this theoretical reorientation is captured in Table 1.3**,** which synthesises the major interpretive perspectives and the authors who shaped them. Rather than treating these approaches as isolated theoretical islands, the table positions them as interrelated strands within a broader epistemological shift. Each perspective foregrounds a different dimension of entrepreneurial life-relational, situated, material, cultural, narrative or institutional-yet together they constitute a coherent challenge to the rationalist, individualistic and opportunity-objectivist assumptions of classical theory. By juxtaposing embedded, situated, effectual and bricolage perspectives with discursive, institutional, cultural and practice-based approaches, the table makes visible the conceptual architecture of contemporary interpretive scholarship. It shows that entrepreneurship is not simply what individuals do but what they are able to do within webs of relationships, artefacts, norms, narratives and institutional arrangements.

Table 1.3. Contemporary interpretive approaches to entrepreneurship

Approach	Core definition	Concepts	Authors and works
Embedded entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship as action deeply rooted in social structures, networks, institutions and cultural norms; economic behaviour is inseparable from social relations and contextual embedding.	Social ties, network embeddedness, institutional contexts, place-based ties, norms, trust, legitimacy.	Aldrich and Zimmer (1986, pp. 13-18); Granovetter (1985, pp. 481-510); Jack and Anderson (2002, pp. 467-487); Welter (2011, pp. 165-190).
Situated entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship emerges through situated practice shaped by physical settings, artefacts, temporal structures and local meanings; entrepreneurial action is performed within specific practice contexts.	Practice, situation, embodied action, spatiality, temporality, interpretive sensemaking.	Lave and Wenger (1991, pp. 29-50); Suchman (1987, pp. 50-75); Orr (1996, pp. 1-23); Steyaert (2007, pp. 453-479).
Effectuation	Entrepreneurs do not predict the future but co-create it with available means, focusing on control rather than	Means-driven action, affordable loss, stakeholder commitment, co-creation,	Sarasvathy (2001, pp. 243-263); Read et al. (2009, pp. 1-23); Dew et al. (2009, pp. 287-

Approach	Core definition	Concepts	Authors and works
	prediction; opportunities emerge through stakeholder interaction.	contingency.	312).
Bricolage	Entrepreneurs act by "making do" with resources at hand, improvising and recombining them under constraints to create value and solve novel problems.	Improvisation, resource recombination, constraints, creative problem-solving, making do.	Baker and Nelson (2005, pp. 329-344); Lévi-Strauss (1966, pp. 16-36); Brewis and Jack (2018, pp. 12-27).
Narrative / discursive entrepreneurship	Opportunities and entrepreneurial identities are constructed through stories, discourse, rhetoric and narrative practices; entrepreneurship as meaning-making.	Storytelling, identity construction, discourse, legitimation, narrative framing.	Gartner (2007, pp. 613-627); Lounsbury and Glynn (2001, pp. 545-579); Hjorth (2013, pp. 46-67).
Institutional entrepreneurship	Actors who leverage resources and legitimacy to create, transform or disrupt institutional structures.	Institutional change, legitimacy, field-level agency, resource mobilisation.	Dimaggio (1988, pp. 3-22); Greenwood and Suddaby (2006, pp. 28-54).
Practice-based entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship is not a trait or event but a set of everyday practices enacted through tools, artefacts, routines, embodied actions and situated activities.	Materiality, routines, embodied knowing, tools and artefacts, performativity.	Orlikowski (2002, pp. 249-273); Jarzabkowski et al. (2007, pp. 5-30); Johannisson (2011, pp. 137-157).
Cultural entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial value creation is rooted in cultural meaning-making, symbolic work, identity and legitimacy within cultural fields.	Cultural narratives, symbols, identity, authenticity, meaning systems.	Swidler (1986, pp. 273-286); Rao et al. (2003, pp. 795-828); Glynn (2000, pp. 285-305).
Social entrepreneurship (interpretive lens)	Social problems and solutions are constructed through collective meaning-making, identity, mission-building and relational work.	Social value creation, hybridity, mission identity, community embeddedness.	Mair and Marti (2006, pp. 35-56); Dacin et al. (2011, pp. 1203-1211).

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), Granovetter (1985), Jack and Anderson (2002), Welter (2011), Lave and Wenger (1991), Suchman (1987), Orr (1996), Steyaert (2007), Sarasvathy (2001), Read et al. (2009), Dew et al. (2009), Baker and Nelson (2005), Lévi-Strauss (1966), Brewis and Jack (2018), Gartner (2007), Lounsbury and Glynn (2001), Hjorth (2013), DiMaggio (1988), Greenwood and Suddaby (2006), Orlikowski (2002), Jarzabkowski et al. (2007), Johannisson (2011), Swidler (1986), Rao et al. (2003), Glynn (2000), Mair and Marti (2006), and Dacin et al. (2011).

In this sense, the table functions not simply as a classificatory overview but as a form of conceptual cartography that illuminates where, why and how the interpretive turn breaks with the assumptions of its classical predecessors. Rather than presenting

interpretive approaches as incremental refinements of rational–economic models, it reveals them as constituting a paradigmatic reorientation in which entrepreneurial agency is understood as something produced through interaction, context and meaning-making rather than possessed by isolated individuals (Gartner, 1985; Weick, 1995; Steyaert, 2007). By making visible the mechanisms through which opportunities are socially constructed (Gartner, 2007; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), the forms of knowledge and practice through which they come into being (Suchman, 1987; Schatzki, 2002; Orlikowski, 2002), and the relational and institutional conditions under which entrepreneurial action becomes legitimate (Granovetter, 1985; DiMaggio, 1988; Welter, 2011), the table provides an analytic scaffold for the deeper inquiry that follows. It also foregrounds the intellectual coherence of the interpretive paradigm: each approach-embedded, situated, effectual or bricolage-based-shares a fundamental commitment to viewing entrepreneurship as relational, emergent and contextually enacted rather than strategically pre-given (Sarasvathy, 2001; Baker & Nelson, 2005; Jack & Anderson, 2002). In this respect, interpretive approaches are not peripheral adjustments to the classical canon but full reconceptualisations of what entrepreneurship is, how it operates and where it resides (Hjorth, 2013; Johannisson, 2011).

The following discussion builds directly on these insights by moving into the first and most structurally foundational interpretive lens: embedded entrepreneurship. The recognition that entrepreneurship cannot be adequately explained by reference to individual traits, rational optimisation or the detection of pre-formed opportunities prompted scholars to interrogate the deeper social, institutional and relational conditions that make entrepreneurial action possible in the first place (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Granovetter, 1985). If entrepreneurship is not solely the product of cognitive alertness or personal motivation, but emerges within webs of social ties, cultural expectations, institutional arrangements and historically sedimented practices, then a critical task is to understand the architecture of these contexts (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Welter, 2011). Embeddedness theory responds precisely to this challenge. It argues that entrepreneurial behaviour is not merely influenced by its social environment but constituted through it: opportunities materialise through networks (Granovetter, 1985), identities are co-produced through community membership (Johannisson, 2011), and the legitimacy of entrepreneurial action depends on shared norms, trust and the moral infrastructures of everyday life (DiMaggio, 1988; Suchman, 1995). In this way, embedded perspectives both anchor and propel the interpretive paradigm, offering the structural grounding upon

which subsequent situated, effectual and bricolage-based interpretations build (Steyaert, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2001; Baker & Nelson, 2005).

The seminal work of Granovetter (1985, pp. 481-484) articulated this argument with remarkable clarity. Challenging both under-socialised (pure rational choice) and over-socialised (norm-deterministic) accounts of economic action, Granovetter demonstrated that economic behaviour is embedded in ongoing social relations that shape information flows, trust, cooperation and access to resources. Entrepreneurs do not simply "search" for suppliers, investors or partners-these relationships are cultivated, negotiated and maintained through historically situated social ties. Empirical studies across diverse sectors underline this point. For instance, research in the semiconductor industry shows that access to tacit knowledge, specialised labour and investment capital depends heavily on embedded networks linking engineers, venture capitalists and academic laboratories in regions such as Silicon Valley and Hsinchu Science Park. These networks are not incidental; they constitute an infrastructural substrate that renders entrepreneurial experimentation possible. Similarly, studies of Italy's industrial districts demonstrate that dense social ties and shared cultural norms support exceptional levels of innovation among small artisanal firms whose competitive advantage stems not from economies of scale but from relationally embedded collaborative practices that enable rapid knowledge exchange and flexible specialisation.

Embeddedness also illuminates why entrepreneurship varies so dramatically across institutional contexts. North (1990, pp. 4–9) argued that formal rules, enforcement mechanisms and informal norms create "institutional matrices" that structure the incentives and constraints faced by entrepreneurs. These arrangements shape not only what is economically profitable but also what is culturally legitimate (Scott, 2014). Renewable energy start-ups, for example, tend to thrive in environments characterised by supportive regulatory frameworks, stable subsidy regimes and cultural narratives valuing environmental stewardship (Geels, 2011; Mazzucato, 2013). By contrast, in economies marked by bureaucratic complexity, institutional voids or political instability, entrepreneurs often depend on informal networks, personal ties and relational brokerage to circumvent obstacles that classical theory treats as external frictions (Granovetter, 1985; Khanna & Palepu, 2010). These dynamics are especially evident in emerging markets, where entrepreneurs must creatively combine formal and informal institutional elements to maintain venture viability (Welter & Smallbone, 2011; Puffer, McCarthy & Boisot, 2010). In East African agri-entrepreneurship, for example, access to microfinance

frequently hinges not on formal creditworthiness but on informal trust networks, kinship structures and collective reputational assessments-forms of embeddedness that remain largely invisible within opportunity-based and trait-centred models of entrepreneurship (Platteau, 2000; Fafchamps, 2004).

Embedded perspectives further reveal how social structures produce uneven access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Entrepreneurship is not a universal field of equal possibility but one shaped by gendered, ethnic and class-based constraints embedded within broader social and institutional arrangements (Ahl, 2006; Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009). Women entrepreneurs, for instance, routinely navigate structural disadvantages rooted in discriminatory lending practices, gendered expectations of leadership and unequal domestic labour burdens (Brush et al., 2009; Jennings & Brush, 2013). Ethnic minority entrepreneurs often leverage dense community networks and co-ethnic ties to compensate for barriers in mainstream institutions, generating distinctive patterns of embedded entrepreneurial systems (Waldinger, Aldrich & Ward, 1990; Kloosterman, van der Leun & Rath, 1999). These are not aberrations from an imagined entrepreneurial "norm"; rather, they demonstrate that entrepreneurial opportunity landscapes are socially constructed, relationally mediated and structurally stratified (Granovetter, 1985; Welter, 2011). Such insights also illuminate why certain groups mobilise entrepreneurship primarily as a strategy of survival, resilience or resistance, while others are able to leverage institutional privilege to pursue scalable, high-growth ventures (Williams & Nadin, 2012). Interpretive approaches thus foreground the relational and institutional architectures through which entrepreneurial possibility is differentially distributed.

The embedded view widens further when considering organisational and technological embeddedness. In digital platform ecosystems, entrepreneurial agency is increasingly mediated by algorithms, data infrastructures and platform governance regimes that structure visibility, access and valuation (Gillespie, 2014; Kenney & Zysman, 2016). Entrepreneurs operating on marketplaces such as Amazon or within delivery platforms such as Uber function under algorithmically structured rankings, opaque penalty systems and automated rules governing pricing, reputation and demand allocation (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Srnicek, 2017). Their success depends not simply on personal alertness or operational efficiency but on the capacity to interpret, anticipate and tactically navigate these technologically embedded architectures, often through

situated learning, experimentation and informal sensemaking practices (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021).

Comparable dynamics emerge beyond digital platforms, particularly in territorially embedded entrepreneurial systems where organisational routines, technological choices and market access are shaped by local production networks and institutional infrastructures. Research on craft-based and small-scale industries demonstrates that entrepreneurial trajectories are deeply conditioned by regional clusters, shared technological standards and locally embedded knowledge flows rather than abstract market forces alone (Reid, 2010; Reid, McLaughlin & Moore, 2014). In such contexts, innovation and survival depend on proximity to suppliers, distributors, regulatory actors and peer firms, reinforcing the embedded nature of entrepreneurial agency within place-specific organisational ecologies (Reid, 2018).

These dynamics are equally evident in scientific, biomedical and educational entrepreneurship, where venture development is shaped by regulatory regimes, ethical norms and the evaluative standards of professional and scientific communities (Powell & Grodal, 2005; Battilana & Lee, 2014). Here, legitimacy hinges on alignment with institutional logics governing safety, efficacy, evidence and public accountability-logics that classical theory tends to reduce to abstract "market signals" but which, in practice, constitute dense interpretive and normative frameworks structuring entrepreneurial action (Scott, 2014; Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012).

Embeddedness therefore reorients entrepreneurship studies away from abstract models of opportunity exploitation and towards grounded inquiries into the social, institutional, technological and spatial infrastructures that make entrepreneurial action possible in the first place (Granovetter, 1985; Welter, 2011; Reid, 2018). It reveals how entrepreneurs interpret ambiguity and uncertainty through the lenses of their networks, cultural repertoires and institutional constraints rather than through universalised rational calculation (Weick, 1995; Steyaert, 2007). It highlights that trust, legitimacy, shared norms, collective narratives and moral expectations are not peripheral conditions of entrepreneurial success but constitutive elements of entrepreneurial practice itself (Suchman, 1995; Jack & Anderson, 2002). Above all, the embedded perspective demonstrates that entrepreneurship is never merely a function of individual agency or psychological disposition; it is a phenomenon produced through patterned relations, institutional architectures and culturally and spatially situated worlds of meaning (Johannisson, 2011; Hjorth, 2013).

The interpretive implications of this shift are substantial. Embeddedness challenges the presumption-rooted in classical and neo-classical paradigms-that entrepreneurial behaviour can be adequately modelled through universal laws, stable preferences or predictive traits (Gartner, 1985; Granovetter, 1985). Instead, it foregrounds the context-dependence of entrepreneurial processes and the heterogeneous ways in which entrepreneurial ecosystems operate across regions, industries and institutional environments (Welter, 2011; Scott, 2014). From this perspective, entrepreneurial opportunities cannot be meaningfully "discovered" independently of the social systems, cultural repertoires and institutional arrangements that define what counts as an opportunity in the first place (Gartner, 2007; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). This theoretical transition lays the groundwork for the next interpretive move: a shift from an emphasis on structural embeddedness to a more fine-grained, practice-oriented analysis of entrepreneurial action (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011).

If embeddedness reveals the relational and institutional scaffolding that underpins entrepreneurship, the next conceptual step refines this logic by redirecting analytical attention to the concrete situations in which entrepreneurial agency is enacted. Situated approaches examine how entrepreneurs navigate particular contexts through embodied skills, tacit knowledge, material artefacts, interpretive repertoires and moment-to-moment improvisation rather than through abstract decision rules (Suchman, 1987; Orr, 1996; Schatzki, 2002). These perspectives do not abandon embeddedness; rather, they deepen it by demonstrating how entrepreneurial action unfolds in the lived immediacy of practice and interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Orlikowski, 2002). In this sense, situated approaches function as a conceptual bridge between macro-level structures and micro-level agency, preparing the analytical ground for effectuation and bricolage as fully practice-based theories of entrepreneurial emergence (Sarasvathy, 2001; Baker & Nelson, 2005).

The foundational insight of situated theories is that entrepreneurial agency emerges in situ-that is, within the concrete, material and interpretive environments where individuals encounter problems, possibilities and constraints. This shift is influenced by the practice turn in sociology and organisation studies, especially the work of Suchman (1987, pp. 50-56), who argued that human action is not the realisation of pre-formed plans but an ongoing process of situated improvisation. Plans, she notes, are "resources for action" rather than determinants of behaviour; actors constantly adapt to contingencies, interpret unexpected signals and revise their goals in real time. Applied to

entrepreneurship, this implies that entrepreneurial decision-making is less a matter of executing predetermined strategies than of responding creatively to unfolding situations-a claim further supported by ethnographic research into entrepreneurial work in resource-constrained, rapidly changing or uncertain environments (Gartner, 1988, pp. 21-25).

Situated perspectives illuminate the cognitive and interpretive aspects of entrepreneurship as well. Entrepreneurs do not simply "perceive" opportunities; they construct them through sensemaking processes embedded in specific situations (Weick, 1995, pp. 43-49). Sensemaking is retrospective and prospective at once: entrepreneurs draw on past experiences, analogies, heuristics and narratives to interpret ambiguous cues and to project plausible future scenarios. When a restaurateur notices that customers regularly ask for an off-menu dish, or when a software founder observes that users improvise unexpected uses for a product feature, these observations become meaningful not because they reflect objective opportunities but because they arise in the flow of situated interactions in which entrepreneurs reinterpret everyday signals as prompts for innovation. Studies of entrepreneurial cognition across industries-from gastronomy to fintech-show that such insights often emerge not in formal planning sessions but in mundane activities: talking with customers, observing user behaviour, responding to operational breakdowns or navigating regulatory ambiguities.

Materiality plays a crucial role in this process. Situated accounts emphasise that entrepreneurial action is mediated by tools, artefacts, technologies and spatial arrangements that both constrain and enable creativity. For example, laboratory-based biotechnology ventures rely on highly specialised instruments (such as PCR machines or high-throughput sequencers), which shape the kinds of experiments that can be conducted and the pace at which discoveries can be translated into commercial ventures. In digital entrepreneurship, algorithms, interfaces and user analytics platforms structure how founders identify customer needs, test prototypes and modify business models. Even in traditional craft industries-furniture making, leatherwork, pottery-entrepreneurs' decisions are deeply influenced by tactile knowledge, hand-material interactions and the affordances of specific tools. These material engagements are not marginal; they structure entrepreneurial possibilities by shaping what is feasible, legible or imaginable within a given setting (Orlikowski, 2007, pp. 1437-1442).

Situated perspectives also provide a powerful explanation for cross-industry variation in entrepreneurial behaviour by demonstrating how sector-specific material, regulatory and spatial conditions shape entrepreneurial action. Consider two contrasting

cases: aerospace engineering and street-food vending. In aerospace start-ups, decision-making is conditioned by complex regulatory regimes, high-cost materials, long development cycles and strict performance metrics embedded within global production and certification systems. Uncertainty is managed through simulation, prototyping, iterative testing and contractual partnerships with major manufacturers operating within tightly coupled industrial networks. By contrast, street-food entrepreneurs operate in fast-paced, low-capital contexts characterised by daily cash-flow pressures, informal competition and immediate customer feedback. The logic of innovation in this setting is improvisational: entrepreneurs experiment with flavours, adapt menus to local tastes and adjust prices in response to foot-traffic patterns and neighbourhood rhythms. These contrasts illustrate that entrepreneurial cognition, opportunity recognition and strategic behaviour are inseparable from the situated industrial and spatial environments that give them form, rather than expressions of a universal entrepreneurial mindset (Suchman, 1987; Steyaert, 2007; Pachura, 2013).

The situated perspective further challenges the classical assumption that entrepreneurial success derives primarily from superior rational calculation. Instead, it highlights practical coping, intelligent improvisation and situated judgement as core entrepreneurial capacities-competences that are difficult to formalise or transfer across contexts (Orr, 1996; Schatzki, 2002). Ethnographic studies of creative and cultural industries show that founders often navigate uncertainty not through expected-value calculations but by following aesthetic intuitions, affective signals and collaborative rhythms with partners and customers (Hjorth, 2013; Johannisson, 2011). Similarly, research on migrant and minority entrepreneurship demonstrates that entrepreneurial effectiveness frequently rests on embodied cultural competences-such as language switching, cross-cultural navigation and informal bargaining practices-rather than formal business planning tools (Waldinger, Aldrich & Ward, 1990; Kloosterman et al., 1999). These abilities are profoundly context-sensitive: what constitutes an effective entrepreneurial skill in a Berlin technology incubator differs radically from what is required in a Lagos marketplace or a rural tourism venture in the Tatra Mountains, where local identity, seasonal rhythms and place-based legitimacy become central resources (Pachura, 2016; Reid, 2018).

A particularly revealing domain for situated entrepreneurship is crisis and high-uncertainty environments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, entrepreneurs across sectors repositioned their capabilities within radically altered situational contexts. Restaurants

converted dining spaces into grocery depots; textile manufacturers retooled production lines for mask production; fitness trainers migrated to digital platforms; and global supply-chain disruptions forced manufacturers to redesign procurement systems in real time. These transformations were not the outcome of long-term strategic optimisation but situated responses-pragmatic, improvised, materially constrained and socially negotiated (Weick, 1995; Baker & Nelson, 2005). Studies of regionally embedded industries further show that the capacity to adapt under crisis conditions depends strongly on local production networks, institutional support structures and shared repertoires of practice, rather than on individual foresight alone (Reid, 2010; Pachura & Kozak, 2017). Such evidence reinforces the conclusion that entrepreneurship emerges as much from contextual affordances, embodied skills and local interpretations as from any stable psychological profile.

Situated approaches reframe entrepreneurship as an ongoing dialogical process between actors and their environments, in which action unfolds through continuous interaction rather than detached decision-making (Suchman, 1987; Steyaert, 2007). Entrepreneurs act with their situations, not against them; opportunities emerge from the dynamic interplay between interpretive schemes, material conditions, cultural meanings and relational dynamics embedded in practice (Schatzki, 2002; Orlikowski, 2002; Johannisson, 2011). This perspective offers a more realistic and empirically grounded account of entrepreneurial agency-one that foregrounds experience, contingency, improvisation and interaction over abstraction and rational idealisation (Orr, 1996; Weick, 1995). In doing so, it provides a conceptual bridge to the next major interpretive approach-effectuation-which similarly challenges classical assumptions of prediction, planning and rational control by proposing that entrepreneurial action proceeds not from predetermined goals but from the means at hand and stakeholder interaction under conditions of uncertainty (Sarasvathy, 2001; Dew et al., 2009).

If the situated perspective reveals how entrepreneurial action emerges from concrete moments of improvisation, material engagement and interpretive adaptation, then the logic of effectuation provides a complementary challenge to classical assumptions by reframing the very foundations of entrepreneurial decision-making under uncertainty. Developed by Saras Sarasvathy (2001, pp. 245-251) based on empirical studies of expert entrepreneurs, effectuation theory rejects the dominant prediction-and-planning paradigm that underlies both classical economics and much of managerial strategy. Instead of assuming that entrepreneurs begin with clear goals and then select

optimal means to achieve them, effectuation argues that entrepreneurial agency is defined by the reverse process: individuals start with the means at their disposal-identity, knowledge, networks, skills, resources-and allow goals to emerge contingently through iterative action, stakeholder commitments and evolving constraints.

This inversion marks a radical break with rationalist models of strategic decision-making. Classical entrepreneurship theory presupposes that opportunities exist "out there" as discoverable objects, that entrepreneurs evaluate them according to expected returns and that successful ventures arise from rational planning. Effectuation, by contrast, argues that in environments of high uncertainty-where outcomes, markets and technologies are not only unknown but unknowable-prediction becomes a futile exercise. Under such conditions, the most successful entrepreneurs do not attempt to foresee the future; they co-create it through action, negotiation, experimentation and relationship-building. This insight aligns with broader epistemological critiques of rationalist economics, including Knight's distinction between risk and uncertainty and March's (1991, pp. 71-75) work on exploration and learning.

Empirical illustrations across sectors demonstrate the logic of effectuation in practice. In early-stage biotechnology ventures, founders rarely know in advance which scientific pathway will yield a viable commercial product. Instead, experiments generate unforeseen discoveries, collaborations with academic laboratories redirect strategic priorities, and regulatory feedback reshapes developmental trajectories over time (Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr, 1996; Murray, 2010). Entrepreneurs therefore proceed by deploying available means-such as patentable molecules, laboratory expertise and pre-existing research relationships-rather than by executing a fully specified ex ante plan, exemplifying the core principles of effectual action under uncertainty (Sarasvathy, 2001; Dew et al., 2009).

In digital innovation contexts, the effectual logic is often even more pronounced. The founders of Instagram famously abandoned their original check-in application after observing how early users actually interacted with the product, pivoting instead toward a photo-sharing platform that aligned with emergent patterns of use (Bohn and Schmidt, 2015; Eisenmann, Ries and Dillard, 2012). In this case, entrepreneurial opportunities did not precede action; they emerged through iterative engagement with users, material constraints of smartphone technologies and serendipitous experimentation with features such as image filters. This process exemplifies effectuation's central claim that opportunities are co-created through action, stakeholder interaction and learning rather

than discovered through predictive analysis (Sarasvathy, Dew & Wiltbank, 2008; Read et al., 2009).

What distinguishes effectuation from other theories of entrepreneurial adaptation is its explicit articulation of decision-making logics. Sarasvathy identifies several foundational principles, each of which challenges classical assumptions. The "bird-in-hand" principle holds that entrepreneurs begin not with imagined markets but with their existing means-who they are, what they know and whom they know. The "affordable-loss" principle proposes that expert entrepreneurs evaluate opportunities not by expected returns but by the maximum downside they are willing to absorb (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 247-249). This approach stands in sharp contrast to classical utility maximisation models, aligning instead with behavioural theories of decision-making under uncertainty. It also underscores why entrepreneurial action is viable in resource-scarce environments where the calculus of expected value would prohibit investment.

The "crazy quilt" principle highlights the centrality of alliances and stakeholder commitments. Opportunities and ventures evolve through negotiated agreements with self-selected stakeholders who bring new resources and constraints into the process. This principle resonates with network-based theories of entrepreneurship, particularly those that emphasise the co-production of opportunities through collective sensemaking (Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 471-474). The "lemonade" principle encourages entrepreneurs to embrace contingencies and surprises as sources of new possibilities rather than as obstacles to be eliminated. Finally, the "pilot-in-the-plane" principle asserts that entrepreneurs shape the future through their actions; they do not attempt to predict it.

These principles are not abstract ideals; they describe empirically observable patterns. In empirical studies of European manufacturing SMEs, for example, Reuber and Fischer (2011, pp. 93-97) observed that founders often enter markets not because forecasting indicates high demand but because they possess specific technical skills or relationships that make experimentation feasible. In creative industries, including film production and fashion design, entrepreneurs routinely assemble informal teams based on trust, shared vision and complementary competencies rather than formal assessments of market potential. Opportunities crystallise as the team interacts with prototypes, festivals, user communities and funding organisations. The process is recursive, relational and emergent-precisely the dynamics highlighted by effectuation.

Importantly, the effectual logic cuts across sectors and geographies. In high-growth technology ecosystems such as Bangalore, Tel Aviv and Silicon Valley, venture

trajectories routinely involve rapid prototyping, iterative testing and strategic pivoting-practices that are difficult to justify within predictive, planning-oriented models but become intelligible when viewed through an effectual lens focused on learning through action (Sarasvathy, 2001; Eisenmann, Ries & Dillard, 2012; Dew et al., 2009). Comparable patterns are evident in markedly different contexts. Ethnographic research on small-scale manufacturing and informal entrepreneurship in Indonesia and Peru shows how entrepreneurs repurpose existing materials, reconfigure tools and collaborate informally with neighbours to create viable ventures under conditions of resource constraint (Baker & Nelson, 2005; de Soto, 2000; Grimes & Vogus, 2021). In such settings, entrepreneurs do not begin with clearly articulated end goals; rather, they progressively discover what is feasible by leveraging the means at hand and responding to contingencies as they arise.

Even in heavily regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals or energy, early-stage entrepreneurial behaviour is permeated by effectual logics. Founders explore regulatory ambiguities, form coalitions with research institutions and public agencies, and adapt strategic directions in response to evolving political and policy landscapes-patterns well documented in studies of science-based and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship (Powell, Koput & Smith-Doerr, 1996; Mazzucato, 2013; Garud, Gehman & Giuliani, 2014). These forms of action cannot be adequately explained by classical optimisation models that assume stable preferences, known constraints and predictable environments. Instead, they underscore effectuation's central insight: entrepreneurial order emerges endogenously through action, interaction and negotiated commitment rather than through ex ante calculation.

A deeper analytical strength of effectuation lies in its critique of the opportunity construct. While classical theories posit opportunities as objective entities waiting to be discovered, effectuation highlights how opportunities are enacted through action. Entrepreneurs shape opportunities by engaging stakeholders, creating markets, reframing problems and experimenting with alternative configurations of resources. This processual and constructivist view aligns with interpretive perspectives in organisation studies, including Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory and Garud and Karnoe's (2003, pp. 283-287) work on path creation. It also resonates with empirical research in emerging markets, where formal institutions are often incomplete or volatile, forcing entrepreneurs to co-create the very structures that enable venture formation.

Critically, effectuation also offers a compelling explanation for entrepreneurial diversity. If entrepreneurial success depended primarily on predictive accuracy, entrepreneurship would be largely confined to individuals possessing exceptional forecasting skills, extensive prior experience and access to sophisticated analytical tools. Empirical research, however, consistently demonstrates that individuals from highly diverse socioeconomic backgrounds-including migrants, artisans, small-scale farmers, gig workers and digital creators-successfully initiate ventures in contexts characterised by radical uncertainty, resource scarcity and institutional instability, where prediction is practically infeasible (Sarasvathy, 2001; Baker & Nelson, 2005; Welter, 2011). Effectuation explains this phenomenon by showing how entrepreneurial action can proceed from heterogeneous means-who one is, what one knows and whom one knows-rather than from privileged access to information or superior analytical capacity (Sarasvathy, Dew & Wiltbank, 2008). In doing so, it reframes entrepreneurship as an inclusive, practice-based process grounded in action, interaction and adaptation, rather than as an elite activity reserved for those capable of rational optimisation under conditions of calculable risk (Dew et al., 2009; Steyaert, 2007). Effectuation explains this diversity by foregrounding skills that are widely distributed: relationship-building, resourcefulness, improvisation, resilience, persuasion and the ability to leverage identity, culture and local knowledge. These are situationally anchored competencies that do not require advanced formal training.

At the same time, effectuation is not without limitations. Some scholars argue that its principles may be less applicable in later stages of venture development, where scaling requires coordination, structure and strategic planning. Others contend that effectuation underplays the role of institutional constraints and power structures in shaping entrepreneurial action. Yet these critiques often reflect misunderstandings: Sarasvathy does not contend that effectuation replaces prediction but that it dominates under conditions of Knightian uncertainty, while causal logics become more relevant as ventures mature. Moreover, recent research suggests that high-performing entrepreneurs dynamically shift between effectual and causal logics depending on task demands, resource availability and environmental stability (Read et al., 2009, pp. 75-81). Effectuation therefore offers not a prescriptive model but a descriptive account of how expert entrepreneurs navigate uncertain terrains.

Effectuation's analytical contribution is thus threefold: it dismantles the predictive rationality underpinning classical entrepreneurship theory; it introduces a constructivist

understanding of opportunity formation; and it positions entrepreneurship as deeply emergent, relational and practice-based-all of which align closely with situated and embedded perspectives (Sarasvathy, 2001; Dew et al., 2009; Steyaert, 2007). Rather than assuming that opportunities exist independently of action, effectuation conceptualises entrepreneurial order as co-produced through interaction, stakeholder commitment and learning under uncertainty (Sarasvathy, Dew & Wiltbank, 2008). As such, effectuation constitutes a central conceptual bridge to the final interpretive lens examined in this chapter: bricolage. If effectuation captures the logic through which entrepreneurs act when goals are indeterminate and environments unstable, bricolage illuminates the material and practical processes through which entrepreneurs recombine non-standard, neglected or discarded resources to create value in situ (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Johannisson, 2011). Together, these approaches complete the interpretive shift away from prediction and optimisation toward emergence, practice and situated creativity as the foundations of entrepreneurial action.

If effectuation reframes entrepreneurial reasoning as an emergent, improvisational and relational process, then the logic of bricolage offers a complementary material and practice-based account of how entrepreneurs create value when facing severe resource constraints, institutional voids or environmental volatility. Originally introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966, pp. 16-22) to describe the work of the bricoleur-a figure who constructs new solutions by recombining whatever materials happen to be at hand-this concept was later adapted by Baker and Nelson (2005, pp. 333-336) to explain how entrepreneurs "make do" under conditions where conventional means-end rationality is either impossible or counterproductive. In contrast to classical entrepreneurship theory, which presumes that ventures form through the mobilisation of specialised resources and planned investment, bricolage illuminates how entrepreneurial agency can arise from the creative, often experimental reassembly of ordinary, overlooked or discarded elements into novel configurations.

Bricolage challenges deeply rooted assumptions about resource scarcity. Classical and neoclassical economic models treat resources as objective entities whose availability determines entrepreneurial possibilities. In those models, limited resources constrain action; investment, financing and market conditions condition what an entrepreneur can accomplish. Bricolage reverses this logic. Entrepreneurs frequently expand their action space not by acquiring more resources but by reinterpreting existing materials as usable inputs. What appears as scarcity from a classical vantage point becomes, under bricolage,

an opportunity for creative recombination. This insight aligns with practice-based theories of strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2005, pp. 23-27) and organisational creativity (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006, pp. 484-486), which emphasise that innovation often emerges not from abundant resources but from the constraints that provoke novel forms of action.

Empirical research across diverse industries demonstrates that bricolage is not marginal but widespread. In resource-constrained manufacturing environments-such as small metalworking workshops in northern Italy, automotive repair clusters in Turkey or electronics recycling hubs in Ghana-entrepreneurs routinely repurpose discarded machinery, adapt tools to new functions and integrate improvised solutions into productive routines. Studies of textile producers in Bangladesh show how entrepreneurs create entire production systems using second-hand looms, broken sewing machines and recycled industrial components; these improvised assemblages are not temporary stopgaps but become stable foundations for competitive business models (Khanna and Palepu, 2010, pp. 74-79). In renewable energy micro-enterprises across Kenya, entrepreneurs assemble solar home systems from mismatched imported parts, re-solder components, rewire batteries and creatively recombine elements that were never designed to function together. Here, innovation does not arise from formal R&D; it emerges from experimentation, embodied skill and intimate familiarity with materials-a form of practical knowledge that classical theories, focused on abstract optimisation, cannot capture.

In service industries, bricolage manifests not primarily through the manipulation of physical materials but through relational, cognitive and symbolic recombination. Migrant entrepreneurs operating small restaurants in major European cities frequently build their ventures by adapting traditional recipes to locally available ingredients, repurposing domestic kitchen tools for semi-commercial use, and negotiating informal supply chains grounded in family and co-ethnic networks. Such practices exemplify bricolage as a socially embedded process in which entrepreneurial value is created through the recombination of cultural knowledge, trust relations and everyday competencies rather than through access to standardised resources (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Kloosterman et al., 1999). Digital micro-entrepreneurs-such as independent game developers or content creators-engage in a comparable logic of bricolage by stitching together free software tools, open-source libraries, online tutorials and iterative community feedback. They combine heterogeneous elements-templates, plugins,

borrowed code and shared community knowledge-in ways that blur conventional distinctions between production and consumption, professional and amateur, creator and user, illustrating entrepreneurship as an emergent, practice-based activity rather than a linear production process (Jenkins, 2006; Davidsson et al., 2017).

The entrepreneurial dynamics of cultural and creative industries provide particularly vivid demonstrations of bricolage in practice. Independent filmmakers lacking access to professional capital frequently shoot on smartphones, edit using free or pirated software, borrow lighting equipment, repurpose household objects as props and exchange labour within informal creative networks, illustrating value creation through improvisation and resource recombination rather than formal investment (DeFillippi, Grabher & Jones, 2007; Hjorth, 2013). Fashion designers in cities such as Lagos, Johannesburg and São Paulo construct entire collections from recycled textiles, industrial leftovers and improvised dyeing techniques, transforming material scarcity into a source of aesthetic distinction and symbolic value within local and global cultural fields (Rao, 2004; Lindkvist, 2010). Musicians similarly assemble home studios from second-hand audio equipment, cracked software, improvised acoustic dampening and shared community resources, relying on collective experimentation and peer-based learning rather than standardised production infrastructures (Bennett & Peterson, 2004; Baker & Nelson, 2005). In all these cases, entrepreneurial action emerges not from strategic planning or predictive optimisation but from continuous improvisation with materials, social ties and interpretive frameworks, exemplifying bricolage as a situated, practice-based mode of entrepreneurial emergence (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Johannisson, 2011).

Polish scholarship on entrepreneurship and regional development reinforces this interpretation by emphasising the contextual, culturally embedded and practice-oriented nature of entrepreneurial action in resource-constrained and peripheral environments. Pachura (2013, 2016) shows that in such settings entrepreneurship often relies on adaptive recombination of locally available resources, identities and social relations rather than on formalised business models. From this perspective, bricolage should not be interpreted as a deviation from "proper" entrepreneurship but as a structurally grounded mode of action shaped by place, culture and institutional context. Bricolage thus appears not as an exceptional response to scarcity, but as a normalised entrepreneurial logic in many service, creative and digitally mediated industries-one that foregrounds improvisation, relationality and situated meaning-making as constitutive elements of entrepreneurial emergence.

Importantly, bricolage is not merely a response to scarcity. It is also a deliberate strategic orientation that remains relevant even in resource-rich environments. Research on high-technology start-ups in the United States shows that many founders resist investment early on precisely because they wish to preserve the creative freedom afforded by bricolage-like experimentation (Katila and Shane, 2005, pp. 284-287). Venture teams often prefer to prototype minimally with available components rather than allocate funding toward fully engineered solutions. The "lean start-up" methodology, widely adopted in Silicon Valley, emphasises rapid iteration, low-cost experimentation and creative repurposing of existing assets-practices strongly aligned with bricolage logic. Even large corporations rely on bricolage during early innovation phases. For example, engineers at 3M famously developed the Post-it Note through improvised uses of a failed adhesive; prototyping occurred with scraps of paper, leftover chemicals and informal exchanges of ideas.

Bricolage also provides a powerful lens for understanding entrepreneurial action in institutional voids-settings where formal markets, legal frameworks or infrastructural systems are incomplete or underdeveloped. In transitional economies across Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, entrepreneurs build ventures by negotiating informal rules, mobilising community legitimacy and creatively circumventing bureaucratic hurdles. De Soto (2000, pp. 32-35) documented how entrepreneurs in Peru construct legal workarounds in the absence of functioning property-rights systems, while research in Nigeria and Kenya shows that entrepreneurs transform informal settlements into hubs of innovation by leveraging social capital, bricolage-based technical skill and flexible cultural practices (Lyon and Fernandez, 2012, pp. 152-155). These cases demonstrate that bricolage is not simply improvisation; it is a sophisticated, situated response to institutional complexity.

One of the most analytically important aspects of bricolage is its distinctive temporal orientation. While classical theories assume linear planning and forward-looking rationality, bricolage is fundamentally retrospective and iterative: entrepreneurs begin by examining what is immediately available and then ask, "What can I make with this?" Rather than designing a venture and then gathering the necessary inputs, bricolage constructs the venture through the act of recombination. This temporality aligns with interpretivist theories of sensemaking, which argue that organisations create meaning retrospectively through action (Weick, 1995, pp. 17-23). It also resonates with anthropological accounts of craft, where skilled practitioners engage directly with

materials, allowing possibilities to emerge through tactile interaction. In entrepreneurial contexts, this means that value creation is deeply embedded in material engagement, sensory awareness and embodied skill-dimensions almost entirely absent from classical theories.

Bricolage and effectuation share important affinities yet remain analytically distinct. Effectuation describes a logic of action under conditions of uncertainty, whereas bricolage captures the material and symbolic processes through which action generates novelty (Sarasvathy, 2001; Baker & Nelson, 2005). Effectuation primarily concerns decision-making under indeterminacy-how entrepreneurs proceed without predefined goals by leveraging available means-while bricolage focuses on how those means are creatively recombined, reinterpreted and repurposed in practice (Dew et al., 2009; Johannisson, 2011). In this sense, effectuation foregrounds means-driven agency, whereas bricolage emphasises the imaginative transformation of means themselves. Both approaches challenge the predictive rationality of classical entrepreneurship models; however, bricolage extends this critique further by dissolving the boundary between resources and imagination, demonstrating how entrepreneurs actively re-make their worlds through material manipulation and symbolic reinterpretation (Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Baker & Nelson, 2005). This distinction is analytically crucial for understanding why interpretive theories do not merely refine classical models but offer a fundamentally different ontology of entrepreneurial action grounded in emergence, practice and situated creativity (Steyaert, 2007; Hjorth, 2013).

Recent research integrates bricolage with theories of resilience and social innovation, further deepening the interpretive shift. Studies of community-based enterprises in regions affected by natural disasters-such as post-earthquake Nepal or post-tsunami Indonesia-show that entrepreneurial recovery depends heavily on bricolage: repurposing debris, reconstructing buildings from salvaged materials, reactivating social ties and reinventing cultural practices disrupted by crisis (Aldrich and Meyer, 2015, pp. 65-68). These empirical cases challenge the idea that entrepreneurship flourishes only under favourable market conditions; they demonstrate instead that entrepreneurial agency often becomes most visible when formal structures fail.

At a deeper interpretive level, bricolage illuminates how entrepreneurship is inseparable from cultural meaning-making. Entrepreneurs draw not only on material resources but also on stories, identities and symbolic repertoires through which value is interpreted and legitimised (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Hjorth, 2013). Migrant entrepreneurs,

for example, frequently mobilise cultural narratives of tradition, heritage and authenticity to reinterpret marginalised backgrounds as valuable entrepreneurial assets, thereby constructing distinctive market positions within host societies (Waldinger, Aldrich & Ward, 1990; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Social enterprises similarly engage in forms of narrative bricolage, reframing social problems as entrepreneurial opportunities by weaving together heterogeneous discourses-such as innovation, justice and sustainability-into coherent and credible value propositions (Mair & Marti, 2006; Dacin, Dacin and Tracey, 2011).

In indigenous communities, entrepreneurial bricolage often takes the form of hybridisation, blending traditional ecological knowledge, collective identities and cultural memory with new technologies or organisational forms to create ventures such as eco-tourism cooperatives or land-stewardship initiatives (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Anderson, Dana and Dana, 2006). These practices resist full assimilation into purely market-driven logics and instead embed entrepreneurial action within broader moral, cultural and relational orders (Welter, 2011; Hjorth, 2013). Taken together, these examples reveal that bricolage is not merely a tactical response to resource scarcity but a culturally grounded mode of world-making, through which entrepreneurs actively reconfigure meanings, identities and social realities as part of the entrepreneurial process (Steyaert, 2007).

Critically, bricolage exposes the limitations of classical theories that treat resource accumulation as a prerequisite for entrepreneurial success. It also challenges managerial doctrines that equate strategic advantage with superior resources. Bricolage demonstrates that competitive advantage can arise from the ability to reconfigure resources, not merely acquire them. This insight aligns with evolutionary theories of the firm (Nelson and Winter, 1982, pp. 54-59) and dynamic capabilities research (Teece, 2007, pp. 1322-1324), but bricolage pushes these ideas further by emphasising improvisation, materiality and the creative interpretation of constraints.

The interpretive approaches analysed in this chapter-embeddedness, situated action, effectuation and bricolage-recast entrepreneurship not as a rational decision problem but as a complex, relational, emergent and materially grounded practice. They illuminate dimensions of entrepreneurial life that classical theories could not see: how action unfolds in real time, how meaning is constructed, how actors interpret and reshape their environments and how new possibilities emerge from improvisation. These approaches depart from classical entrepreneurship theory not by offering minor

theoretical corrections but by fundamentally reorienting the ontology of entrepreneurship itself. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as an individual cognitive act directed at pre-existing opportunities, interpretive theories understand entrepreneurship as a process of enacting worlds-economic, social, material and symbolic.

Classical theories, despite their intellectual sophistication and enduring influence, constructed a conceptual architecture grounded in three core assumptions: that entrepreneurial opportunities are objective and pre-existing, that the entrepreneur acts as a rational and autonomous agent, and that markets constitute neutral, self-regulating mechanisms for coordinating economic activity. These assumptions-visible in Cantillon's and Knight's uncertainty-bearing model (Cantillon, 1959, pp. 38-42; Knight, 1921, pp. 19-26), Say's coordinating entrepreneur (1960, pp. 74-80), Marshall's equilibrium-oriented framework (1930, pp. 67-72), Kirzner's notion of discovery and alertness (1973, pp. 30-35), and trait-based psychological theories (McClelland, 1961, pp. 45-52)-gave classical entrepreneurship its analytical clarity. However, they also embedded conceptual blind spots that later scholarship increasingly found untenable.

Interpretive approaches diverge from this architecture not by dismissing the achievements of classical theory but by identifying the dimensions of entrepreneurial life that classical assumptions systematically overlook. Across multiple disciplines-including sociology, anthropology, institutional theory, organisational studies and practice theory-scholars demonstrated that classical models could not adequately explain the relational, situated, emergent or materially mediated aspects of entrepreneurial action (Granovetter, 1985, pp. 481-484; North, 1990, pp. 3-7; Suchman, 1987, pp. 50-56; Orlikowski, 2007, pp. 1435-1442; Steyaert, 2007, pp. 470-475). Interpretive perspectives therefore represent not incremental adjustments to the classical canon but a fundamental reorientation of the ontology of entrepreneurship.

Table 1.4. visualises this epistemological rupture. It functions not as a linear historical timeline but as an analytical genealogy that traces the departure points, lines of critique and new theoretical commitments defining contemporary interpretive perspectives. The upper tier identifies the three foundational assumptions of classical entrepreneurship theory. The middle tier synthesises the multi-disciplinary critiques that destabilised each assumption-critiques demonstrating, for example, that opportunities are socially constructed rather than discovered (Alvarez and Barney, 2007, pp. 15-18), that entrepreneurial agency is relational and collective rather than isolated (Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986, pp. 13-16; Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 470-473), and that markets are

embedded in institutional and cultural systems rather than neutral arenas (DiMaggio, 1988, pp. 3-5; North, 1990, pp. 4-9).

Table 1.4. The conceptual departure of interpretive approaches from classical entrepreneurship theory

CLASSICAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP THEORY (Rational, individualised, opportunity-driven)				
Assumption 1:		Assumption 2:		Assumption 3:
Opportunities are objective and pre-existing		Entrepreneur acts individually and rationally		Markets are neutral and self-regulating
Critique:		Critique		Critique
Opportunities are socially constructed		Agency is relational and collective		Markets are institutional and cultural
CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP				
Embedded	Situated	Effectuation	Bricolage	Discursive/Cultural
Aldrich and Zimmer (1986); Granovetter (1985);| Jack and Anderson (2002); Welter (2011)	Suchman (1987); Lave and Wenger (1991); Orr (1996); |Steyaert (2007)	Sarasvathy (2001); Read et al. (2009); Dew et al. (2009)Sarasvathy (2001); Read et al. (2009); Dew et al. (2009)	Baker and Nelson (2005); Lévi-Strauss (1966); Brewis and Jack (2018)	Steyaert (2007); Hjorth (2007)
NEW ONTOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS:				
Entrepreneurship as relational Opportunities as emergent and socially constructed Agency as situated, negotiated and co-created Action as materially mediated Markets as institutional and cultural formations				

Source: Author's own elaboration based on classical economic theories of entrepreneurship (Cantillon, 1959; Say, 1960; Knight, 1921; Marshall, 1890/1930), and contemporary interpretive and practice-based approaches including Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), Granovetter (1985), Suchman (1987), Lave and Wenger (1991), Orr (1996), Jack and Anderson (2002), Sarasvathy (2001), Baker and Nelson (2005), Steyaert (2007), Hjorth (2007), Welter (2011), Read et al. (2009), Dew et al. (2009), and Brewis and Jack (2018).

What the table's lower panel demonstrates is how these critiques crystallised into distinct interpretive frameworks, each emphasising a particular mechanism through which entrepreneurial action is socially constituted**.** Embedded entrepreneurship, for example, reframes entrepreneurial agency as a product of networks, norms and institutional arrangements (Granovetter, 1985, pp. 482-485; Uzzi, 1997, pp. 43-47). Situated perspectives foreground the temporal, embodied and socio-material character of

action in practice (Suchman, 1987, pp. 52-60; Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 470-476). Effectuation challenges predictive rationality by showing how entrepreneurs co-create futures through interaction under conditions of uncertainty (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 245-258). Bricolage reconceptualises resource constraints as generative inputs for creative recombination (Baker and Nelson, 2005, pp. 329-341). Finally**,** discursive, cultural and narrative approaches illuminate the symbolic and meaning-making processes through which opportunities and identities form (Steyaert, 2007, pp. 467-472; Hjorth, 2012, pp. 49-56).

The bottom tier of Table 1.4 presents the new ontological commitments shared across these interpretive approaches: entrepreneurship is relational; opportunities are socially constructed and emergent; agency is situated and co-created; action is materially mediated; and markets are institutional and cultural formations. Taken together, these commitments mark a decisive epistemological shift. Where classical theory sought generalisable principles abstracted from context, interpretive approaches insist that entrepreneurship can only be understood in relation to the social worlds, institutional structures and material practices through which it is enacted.

1.4. The historical and conceptual development of strategy

The concept of strategy has occupied a central position in management and organisational theory for decades, yet it has never constituted a unified or static body of knowledge. Instead, strategy has evolved through successive waves of theorisation, each shaped by historically specific organisational forms, economic conditions and dominant assumptions about rationality, control and uncertainty. Rather than progressing linearly toward a single optimal framework, strategic thought reflects an accumulation of perspectives that coexist, overlap and sometimes contradict one another. Understanding this historical and conceptual evolution is therefore essential for situating contemporary interpretations of strategising-particularly those emphasising emergence, practice and embeddedness-within a broader intellectual landscape.

Strategy entered management discourse in the mid-twentieth century at a moment when organisations were grappling with unprecedented growth, scale and complexity. Drawing inspiration from military thought and the post-war faith in scientific management, early strategic theories conceptualised strategy as a deliberate and future-oriented activity conducted by top management. The rise of large, multidivisional corporations created a demand for formal mechanisms capable of coordinating resources,

aligning organisational units and ensuring long-term stability. In this context, strategy was understood primarily as a rational plan designed to guide organisational action toward predetermined objectives.

Chandler's foundational work crystallised this perspective by defining strategy as the determination of long-term goals and objectives and the allocation of resources necessary for their achievement (Chandler, 1962, pp. 13-17). His assertion that "structure follows strategy" reinforced a causal and hierarchical model in which strategic intent precedes organisational action and design. Strategy, in this formulation, is external to everyday operations: it is conceived at the top and subsequently implemented throughout the organisation. This logic positioned strategy as an instrument of control and coordination, capable of aligning organisational behaviour with anticipated future conditions. Szarucki's work contributes to understanding strategy research as a methodological field where explanatory strength depends on the fit between theoretical claims and research procedures. By highlighting how different methodological choices structure what can be "seen" analytically, his perspective supports the argument that practice-based and interpretive views of strategy require methods capable of capturing emergence, interaction, and situated meaning. (Lisiński & Szarucki, 2020/2021).

Ansoff further institutionalised the rational-planning conception of strategy by formalising it as a systematic analytical process (Ansoff, 1965, pp. 23-29). Strategy became a technical activity grounded in environmental scanning, gap analysis and portfolio optimisation. These approaches assumed that uncertainty could be reduced through rigorous analysis and that managerial rationality was sufficient to anticipate environmental change. The intellectual foundations of this paradigm were reinforced by operations research, systems theory and game theory (von Neumann and Morgenstern, 1944), all of which treated strategic decision-making as a problem of optimisation under known or calculable conditions. Within this framework, uncertainty was framed as an anomaly to be minimised rather than as a constitutive feature of organisational life.

While the planning paradigm proved effective for coordinating large organisations operating in relatively stable environments, its conceptual limitations became increasingly visible as economic and technological conditions changed. The acceleration of innovation, intensification of competition and globalisation of markets exposed the fragility of assumptions regarding predictability and control. Empirical research revealed that organisations frequently failed not because they lacked strategic plans, but because they adhered too rigidly to them in contexts requiring flexibility, learning and rapid

adjustment. Strategy, it became apparent, could not be reduced to a technical exercise detached from the messy realities of organisational practice.

In response to these challenges, strategic thought shifted toward competitive positioning. Porter's influential framework reconceptualised strategy as the selection of a defensible position within an industry structure, grounded in the analysis of competitive forces (Porter, 1980, pp. 5-12). Rather than emphasising long-term planning horizons, this approach focused on relative advantage and competitive differentiation. Although positioning theory represented a significant analytical advance, it retained core rationalist assumptions, particularly the stability of industry structures and the predictability of competitive dynamics. As empirical evidence accumulated from innovation-driven, creative and service-based sectors, it became increasingly clear that competitive advantage was often temporary, context-dependent and difficult to sustain through positioning alone.

A further conceptual reorientation occurred with the emergence of the resource-based view, which relocated the source of strategic advantage from external market structures to internal organisational resources. Barney's formulation emphasised resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable as the basis of sustained advantage (Barney, 1991, pp. 99-105). Strategy thus became concerned with organisational capabilities, tacit knowledge and embedded routines rather than with market positioning alone. This internalisation of strategy was further developed through the concept of dynamic capabilities, which highlighted the firm's capacity to sense, seize and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change (Teece, 2007, pp. 1323-1327). These perspectives acknowledged uncertainty and learning more explicitly, yet they often preserved an implicit belief in managerial intentionality and control. According to Lenart-Gansiniec and Sułkowski (2020, pp. 326–328), organizations operating under uncertainty enact strategy through continuous learning embedded in everyday practices, enabling ongoing adjustment to changing conditions.

A more fundamental challenge to rationalist assumptions emerged from process-oriented and interpretive research. Mintzberg's critique of strategic planning demonstrated that strategy frequently emerges retrospectively as a pattern in action rather than as the execution of pre-formulated intentions (Mintzberg, 1994, pp. 107-134). The distinction between deliberate and emergent strategy destabilised the assumption that strategic outcomes can be fully designed in advance and redirected attention toward how strategy unfolds through everyday organisational activity. Quinn's concept of logical

incrementalism further reinforced this view by showing that effective strategies often develop through small, adaptive steps shaped by negotiation, learning and political compromise rather than comprehensive analysis (Quinn, 1978, pp. 21-26).

These insights contributed to a broader interpretive turn in strategy research, in which strategy came to be understood as a socially constructed and contextually embedded process. Rather than eliminating uncertainty, strategic activity was shown to consist largely of coping with it. Strategy became less about prediction and more about sensemaking: the ongoing interpretation of ambiguous environments and the coordination of action through shared meanings, narratives and practices. This shift aligned strategy research with developments in organisational theory and entrepreneurship studies that emphasised embeddedness, relationality and the situated nature of action.

The interpretive turn reached its most explicit formulation in practice-based perspectives, particularly strategy-as-practice. This approach reconceptualised strategy as something organisations do rather than something they possess, shifting analytical attention to the micro-level activities through which strategic direction is enacted (Jarzabkowski, 2005, pp. 1-14; Whittington, 2006, pp. 614-621). Strategising, from this perspective, is a socially and materially embedded process involving routines, discourses, tools, artefacts and embodied skills. Strategy becomes inseparable from everyday work and from the cultural, institutional and material contexts in which organisations operate.

Seen in historical perspective, the development of strategy reflects a gradual movement away from prediction and control toward emergence, interpretation and practice. Classical planning models sought to tame uncertainty through rational design and anticipatory analysis; contemporary perspectives increasingly recognise uncertainty as a constitutive feature of organisational life rather than a residual disturbance to be eliminated (Mintzberg, 1994; Whittington, 2006). Importantly, this evolution does not imply a linear replacement of older models by newer ones. Rather, strategic thought has developed through layering: planning, positioning, resource-based, emergent and practice-based perspectives coexist and are selectively mobilised depending on organisational context, sectoral characteristics and environmental conditions (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007).

This layered understanding of strategy raises fundamental questions about how different strategic orientations should be conceptualised and classified, particularly when strategy is understood not as a static plan but as an interpretive and practice-based phenomenon embedded in specific spatial, institutional and cultural contexts. Polish

scholarship on strategy and regional development reinforces this view by emphasising that strategic action is historically contingent, territorially embedded and shaped by locally available resources, identities and institutional arrangements rather than by universal strategic formulas (Pachura, 2013; Pachura, 2016). From this perspective, strategic rationality is not abstract or generalisable but situational, emerging from actors' engagement with concrete regional and organisational realities.

Building on this interpretive understanding of strategy as historically contingent and practice-based, traditional strategic typologies require substantial rethinking. In much of the classical strategic management literature, "types of strategy" are presented as discrete and mutually exclusive categories-such as growth, diversification, cost leadership, differentiation, stability or retrenchment-implying that organisations consciously select a single coherent strategic path and follow it in a linear and internally consistent manner over time. This view reflects the rationalist assumptions of early strategic management, according to which environments are sufficiently stable to be analysed, futures can be forecast, and managerial actors are capable of designing optimal courses of action ex ante (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1980).

However, when strategy is approached through an interpretive and embedded lens, such typologies appear less as universal prescriptions and more as idealised cognitive frames through which managers and entrepreneurs attempt to navigate uncertainty, mobilise resources and make sense of evolving environments. Empirical research on regionally embedded industries-including craft production, small-scale manufacturing and creative sectors-shows that organisations often combine multiple strategic orientations simultaneously, shifting between them in response to situational constraints and opportunities rather than adhering to a single dominant logic (Reid, 2010; Reid, McLaughlin & Moore, 2014). In this sense, strategic "types" function not as objective categories but as interpretive repertoires that actors draw upon selectively in practice.

Polish contributions further support this reinterpretation by showing that in peripheral, transitional or resource-constrained contexts, strategy often emerges through adaptive recombination of locally embedded capabilities rather than through deliberate long-term planning (Pachura and Kozak, 2017). Strategy thus becomes a situated accomplishment-produced through ongoing interpretation, negotiation and adjustment-rather than a fixed blueprint. From this standpoint, classical typologies retain analytical

value only insofar as they are understood as heuristic devices within broader interpretive processes, not as stable descriptors of organisational behaviour.

Historically, the first strategic typologies emerged within the planning paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s. Influential contributions of this period-including Chandler's structure-follows-strategy thesis, Ansoff's product–market expansion matrix and portfolio-based planning models such as the BCG matrix-were grounded in the normative belief that organisational futures could be predicted and controlled through systematic analysis (Chandler, 1962; Ansoff, 1965; Henderson, 1979). Strategy types were classified primarily according to product–market choices or competitive positioning, assuming relatively stable industry boundaries, linear technological trajectories and the availability of comprehensive information. While these typologies provided analytical clarity and managerial guidance, their explanatory power depended heavily on assumptions that empirical research increasingly called into question (Mintzberg, 1994).

As scholars began to investigate how organisations actually behave rather than how they ought to behave, strategic typologies gradually shifted away from rationalist templates toward behavioural and evolutionary orientations. A key turning point was the recognition that strategic patterns often emerge retrospectively from streams of action rather than from predefined intentions. The distinction between deliberate and emergent strategy demonstrated that organisations frequently discover their strategies ex post, through learning, adaptation and accumulated practice (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Similarly, the notion of logical incrementalism highlighted that effective strategies often develop through small, negotiated steps rather than through comprehensive analytical leaps (Quinn, 1980). These insights did not merely expand the list of strategy types; they fundamentally altered the ontological status of typologies themselves. Rather than representing objective categories of organisational behaviour, typologies came to be understood as interpretive artefacts-heuristic simplifications through which actors rationalise, legitimate and narrate their strategic decisions (Whittington, 2006).

Despite these critiques, strategy typologies retain significant analytical value, provided they are treated not as deterministic classifications but as interpretive lenses that illuminate underlying assumptions about competition, uncertainty and organisational capacity. From this perspective, strategy types can be organised along analytically meaningful dimensions, each reflecting a distinct worldview regarding how organisations relate to their environments. One of the most enduring distinctions is that between positional and resource-based strategies. Positional logic assumes that industries possess

relatively stable structures and that firms achieve advantage by occupying defensible positions within those structures (Porter, 1980). This approach remains influential in sectors characterised by high capital intensity, scale economies or strong regulatory frameworks; however, its limitations become evident in environments marked by volatility, institutional fluidity or rapid technological change.

The emergence of the resource-based view marked a significant shift away from external positioning toward internal capability configurations. Here, strategic advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and organisationally embedded (Barney, 1991). Strategy types are no longer defined primarily by market position but by distinctive combinations of knowledge, skills, routines and relational assets. Subsequent work on dynamic capabilities further extended this logic by conceptualising strategy as the capacity to reconfigure resources in response to environmental change (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). These perspectives are particularly relevant for small, craft-based and creative enterprises, where competitive advantage depends less on formal strategic planning and more on accumulated know-how, embodied practice and community-embedded relationships (Pachura, 2016; Reid, 2018).

Another important axis of differentiation concerns competitive, cooperative and adaptive strategies. Competitive strategies foreground rivalry and advantage-seeking (Competitive Strategy), cooperative strategies emphasise alliances, networks and joint value creation (Mark Granovetter, 1985; Walter W. Powell, 1990), while adaptive strategies highlight learning, responsiveness and resilience (Henry Mintzberg, 1994; Karl E. Weick, 1995). In contemporary organisational settings, especially those characterised by uncertainty and resource constraints, these orientations rarely appear in pure form. Instead, organisations draw selectively from multiple strategic logics, combining elements of competition, cooperation and adaptation as circumstances demand (Richard Whittington, 2006). From an interpretive standpoint, such hybridity is not a deviation from strategic rationality but a reflection of the complexity of real-world strategising (Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

Within this interpretive framework, strategy typologies should not be understood as labels that organisations "possess", but as cognitive repertoires that actors mobilise in practice (Richard Whittington, 2006). Organisations frequently enact multiple strategic orientations simultaneously, shifting emphasis over time and across situations (Henry Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In small and entrepreneurial firms, strategy types often

appear most clearly in narratives and self-descriptions rather than in formal plans (William Gartner, 2007). Entrepreneurs may describe their firms as experimental, quality-driven, local, collaborative or growth-oriented, using these strategic identities to guide decision-making, mobilise commitment and communicate legitimacy to stakeholders (Mary Ann Glynn & Lounsbury, 2001). In this sense, typologies function as discursive resources that shape how actors interpret opportunities, constraints and appropriate courses of action (Dag Hjorth, 2013).

If the evolution of strategy typologies is viewed longitudinally, it resembles a layered structure rather than a linear progression (Henry Mintzberg, 1994). Classical planning logic forms the foundational layer (Igor Ansoff, 1965), upon which positional approaches were built (Michael E. Porter, 1980). Behavioural and emergent perspectives added a further layer by foregrounding learning and adaptation (Henry Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), while resource-based and practice-oriented perspectives introduced an interpretive layer focused on capability, action and embeddedness (Jay Barney, 1991; David Teece et al., 1997; Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Organisations do not abandon earlier layers; rather, they draw upon different layers depending on situational demands (Piotr Pachura, 2016). This layered understanding aligns closely with practice-based approaches to strategy, which emphasise that strategising is socially constructed, contextually enacted and materially mediated (Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

From a grounded-theory perspective, this reconceptualisation of strategy typologies enables a more nuanced integration of empirical findings (Charmaz, 2006). Instead of forcing empirical material into predefined strategic categories, researchers can examine how actors invoke, combine and transform strategic frames in practice, and how these frames interact with institutional conditions, relational networks and material constraints (Mark Granovetter, 1985; Richard Whittington, 2006). Typologies thus become analytically productive without being reified; they function as sensitising concepts rather than fixed classificatory schemes (Blumer, 1954).

The diversity of strategic approaches identified in the literature reflects not only different theoretical traditions but also distinct assumptions about how organisations organise purposeful action under uncertainty (Karl E. Weick, 1995). Rather than treating these approaches as competing doctrines, they can be understood as historically situated responses to different environmental and organisational conditions (Neil Reid, 2018; Piotr Pachura, 2013). This interpretive synthesis is summarised in Table 1.5, which

presents a comparative overview of major strategic orientations and their underlying logics.

Table 1.5. Comparative typology of strategic approaches in management

Strategy type	Core focus	Primary mechanism	Implications for organisational action
Classical / Planning strategy (Chandler (1962); Ansoff (1965); Steiner (1979))	Long-term objectives; predictable environments	Systematic analysis, forecasting, formalised plans	Enables coordination and resource allocation; limited flexibility in volatile contexts
Positioning strategy (Porter (1980, 1985))	Competitive industry structure and market position	Analytical assessment of industry forces; strategic choice	Clarifies sources of advantage; assumes relative market stability
Resource- and competence-based strategy (Barney (1991); Prahalad and Hamel (1990); Grant (1996))	Unique internal capabilities	Development and protection of distinctive resources and skills	Supports sustainability; risks inward orientation
(Quinn (1978); Mintzberg (1994); Nelson and Winter (1982))	Organisational learning and change	Experimentation, feedback loops, incremental adjustment	High responsiveness; potential lack of coherence
Entrepreneurial strategy (Schumpeter (1934); Stevenson and Jarillo (1990); Sarasvathy (2001))	Opportunity creation and innovation	Risk-taking, opportunity recognition, founder-driven action	Drives innovation and growth; dependence on individual agency
Collaborative / network strategy (Gulati (1998); Powell (1990); Johnstone and Lionais (2004))	Inter-organisational relationships	Alliances, networks, shared resources	Expands access to knowledge and markets; increases relational complexity
Stakeholder-oriented strategy (Freeman (1984); Donaldson and Preston (1995))	Long-term legitimacy; balance of stakeholder interests	Engagement, consultation, co-creation	Enhances resilience and legitimacy; may dilute strategic focus
Digital / data-driven strategy (Bharadwaj et al. (2013); Yoo et al. (2010))	Data, platforms and real-time coordination	Analytics, automation, platform integration	Enables dynamic optimisation; dependence on digital infrastructures
Sustainable strategy (Elkington (1997); Porter and Kramer (2011))	Environmental and social responsibility	Integration of sustainability into core operations	Strengthens legitimacy and long-term resilience; requires cultural change

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965), Steiner (1979), Porter (1980, 1985), Barney (1991), Prahalad and Hamel (1990), Grant (1996), Quinn (1978), Mintzberg (1994), Nelson and Winter (1982), Schumpeter (1934), Stevenson and Jarillo (1990), Sarasvathy (2001), Gulati (1998), Powell (1990), Johnstone and Lionais (2004), Freeman (1984), Donaldson and Preston (1995), Bharadwaj et al. (2013), Yoo et al. (2010), Elkington (1997), and Porter and Kramer (2011).

Seen in this way, strategy typologies do not exhaust the phenomenon of strategy but provide interpretive frames through which organisational actors make sense of their actions. To understand how these frames are mobilised, combined and transformed in everyday organisational life, it is therefore necessary to move beyond typologies and examine strategy at the level of micro-level practices, interactions and material engagements. This shift in analytical focus provides the foundation for the discussion of micro-level strategic processes in small and craft enterprises developed in the following section.

1.5. Micro-level strategic processes in small and craft enterprises

The increasing prominence of micro-level perspectives in contemporary strategy research reflects a profound reconfiguration of the epistemological foundations of strategic management (Richard Whittington, 2006; Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Rather than treating strategy as a rationally designed plan, a formally articulated long-term orientation, or a static configuration of competitive positions, micro-level approaches conceptualise strategy as a situated, ongoing and socially embedded process (Henry Mintzberg, 1994; Dag Hjorth, 2013). This shift does not merely introduce new analytical techniques; it fundamentally challenges the ontological assumption that strategy exists independently of action (Theodore Schatzki, 2002). From a micro-level perspective, strategy is not something organisations possess, but something organisational actors continuously accomplish through everyday practices, interpretations and interactions (Paula Jarzabkowski, 2005).

This reorientation is particularly consequential for the analysis of small and craft enterprises. Such organisations do not simply represent scaled-down versions of large corporations; they operate under qualitatively different structural, cultural and institutional conditions (Friederike Welter, 2011; Piotr Pachura, 2016). Small and craft enterprises typically face chronic resource constraints, limited organisational slack, high exposure to environmental volatility and strong dependence on local socio-economic contexts (Neil Reid, 2018). Decision-making authority is often concentrated in the hands of founders or owner-managers, yet this authority is simultaneously constrained by material realities, relational obligations and normative commitments associated with craft

identity and community embeddedness (Bengt Johannisson, 2011). Under these conditions, the classical distinction between strategic and operational levels becomes empirically untenable (Henry Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Strategy does not precede practice; it is immanent to it (Theodore Schatzki, 2002).

In small and craft enterprises, strategising unfolds as a micro-level process consisting of streams of situated judgments, embodied practices, relational negotiations and interpretive adjustments (Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Bengt Johannisson, 2011). Strategic direction emerges through the accumulation of small, often improvised decisions rather than through discrete strategic episodes (James Brian Quinn, 1980). These decisions are rarely experienced by actors as "strategic" at the moment of enactment (Henry Mintzberg, 1994). Only retrospectively, through narrative and sensemaking processes, do patterns become visible and acquire strategic meaning (Karl E. Weick, 1995). Strategy, therefore, is not the cause of action but its interpretive outcome-a stabilised reading of past practices that informs future behaviour (Richard Whittington, 2006).

At the core of micro-level strategising lies sensemaking. Organisational actors do not confront an objectively given environment that can be exhaustively analysed and predicted; they confront equivocal situations requiring interpretation (Karl E. Weick, 1995). Markets, technologies, regulatory frameworks and competitive dynamics present ambiguous signals rather than clear imperatives (William Starbuck, 1985). Sensemaking enables actors to construct plausible interpretations of these signals, reducing uncertainty sufficiently to allow coordinated action (Karl E. Weick et al., 2005). Importantly, sensemaking is not a preliminary stage of strategy formation but an ongoing, constitutive process through which strategic action is continuously generated (Paula Jarzabkowski, 2005).

As Weick (1995) emphasises, sensemaking is retrospective, social and grounded in action. Actors enact their environments through what they do and subsequently interpret the outcomes of their actions in order to guide future behaviour. In small and craft enterprises, this dynamic is intensified by the absence of formal analytical infrastructures and by the immediacy of operational pressures. Strategic sensemaking relies heavily on experiential judgement, intuition and locally shared interpretive frames shaped by prior experience, professional socialisation and craft traditions. Strategy emerges not as the product of objective analysis but as a plausible narrative that enables organisational members to coordinate action and sustain continuity over time.

Polish strategic-management scholarship has consistently highlighted this interpretive character of strategy. Obłój (2014) conceptualises strategy as a mechanism for maintaining coherence between organisational action and evolving interpretations of success, legitimacy and purpose. Krupski (2011) observes that in small organisations strategy often exists implicitly, embedded in routines and behavioural patterns rather than articulated in formal plans. Rokita (2005) underscores the role of tacit knowledge and intuition in strategic decision-making, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and time pressure. These insights converge with international processual research demonstrating that strategy is continuously negotiated and reconstructed rather than deliberately chosen (Mintzberg, 1994; Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2008).

Micro-level strategising in craft enterprises is also deeply embodied and material. Craft-based production relies on tacit, sensory and bodily knowledge acquired through prolonged engagement with materials, tools and techniques. Such knowledge resists codification and cannot be easily transferred or standardised. Strategic decisions concerning innovation, experimentation, quality standards or product differentiation are therefore inseparable from production practices themselves. What is strategically possible is constrained and enabled by what practitioners can physically do, perceive and manipulate in practice.

This embodied dimension of strategising challenges cognitive and analytical models of strategy by demonstrating that strategic judgement is grounded not only in reasoning but also in bodily experience, sensory evaluation and emotional attunement to materials and processes. Polish qualitative research in organisation studies has repeatedly emphasised the importance of everyday practice, materiality and affect in organisational action (Konecki, 2000; Kostera, 2014). In craft enterprises, strategic outcomes emerge through iterative cycles of making, testing, adjusting and refining rather than through abstract deliberation detached from material realities.

Relational embeddedness constitutes another foundational dimension of micro-level strategic processes. Small and craft enterprises are deeply embedded in dense networks of social, economic and institutional relations. Suppliers, customers, collaborators, competitors, local authorities and community members all participate-directly or indirectly-in shaping strategic possibilities. These relationships are not merely transactional; they are infused with trust, reputation, reciprocity and shared identity. Strategic action unfolds through negotiation, mutual adjustment and relational coordination rather than through unilateral choice.

Granovetter's (1985) concept of embeddedness provides a crucial analytical lens for understanding how economic action is shaped by social relations. In small enterprises, embeddedness often intensifies over time as repeated interactions produce durable relational ties. Polish management research has extensively applied this perspective to explain how small firms compensate for resource scarcity through networks and cooperation (Gorynia, 2010; Matejun, 2012). Czakon (2012) further demonstrates that network relations function not only as channels for resource exchange but also as arenas of learning, norm formation and legitimacy construction. Strategic agency thus becomes distributed across relational configurations rather than concentrated solely in the individual entrepreneur.

Resource scarcity plays a paradoxical role in micro-level strategising. On the one hand, limited access to financial capital, specialised labour and advanced technologies constrains the range of feasible strategic options. On the other hand, scarcity often stimulates creativity, improvisation and experimentation. Entrepreneurs engage in bricolage-like practices, recombining available resources to address emerging challenges (Baker and Nelson, 2005). Rather than optimising resource allocation, they "make do" with what is at hand. Polish scholars similarly emphasise improvisation and incremental problem-solving as defining features of strategic behaviour in small firms (Nogalski and Karpacz, 2011).

As a consequence, micro-level strategising is predominantly incremental and adaptive. Strategic direction emerges through sequences of small adjustments rather than through large-scale transformations. Quinn's (1978) concept of logical incrementalism captures this dynamic, highlighting how coherence is produced through cumulative steps rather than grand designs. Mintzberg's (1994) notion of emergent strategy further reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that strategic patterns often become visible only retrospectively. In small and craft enterprises, strategy unfolds as an evolutionary process shaped by feedback, learning and path dependence.

Temporality is therefore central to micro-level strategising. Strategy is not a snapshot but a temporally extended process in which past actions shape present interpretations and future possibilities. Repeated practices sediment into routines; routines crystallise into organisational identity; identity constrains future strategic choices. This path-dependent dynamic means that strategy is simultaneously reactive and cumulative, improvised and stabilised. Strategic continuity is produced not through long-term planning but through the repetition and reinforcement of practice over time.

Emotional and identity-related dimensions further deepen the micro-level character of strategising. Entrepreneurs' emotional attachment to their work, products and communities profoundly shapes strategic choices. Craft enterprises, in particular, are often driven by strong normative commitments to quality, authenticity and professional integrity. These commitments function as internal constraints that delimit what is considered strategically acceptable. Polish scholars associated with interpretive management and organisational culture studies (Sułkowski, 2012; Jemielniak, 2012) emphasise that identity and values are not peripheral but constitutive elements of organisational action. Strategy, from this perspective, is as much a moral and cultural process as it is an economic one.

To avoid an overly voluntaristic interpretation of micro-level strategising, it is necessary to situate these processes within broader institutional environments (William R. Scott, 2014). Everyday strategic practices are deeply shaped by institutional logics, regulatory frameworks, professional norms and cultural expectations that define what is perceived as legitimate, appropriate and possible (Patricia H. Thornton et al., 2012). In small and craft enterprises, institutional embeddedness is often experienced acutely because such firms lack buffering mechanisms that might otherwise shield them from institutional pressures (Friederike Welter, 2011).

Institutional theory highlights that strategic action is constrained not only by resources and cognition but also by legitimacy considerations (Mark C. Suchman, 1995). Organisational actors evaluate strategic options not solely in terms of efficiency or profitability, but also in terms of acceptability and credibility within their organisational field (Paul J. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In craft enterprises, legitimacy is often tied to culturally entrenched narratives surrounding craftsmanship, locality, authenticity and quality (Neil Reid, 2018). Strategic decisions that violate these narratives-even if economically attractive-may be rejected because they threaten symbolic standing and social recognition (Mary Ann Glynn, 2000).

From a micro-level perspective, legitimacy is not a static attribute but an ongoing accomplishment (Mark C. Suchman, 1995). Entrepreneurs engage continuously in legitimacy work: narrating their actions in ways that align with institutional expectations, performing recognised craft practices, and demonstrating adherence to shared quality standards (Dag Hjorth, 2013). Strategy thus becomes inseparable from institutional sensemaking, as actors interpret not only markets but also norms and expectations

concerning what kinds of strategic behaviour are socially sanctioned (Karl E. Weick, 1995).

Power relations further shape micro-level strategising. Although small and craft enterprises are often portrayed as flat and informal, power is exercised through control over resources, interpretive authority and narrative framing (Michel Foucault, 1980). Entrepreneurs, as founders and owners, typically possess privileged capacity to define which actions are retrospectively framed as strategic successes or failures (Henry Mintzberg, 1994). At the same time, power is frequently informal and relational, grounded in expertise, reputation and moral authority rather than formal hierarchy (Bengt Johannisson, 2011). Craft mastery and symbolic capital can thus exert significant influence over strategic direction (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986).

Quality logic constitutes a particularly important stabilising mechanism in micro-level strategising. In craft enterprises, quality is not merely a technical parameter but a normative and cultural construct (Luc Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). It functions as a strategic anchor that constrains opportunistic behaviour and provides a durable reference point for evaluating strategic options (Piotr Pachura, 2016). Quality is enacted through routines, sensory practices, inspection rituals and peer evaluation rather than through formal metrics alone (David Teece et al., 1997). Commitments to quality introduce a temporal dimension to strategy, as investments in quality yield delayed returns and require sustained consistency over time (Neil Reid, 2018).Table 1.6 synthesises the analytical dimensions of micro-level strategising and their broader organisational effects.

Table 1.6. Micro-level strategic processes and their organisational effects

Micro-level strategic process	Core mechanism	Strategic effect	Organisational implication
Sensemaking (Weick (1995); Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991); Obłój (2014))	Interpretation of ambiguity through action and retrospection	Directional coherence under uncertainty	Cognitive stability and shared understanding
Embodied and material practice (Polanyi (1966); Konecki (2000); Gherardi (2012))	Tacit, sensory and bodily knowledge embedded in production	Definition of feasible strategic options	Material constraint and enablement of strategy
Relational embeddedness (Granovetter (1985); Jack and Anderson (2002); Czakon (2012))	Trust-based, repeated social interactions	Distributed strategic agency	Network-based resilience and cooperation
Incremental adaptation (Quinn (1978); Mintzberg (1994);	Learning-by-doing, experimentation, improvisation	Strategic flexibility and responsiveness	Evolutionary change rather than planned

Micro-level strategic process	Core mechanism	Strategic effect	Organisational implication
Nogalski and Karpacz (2011))			transformation
Temporal layering (path dependence) (Sydow, Schreyögg and Koch (2009))	Sedimentation of past practices and decisions	Strategic continuity over time	Historical embeddedness of strategy
Identity anchoring (Albert and Whetten (1985); Gioia et al. (2013); Sułkowski (2012))	Normative commitment to values, craft ethos and authenticity	Strategic boundary-setting	Value-based coherence and selectivity
Legitimacy work (Suchman (1995); DiMaggio and Powell (1983); Kostera (2014))	Alignment with institutional norms and expectations	Strategic credibility	Social acceptance within organisational field
Narrative integration (Czarniawska (2004); Boje (1991); Barry and Elmes (1997))	Retrospective storytelling and meaning construction	Stabilisation of emergent strategy	Interpretive control and organisational coherence

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Weick (1995), Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), Obłój (2014), Polanyi (1966), Konecki (2000), Gherardi (2012), Granovetter (1985), Jack and Anderson (2002), Czakon (2012), Quinn (1978), Mintzberg (1994), Nogalski and Karpacz (2011), Sydow, Schreyögg and Koch (2009), Albert and Whetten (1985), Gioia et al. (2013), Sułkowski (2012), Suchman (1995), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Kostera (2014), Czarniawska (2004), Boje (1991), and Barry and Elmes (1997).

So, micro-level strategic processes in small and craft enterprises are best understood as dense, temporally unfolding configurations of practice, interpretation, material engagement, relational coordination and institutional legitimation. Strategy emerges not as a detached plan but as a lived accomplishment, continuously produced and reproduced through everyday action. This perspective fundamentally challenges static, plan-based models of strategy and provides a robust theoretical foundation for analysing entrepreneurial action in contexts characterised by uncertainty, embeddedness and craft-based production.

1.6. Strategy within systems of strategic management

The conceptualisation of strategy as an emergent, micro-level accomplishment-developed in the preceding section-necessitates a complementary analytical perspective capable of explaining how such dispersed, situated and often improvised actions acquire durability, coherence and organisational relevance over time. Without this perspective, strategy risks being reduced to a collection of isolated practices, lacking explanatory power with regard to continuity, coordination and institutional persistence. Systems of strategic management provide precisely this missing analytical layer, enabling strategy

to be understood not merely as action, but as an organised, stabilised and reproduced social process.

Historically, strategic management emerged as an attempt to systematise strategic decision-making in large, complex organisations operating under conditions of relative environmental stability. Early formulations treated strategic management as a rational, linear sequence comprising environmental analysis, strategy formulation, implementation and control (Chandler, 1962; Ansoff, 1965). Within this paradigm, strategy was assumed to exist prior to action and to guide organisational behaviour through formal plans, structures and performance metrics. Polish management literature of the late twentieth century largely adopted this framework, emphasising long-term planning, analytical tools and hierarchical coordination (Penc, 1997; Stabryła, 2000; Griffin, 2002). Pachura (2012, pp. 50-54) emphasised that entrepreneurial strategy is constructed through interpretive sense-making processes, whereby actors continuously negotiate meanings, priorities and possibilities in response to evolving contexts.

However, as empirical research increasingly revealed the volatility, complexity and ambiguity of organisational environments, the epistemological foundations of this procedural model were progressively destabilised. Strategic failure was often observed not as a consequence of inadequate planning, but as a result of excessive reliance on rigid plans in contexts requiring flexibility, learning and rapid reinterpretation. Mintzberg's (1994) critique of strategic planning marked a decisive turning point, demonstrating that strategy frequently emerges from patterns of action rather than from deliberate intention. This insight fundamentally altered the understanding of strategic management systems, shifting attention away from formal planning toward processes of interpretation, learning and adaptation.

Contemporary perspectives increasingly conceptualise strategic management as a system of interrelated processes through which organisations continuously interpret their environments, negotiate strategic meaning and coordinate collective action. From this viewpoint, strategic management is not a discrete managerial function, nor a periodic planning exercise, but an ongoing organisational capability embedded in everyday practice. Strategy does not simply pass through the system; it is produced by it. Strategic management systems thus function as interpretive infrastructures that render organisational action intelligible, legitimate and repeatable.

Polish scholars have been instrumental in advancing this systemic reorientation. Obłój (2014) defines strategic management as a dynamic process of maintaining

coherence between organisational goals, capabilities and environmental conditions, emphasising that coherence is neither automatic nor permanent but must be continually reconstructed. Krupski (2011) argues that strategy in practice often manifests as a set of implicit decision rules and habitual responses rather than explicit plans, suggesting that strategic management systems operate largely below the level of formal articulation. Rokita (2005) conceptualises strategic management as an adaptive system integrating feedback, learning and experimentation, particularly relevant for organisations operating under uncertainty.

This recursive logic directly addresses a central weakness of both classical strategy theory and purely micro-level perspectives (Henry Mintzberg, 1994; Richard Whittington, 2006). Classical models assume that systems impose order from above, while micro-level approaches risk fragmenting strategy into disconnected practices (James Brian Quinn, 1980; Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). A systemic perspective reconciles these positions by demonstrating how order emerges from interaction rather than imposition (Niklas Luhmann, 1995; Anthony Giddens, 1984). Strategic management systems do not eliminate emergence; rather, they selectively stabilise it by transforming dispersed actions into recognisable, legitimate and reproducible patterns of organisational behaviour (William R. Scott, 2014; Patricia H. Thornton et al., 2012).

Learning plays a pivotal role within such systems. Strategic management systems function as organisational learning architectures, translating experiential feedback into revised interpretive frameworks and decision routines. This insight resonates with the behavioural theory of the firm (Cyert and March, 1963), which emphasises bounded rationality, adaptive aspiration levels and routine-based learning. It is further developed in the literature on dynamic capabilities, which conceptualises strategic management as the capacity to sense, seize and reconfigure resources in response to change (Teece, 2007). Polish researchers similarly emphasise learning as a central mechanism of strategic management, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, where formal planning is limited and experiential knowledge plays a dominant role (Nogalski and Karpacz, 2011; Matejun, 2012).

Decision-making within strategic management systems is therefore distributed, iterative and socially embedded rather than centralised and episodic. Sobotkiewicz argues that marketing should not be treated as a narrow operational activity but as an organisational logic that shapes how firms coordinate decisions about value, relationships, and market positioning. From this perspective, “marketing management”

implies structuring organisational processes around market knowledge and customer value, rather than isolating marketing as a technical function. This is relevant for practice-based strategising because it positions marketing as a cross-cutting set of routines and interpretive frames through which firms stabilise strategic direction under uncertainty (Sobotkiewicz, 2007). While formal authority may reside with top management or founders, strategic decisions emerge through interaction, negotiation and interpretation across organisational and inter-organisational boundaries. Strategic management systems structure these interactions by defining legitimate topics of discussion, acceptable evaluation criteria and dominant interpretive frames (Luhmann, 1995; Scott, 2014). Strategy becomes organisationally "thinkable" only within the cognitive and normative boundaries established by the system, which simultaneously enable and constrain strategic imagination (Weick, 1995; Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012; Whittington, 2006).

Control mechanisms constitute another essential component of strategic management systems. In classical models, control is primarily associated with performance measurement, budgeting and corrective action. Contemporary systems-oriented perspectives broaden this understanding by recognising symbolic and normative forms of control alongside formal mechanisms. Values, mission statements, quality standards and professional norms guide behaviour without requiring constant monitoring or hierarchical enforcement. Polish organisational theorists emphasise the role of cultural and normative control in sustaining strategic coherence, particularly in organisations where formal control mechanisms are weak, costly or counterproductive (Sułkowski, 2012; Kostera, 2014).

Institutional theory further deepens the systemic understanding of strategic management by highlighting the role of legitimacy, conformity and field-level expectations. Strategic management systems are not neutral technical instruments; they are shaped by dominant managerial ideologies, professional standards and institutionalised conceptions of rationality. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism explains why organisations adopt similar strategic-management practices regardless of their actual effectiveness. In such cases, strategic management systems function less as performance-enhancing tools and more as legitimacy signals that align organisations with prevailing norms of "good management".

In the Polish context, systems of strategic management have been profoundly influenced by broader institutional transformations associated with post-socialist

transition, European integration and the diffusion of Western management models (Gorynia, 2010). These influences shape not only the formal architecture of strategic management systems but also underlying assumptions about competition, growth and managerial responsibility. Strategic management systems thus mediate between global managerial discourses and local organisational realities, translating abstract models into context-specific practices.

When applied to small and craft enterprises, the systemic perspective reveals important deviations from canonical models. Such organisations rarely possess formalised strategic-management systems in the conventional sense. Instead, strategic management is enacted through informal routines, personal interactions and shared interpretive frames. Nevertheless, systems exist wherever strategic action is recurrently coordinated and stabilised over time. In craft enterprises, these systems often revolve around quality rituals, peer evaluation, founder narratives, production routines and relational governance rather than formal planning documents.

This observation challenges the implicit bias in strategic-management literature toward scale and formalisation. Systems of strategic management should not be equated with bureaucratic apparatuses. From a practice-oriented perspective, systems emerge wherever repeated strategic action is rendered meaningful, legitimate and reproducible. In craft enterprises, such systems are frequently personalised, tacit and deeply embedded in everyday practice, yet they perform the same stabilising and coordinating functions as formal systems in larger organisations.

Organisational narratives contribute to the stabilisation and interpretation of strategic orientation by highlighting certain values, histories, and future trajectories. Gębarowski (2019) points out that narratives play a role in legitimising strategic choices, as different interpretations compete for recognition within and beyond the organisation. Strategy thus involves not only material decisions but also processes of narrative construction.

Quality logic plays a particularly stabilising role within these systems. Commitments to quality function as normative anchors that constrain opportunistic behaviour and provide a durable reference point for strategic evaluation. Quality standards operate as soft control mechanisms, shaping decision-making without explicit enforcement. Over time, these standards become institutionalised within strategic management systems, influencing resource allocation, innovation trajectories and organisational identity.

Narrative processes further contribute to systemic coherence. Through storytelling, organisations retrospectively integrate dispersed actions into coherent strategic narratives that legitimise past decisions and orient future behaviour. As Czarniawska (2004) demonstrates, such narratives are not merely descriptive but performative: they actively shape organisational reality. Within strategic management systems, narratives function as sensemaking devices that translate micro-level emergence into macro-level coherence, enabling organisations to maintain strategic continuity despite uncertainty and change.

Table 1.7. synthesises the expanded components of strategic management systems and their functions within small and craft enterprises.

Table 1.7. Expanded systemic components of strategic management

System dimension	Core function	Mode of operation	Key authors
Interpretive sensemaking	Meaning construction	Shared cognitive frames	Weick (1995); Obłój (2014)
Decision routines	Action coordination	Recurrent patterns	Cyert and March (1963); Krupski (2011)
Learning mechanisms	Adaptation	Feedback and experimentation	Mintzberg (1994); Nogalski and Karpacz (2011)
Normative control	Behavioural regulation	Values and quality standards	Sułkowski (2012); Kostera (2014)
Structural arrangements	Resource alignment	Informal roles and flexibility	Chandler (1962); Matejun (2012)
Institutional alignment	Legitimacy	Conformity with field norms	DiMaggio and Powell (1983); Gorynia (2010)
Narrative integration	Coherence	Retrospective storytelling	Czarniawska (2004); Boje (1991)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Weick (1995), Obłój (2014), Cyert and March (1963), Krupski (2011), Mintzberg (1994), Nogalski and Karpacz (2011), Sułkowski (2012), Kostera (2014), Chandler (1962), Matejun (2012), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Gorynia (2010), Czarniawska (2004), and Boje (1991).

A fully developed systems perspective on strategic management requires moving beyond descriptive accounts of organisational coordination toward an explicit theorisation of how strategic order is produced under conditions of indeterminacy. Strategy systems do not operate in stable environments; rather, they exist precisely because organisational environments are volatile, ambiguous and structurally underdetermined. Strategic management systems therefore function not as instruments of prediction, but as mechanisms for coping with uncertainty through structured interpretation and selective stabilisation.

From this perspective, uncertainty is not an external disturbance to be eliminated through better analysis, but a constitutive condition of strategic action (Karl E. Weick,

1995; Niklas Luhmann, 1995). Classical strategic management attempted to neutralise uncertainty through forecasting and formal planning (Igor Ansoff, 1965; Henry Mintzberg, 1994). Contemporary systems-oriented approaches, by contrast, recognise that uncertainty cannot be removed, only managed (James G. March, 1994; Karl E. Weick, 1995). Strategic management systems operate by transforming radical uncertainty into manageable ambiguity, allowing organisations to act despite incomplete information (Niklas Luhmann, 1995). This transformation occurs through the establishment of interpretive frames, routines and evaluative criteria that reduce complexity without eliminating it (William R. Scott, 2014; Patricia H. Thornton et al., 2012).

Polish scholars explicitly acknowledge this function of strategic management. Krupski (2011) argues that strategy systems primarily serve to "domesticate uncertainty" by creating decision premises that make action possible even in the absence of reliable forecasts. Obłój (2014) similarly emphasises that strategic coherence is achieved not through predictive accuracy but through interpretive consistency. In this sense, strategic management systems operate as cognitive scaffolding that supports organisational action under conditions of epistemic limitation. Pachura (2011, pp. 9-14) highlighted that such assumptions rarely hold for small entrepreneurial firms operating under uncertainty, where strategic rationality is bounded by institutional constraints, resource scarcity and incomplete information. Strategy in these contexts reflects pragmatic adaptation rather than optimisation.

An important implication of this view is that strategic management systems are inherently selective. They do not process all available information; instead, they prioritise certain signals while marginalising others. This selectivity is neither accidental nor purely rational. It reflects historically sedimented assumptions about what matters strategically, which actors are authorised to interpret signals, and which criteria are considered legitimate bases for decision-making. Strategic management systems thus shape organisational attention (Ocasio, 1997), directing it toward specific issues while rendering others invisible.

This attentional function is particularly evident in small and craft enterprises, where cognitive and organisational capacities are limited (Simon, 1957; Welter, 2011). Strategic management systems in such contexts often focus attention on a narrow set of concerns-product quality, customer feedback, resource availability, regulatory compliance-while excluding broader market analysis or abstract competitive modelling (March & Simon, 1958; Weick, 1995; Reid, 2018). This selective focus is not a deficiency

but a functional adaptation to organisational scale and context. By constraining attention, the system enables timely action and prevents cognitive overload.

At the same time, selectivity introduces path dependence. Once certain issues are consistently framed as strategically salient, they become embedded in organisational routines and narratives, shaping future interpretations. Strategic management systems thus reproduce their own premises over time. Sydow, Schreyögg and Koch (2009) conceptualise this dynamic as self-reinforcing path dependence, whereby strategic choices become increasingly constrained by earlier decisions. Polish researchers have observed similar dynamics in small firms, where early strategic orientations-such as a focus on craftsmanship or local markets-become deeply institutionalised and difficult to reverse (Rokita, 2005; Matejun, 2012).

Another critical dimension of strategic management systems concerns their normative foundations. Strategy is often portrayed as a technical or economic process, yet in practice it is deeply infused with values and moral judgments. Strategic management systems encode normative assumptions about what constitutes "good strategy," "acceptable risk," or "legitimate growth." These assumptions are rarely explicit; they are embedded in organisational culture, professional standards and field-level discourses.

Polish organisational scholars have extensively analysed the normative dimension of management. Sułkowski (2012) argues that management systems function as cultural artefacts that reproduce specific value orientations and power relations. Kostera (2014) emphasises that organisational order is sustained through symbolic and moral mechanisms rather than through formal control alone. From this perspective, strategic management systems should be understood as moral as well as technical systems, shaping not only what organisations do, but who they believe they are.

This normative dimension is especially salient in craft enterprises, where strategic decisions are often evaluated through ethical and identity-based criteria rather than purely instrumental ones. Decisions concerning scaling, automation or cost reduction may be rejected not because they are unprofitable, but because they conflict with craft values and professional identity. Strategic management systems in such contexts operate as guardians of identity, filtering strategic options through normative lenses. This reinforces continuity and coherence but may also constrain radical transformation. Paliszkiewicz emphasises that knowledge represents one of the key strategic resources of organisations,

particularly in the context of the knowledge-based economy, and manifests itself primarily in everyday organisational practices (Paliszkiewicz, 2015, pp. 21–24).

Power relations further complicate the operation of strategic management systems. Systems do not merely coordinate action; they privilege certain actors, interpretations and interests over others. Control over strategic narratives, decision premises and evaluative criteria constitutes a significant source of power. In small enterprises, this power is often concentrated in the figure of the founder or owner-manager, whose personal interpretations and values become embedded in the strategic management system itself.

However, power within strategic management systems is rarely absolute. It is contested, negotiated and reinterpreted through everyday interactions. Employees, partners and external stakeholders influence strategic direction by shaping information flows, framing issues and mobilising legitimacy claims. Strategic management systems thus function as arenas of ongoing negotiation rather than as instruments of unilateral control. This view aligns with Polish critical management studies, which emphasise the political and contested nature of organisational order (Kostera and Śliwa, 2012).

Institutional environments exert additional pressure on strategic management systems, shaping their structure and operation. Organisations do not design their strategy systems freely; they draw upon institutionalised models of "good management" diffused through education, consultancy, professional associations and regulatory frameworks. These models often emphasise formalisation, planning and control, even when such practices are poorly suited to small or craft-based organisations.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism explains why strategic management systems often converge across organisations despite contextual differences. In the Polish context, this convergence has been particularly pronounced due to the rapid diffusion of Western management models following economic transformation (Gorynia, 2010). As a result, many organisations adopt formal strategic practices primarily for legitimacy reasons, even when actual strategising continues to occur informally.

This decoupling between formal systems and lived practice represents a critical analytical issue (John W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Richard Whittington, 2006). Strategic management systems may exist simultaneously at multiple levels: a formal level oriented toward external legitimacy, and an informal level where real strategic work takes place (Paula Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Henry Mintzberg, 1994). Recognising this duality is

essential for avoiding superficial analyses that equate strategy with documentation (Karl E. Weick, 1995). From a systems perspective, both levels are part of the strategic management system, serving different functions within the organisation's institutional environment (Niklas Luhmann, 1995; William R. Scott, 2014).

Narrative mechanisms play a crucial role in integrating these levels. Strategic narratives translate informal practices into formally recognisable strategy, aligning lived experience with institutional expectations. Czarniawska (2004) demonstrates that narratives function as organising devices that render complexity intelligible and legitimate. Within strategic management systems, narratives stabilise meaning by retrospectively framing emergent actions as coherent strategic choices. This process does not eliminate ambiguity but renders it manageable.

Over time, strategic management systems become historically embedded. They accumulate layers of routines, narratives and interpretive frames that reflect past experiences and decisions. This historical layering explains why strategic change is often slow and contested, even in the face of environmental disruption. Systems resist change not because of inertia alone, but because they embody accumulated meaning and identity. Altering the system therefore requires not only new decisions, but reinterpretation of organisational history.

From this perspective, strategic change is a process of systemic reconfiguration rather than discrete choice (Luhmann, 1995). It involves renegotiating interpretive frames, modifying routines, redefining legitimacy criteria and reconstructing narratives (Weick, 1995). Strategic management systems can support such change by providing arenas for reflection and learning, but they can also impede it by reinforcing existing assumptions (Mintzberg, 1994). Understanding this ambivalence is crucial for analysing strategy in practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

Therefore, this extended analysis demonstrates that strategy within systems of strategic management is a deeply complex, multi-layered phenomenon. Strategic management systems integrate cognitive, normative, relational and institutional dimensions, enabling organisations to act coherently under conditions of uncertainty (Luhmann, 1995; Weick, 1995). They do not eliminate emergence; they structure it. They do not impose order from above; they stabilise order from within (Mintzberg, 1994).

This systemic perspective completes the theoretical framework developed in this chapter. By linking micro-level strategising with organisational systems of interpretation, coordination and institutionalisation, it provides a comprehensive lens for analysing how

strategy is enacted, sustained and transformed in small and craft enterprises (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). The empirical analysis that follows draws directly upon this framework, examining how strategic management systems operate in practice and how they interact with everyday strategising to produce distinctive strategic trajectories.

Despite significant developments in entrepreneurship studies, major conceptual blind spots remain regarding how strategy emerges in small, craft-based enterprises. Classical strategic management-particularly the analytical-planning tradition represented by Porter (1985, pp. 3-33), Ansoff (1991, pp. 56-78) and the design school outlined by Mintzberg (1994, pp. 107-142)-treats strategy as a deliberate, ex ante formulated plan implemented under conditions of relative stability. These frameworks assume the possibility of structured market analysis, resource optimisation and planned competitive positioning. However, these assumptions do not correspond to the realities faced by microbreweries, which operate under uncertainty, institutional ambiguity, resource scarcity and, in the case of Ukraine, chronic crisis and war.

To present these shortcomings in a synthetic and analytically clear manner, Table 1.8 summarises the key areas in which classical approaches prove insufficient for explaining how strategising unfolds within microbreweries. This table serves as an organising device and establishes the conceptual foundation for subsequent sections, demonstrating that these gaps are not marginal irregularities but fundamental limitations concerning core analytical categories-from the nature of strategy itself, through socio-cultural embeddedness, to understandings of innovation, cooperation and entrepreneurial action under crisis conditions.

Table 1.8. The main gaps in classical entrepreneurship and strategy research

Area of theoretical deficiency	Description of the gap	Implications for understanding craft microbreweries
Lack of a practice-based understanding of strategising	Classical research treats small firms as simplified large firms, focusing on decision-making rather than *doing* (Whittington, 1996, pp. 731-735).	Strategising in microbreweries occurs through embodied, material practices (brewing, sensory evaluation, improvisation) that remain invisible in deliberate strategy models.
Insufficient attention to socio-cultural embeddedness	Embeddedness is acknowledged (Granovetter, 1985, p. 490; Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 467-469), but rarely analysed as a daily practice shaping entrepreneurial action.	Local identity, cultural repertoires, community norms, and place-based relationships significantly shape decisions on sourcing, distribution, branding and cooperation.
Narrow conceptualisation of	Innovation is often reduced to market differentiation	Craft innovation emerges rhythmically from embodied

Area of theoretical deficiency	Description of the gap	Implications for understanding craft microbreweries
innovation	(Schumpeterian logic), overlooking its artisanal and sensory dimensions (Schumpeter, 1934).	routines, materials, experimentation and local context-not just market positioning.
Under-theorisation of cooperation and relationality	Cooperation is treated instrumentally, not as a trust-based, culturally grounded relational process (Johnstone and lionais, 2004, pp. 273-275).	Collaboration among brewers (sharing yeast, co-brewing, knowledge exchange) is a strategic mechanism driven by shared norms, reciprocity and community ethos.
Insufficient frameworks for strategising under crisis and scarcity	Most strategy theories assume stable institutional contexts and predictable environments.	War, disrupted supply chains, infrastructural instability and scarcity (particularly in ukraine) reveal strategic behaviours that classical models cannot explain.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Whittington (1996), Granovetter (1985), Jack and Anderson (2002), Schumpeter (1934), and Johnstone and Lionais (2004).

The gaps identified in Table 1.8 reveal that classical models fail to capture the situated, relational and material dimensions of entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries. These limitations underscore the need for a conceptual approach capable of explaining how strategy emerges from everyday practices, embodied skills, local cultural repertoires and adaptive responses to uncertainty.

These observations indicate that any attempt to understand strategising in craft microbreweries must move beyond static, plan-based conceptions and instead engage with the lived, processual and relational nature of entrepreneurial action. This requires a theoretical synthesis capable of capturing both the micro-level practices through which strategy is enacted and the broader socio-cultural, material and institutional contexts that shape these practices.

Strategy-as-practice (SAP) shifts attention from strategy as a document to strategising as "what people do" (Jarzabkowski, 2005, pp. 15-37). It foregrounds:

a) micro-activities of practitioners,
b) embodied practices and sensory labour,
c) material artefacts and production spaces,
d) situated decision-making under real-world constraints.

Embedded entrepreneurship contributes the complementary perspective that entrepreneurial action is shaped by place, culture, networks and community relationships (Anderson and Jack, 2002, pp. 469-472).

Their integration suggests that strategising in microbreweries emerges through the interaction of:

a) embodied brewing practices,
b) shared craft ethos,
c) local cultural identity,
d) relational commitments,
e) material constraints and opportunities,
f) socio-institutional context.

This integrated perspective underscores that strategising in microbreweries is an emergent, relational and contextually grounded process-one that cannot be fully captured through static or prescriptive analytical frameworks (Mintzberg, 1994; Welter, 2011). Understanding how entrepreneurs negotiate meaning, interpret their environment and adapt their practices therefore requires an approach capable of tracing these processes as they unfold in real time and within specific socio-material conditions (Weick, 1995).

CHAPTER 2.
HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE CRAFT BEER INDUSTRY HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CRAFT BREWING

The contemporary craft beer industry, now a global yet distinctly localised cultural-economic phenomenon, emerges from a long and complex history of brewing practices, technological transitions and institutional change. Understanding this sector requires more than a narrow account of recent entrepreneurial activity; it demands situating craft brewing within the broader historical arc of industrialisation, regulatory transformation, and cultural revalorisation. The resurgence of small-scale, artisanal breweries over the past decades is inseparable from the centuries-long evolution of beer as both a material product and a cultural artefact.

This chapter therefore traces the foundations of the modern craft beer landscape across three interrelated domains. It first examines the historical trajectory through which brewing moved from decentralised, guild-regulated and household-based production toward the highly standardised industrial systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Technological breakthroughs, new scientific epistemologies, and large-scale distribution reshaped the beer market, narrowing stylistic diversity while consolidating production in the hands of a few multinational corporations. Yet the same forces that drove industrial expansion also created the conditions for its critique, providing the backdrop against which contemporary craft movements later emerged.

The chapter then explores the Craft Beer Revolution as a global structural shift that challenged the industrial paradigm. Rather than viewing the rise of craft beer as a nostalgic revival of pre-modern techniques, the analysis frames it as an institutional and epistemic reconfiguration: a collective reimagining of what beer can be, how it is produced, and the meanings it carries. Regulatory liberalisation, homebrewing cultures, consumer movements and changing post-industrial identities together generated a decentralised innovation environment that enabled thousands of new breweries to flourish. Craft beer thus reflects not only entrepreneurial ingenuity but also shifting cultural demands for authenticity, locality and sensory diversity.

Building on this foundation, the chapter considers the organisational logics of contemporary craft breweries. It highlights the distinct business models through which value is created, delivered and captured in a sector defined by heterogeneity, regional embeddedness and experiential consumption. Craft breweries differ fundamentally from industrial producers-not simply in scale, but in their production ethos, distribution strategies, identity narratives and forms of cultural positioning. Their organisational choices reflect ongoing negotiations between growth and authenticity, creativity and consistency, autonomy and market pressures.

The chapter concludes with a comparative examination of craft beer development in Poland and Ukraine. Although geographically proximate and connected by shared post-socialist legacies, the two countries experienced the rise of craft brewing in markedly different ways. Poland's trajectory was gradual, institutionally stabilised and supported by EU integration and expanding consumer sophistication, whereas Ukraine's was accelerated, crisis-driven and shaped by geopolitical rupture and wartime resilience. These contrasts reveal that craft beer is not a uniform global trend but a contextually embedded process shaped by institutional capacity, cultural repertoires and entrepreneurial agency.

To sum up, the analyses presented in this chapter provide the historical, cultural and economic foundations necessary for understanding the empirical dynamics explored later in the dissertation. They reveal how the craft beer sector is anchored not only in markets but also in broader processes of identity-making, cultural negotiation and institutional transformation.

2.1. The historical evolution of the brewing industry

The historical evolution of the brewing industry unfolds as a long, intricate narrative shaped by changing technological regimes, shifting socio-economic structures, and evolving cultural expectations. Far from being a linear progression from "primitive" craft to modern industry, the brewing landscape reflects a series of deep systemic transformations, each of which redefined what beer was, what it symbolised, who produced it, and for whom. Understanding this trajectory is essential for situating the contemporary craft beer renaissance within a much broader arc of industrialisation, globalisation, decline, and revival. The present diversity and dynamism of the craft beer industry cannot be understood without recognising the profound ruptures that eroded earlier brewing cultures and the counter-movements that emerged in response.

In medieval and early modern Europe, brewing was embedded within everyday life, forming part of a broader household economy in which food preservation, caloric intake, and social ritual intertwined. Beer was not simply a beverage but a nutritional staple, safer than water, and deeply entwined with regional identity. Most cities across Europe maintained small, guild-regulated breweries operated by artisans who acted as custodians of local knowledge (Unger, 2004, pp. 63-70). Brewing skills were transmitted orally, ingredients were locally sourced, and the final product varied significantly by region, season, and household. This variability was not a sign of backwardness but an expression of terroir: local water chemistry, endemic yeast strains, grain varieties, and climatic conditions shaped distinct styles that modern brewing science would later recognise as historically unique (Hornsey, 2003, pp. 88-95). Beer was therefore a profoundly local cultural artefact.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, brewing became increasingly centralised in urban centres, particularly in northern Europe. Yet even these "large" breweries by early modern standards remained artisanal, characterised by labour-intensive processes, variable quality, and limited distribution radii. The absence of refrigeration meant that brewing was seasonally restricted; lagering, requiring cool temperatures, could only be practised in certain regions and climates. Transportation of beer over long distances was risky and expensive, restricting regional trade and reinforcing localism (Ogle, 2006, pp. 22-27). The diversity of beer at this time, from English porters and mild ales to Flemish lambics and Baltic porters, reflected centuries of accumulated cultural and ecological adaptation.

The decisive inflection point in the history of beer occurred in the nineteenth century with the rise of scientific brewing and industrial capitalism. Louis Pasteur's Études sur la Bière (1876) transformed brewers' understanding of fermentation, revealing yeast behaviour as a scientific process rather than artisanal intuition. This shift profoundly altered production philosophies: brewing began to move from an interpretive craft towards a predictable, standardised industrial process (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005, pp. 19-22). Concurrently, Carl von Linde's development of mechanical refrigeration (1873) erased the seasonal constraints of brewing and enabled year-round lager production. The combination of refrigeration, steam power, and advances in bottling, filtration, and railway transport allowed breweries to expand both in scale and in geographical reach, dissolving centuries-old limitations on production volume and

distribution. Figure 2.1 visualises this structural rupture between locally embedded artisanal brewing and industrialised, science-driven production systems.

Figure 2.1. Small-scale local breweries and the emergence of industrial brewing infrastructures (19th-early 20th century)

Source: Images sourced from the Deutsches Museum Archive (Munich), the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, and the European Brewery Convention Historical Archives).

The figure juxtaposes pre-industrial, locally embedded brewing facilities with early industrial breweries enabled by scientific fermentation, mechanical refrigeration, and expanding transport infrastructures.

The rise of pale lager-first in Bavaria and Bohemia, then globally-became emblematic of this industrial transition. Unlike the diverse ales and mixed-fermentation beers that preceded it, lager was exceptionally stable, crisp, and mild in flavour. It travelled well, appealed broadly, and lent itself to consistent replication in large volumes. By the early twentieth century, lager was becoming the default beer style in many industrialising nations. This stylistic dominance was not merely a matter of consumer taste; it was the outcome of structural advantages conferred by refrigeration, new malting technologies, and an emerging fascination with scientific consistency (Ogle, 2006, pp. 49-56). Beer shifted rhetorically from a local expression of culture to a modern industrial commodity.

This transition may also be interpreted as a culturally disruptive process rather than a purely technological advancement. As Piotr Sztompka (2004) argues, modernisation often produces breaks in social continuity, displacing locally embedded practices with abstract, system-oriented forms of organisation. In the context of brewing, industrialisation severed the symbolic and social ties between producers, communities and products, transforming beer from a culturally situated artefact into a standardised industrial commodity.

The twentieth century accelerated this transformation through consolidation, mergers, and financial restructuring. In many countries, legal and institutional frameworks inadvertently reinforced industrial concentration. Excise regimes increasingly taxed breweries per unit of output in ways that favoured large-scale producers. In the United Kingdom, the tied-house system granted breweries ownership over pubs, effectively locking out competitors (Gourvish and Wilson, 1994). In the United States, the aftermath of Prohibition decimated small-scale brewing and enabled rapid expansion of a handful of industrial breweries. Because re-establishing brewing capacity required significant capital and regulatory negotiation, the field consolidated into an oligopolistic structure dominated by Anheuser-Busch, Miller, and Coors (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005, pp. 111-118). Similar patterns emerged globally as industrial breweries leveraged advertising, distribution networks, and economies of scale to marginalise local producers.

As consolidation intensified, brewing became one of the most concentrated consumer goods industries in the world. By the late twentieth century, the top ten global brewing corporations controlled more than half of the world's beer supply. Through continuous mergers and acquisitions-especially during the 1990s and 2000s-the industry transformed into the global duopoly of AB InBev and Heineken, supplemented by regional giants such as Carlsberg and Molson Coors (Swinnen, 2018, pp. 12-17). This globalisation was accompanied by a homogenisation of taste. Industrial lager, inexpensive to produce and easy to market, became synonymous with "beer" itself, overshadowing the rich brewing traditions of earlier centuries. Advertising shaped consumer expectations, associating pale lager with masculinity, sociability, consistency, and modernity. As a result, by the late twentieth century, beer diversity had reached one of its historical low points, despite unprecedented production volume.

The decline of local breweries, therefore, was not an accidental or gradual fading but a consequence of systemic, multi-dimensional pressures-technological, regulatory, economic, and cultural. Industrial breweries could guarantee stability, clarity, and reliability in ways that were impossible for small-scale producers without access to modern equipment. Supermarket-driven distribution, global branding campaigns, and uniform consumer messaging reinforced the dominance of mass-produced lagers. Local breweries, often lacking access to capital, modern refrigeration, sterile bottling conditions, or large-scale distribution networks, found themselves unable to compete, leading to closures across Europe, North America, and Asia. By the 1970s, several countries had only a handful of surviving breweries; in the United States, the number had fallen to fewer than 50 (Brewers Association, 2020).

The structural marginalisation of small breweries reflects what Witold Morawski (2001) describes as institutional dominance, whereby prevailing economic logics systematically crowd out alternative organisational forms. Once industrial brewing became the dominant template, regulatory frameworks, taxation systems and distribution infrastructures reinforced this model, rendering artisanal production economically non-viable despite its cultural legitimacy.

Yet this very homogenisation created fertile ground for cultural counter-movements. The emergence of what would later be called the "Beer Revolution" was driven by dissatisfaction not simply with taste but with the cultural flattening produced by global beer capitalism. Figure 2.2 illustrates the early material and organisational

conditions of this counter-movement, showing how small-scale breweries emerged as experimental alternatives to industrial beer production.

Figure 2.2. Early American craft breweries as experimental entrepreneurial spaces (1970s-1980s)

Sources: Brewers Association Historical Archives; Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Food and Drink Collection (public domain and educational use).

The figure documents the material and organisational conditions of the early American craft beer revival following the legalisation of homebrewing in 1978. The visual evidence highlights small-scale infrastructure, experimental production settings, and limited capital intensity characteristic of pioneering craft breweries

As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, homogenised mass goods tend to produce a reactive search for authenticity, distinction, and locality. Beer drinkers who had grown up with industrial lagers began to seek sensory diversity, historical continuity, and a sense of place. Simultaneously, broader societal developments-including the rise of the environmental movement, renewed interest in artisanal food production, higher disposable incomes in post-industrial economies, and a growing appreciation for gastronomic diversity-created receptive conditions for small-scale brewing to re-emerge.

The revival of homebrewing in the United States after legalisation in 1978, the UK's Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) beginning in 1971, and the resurgence of farmhouse and traditional styles in Belgium, Germany, and Scandinavia all signalled a cultural shift back towards beer as an artisanal product (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2018). These movements represented early cracks in the hegemony of industrial brewing-cracks that would expand rapidly in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as entrepreneurial actors began building new business models around craft, locality, innovation, and heritage (Tremblay & Tremblay, 2005; Reid, 2018). Figure 2.3 visualises this cultural shift in Europe, emphasising the social, gastronomic, and community-oriented contexts through which craft beer re-entered everyday life (Pachura, 2019).

Figure 2.3. Craft beer as a socially embedded cultural practice in Europe

Source: CAMRA Media Archive; The Brewers of Europe (2022); Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity (educational use).

Thus, the historical evolution of the brewing industry can be conceptualised as an oscillating cycle between local pluralism and industrial consolidation, culminating in the contemporary re-pluralisation embodied by the craft beer movement (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018; Mathias, 1995). The present global craft beer industry-defined by heterogeneity, experimentation, revival of forgotten styles, and the re-emergence of brewing as an artisanal cultural practice-constitutes not a revolutionary divergence from history but a historically grounded reaction to the industrial forces that had previously narrowed the sensory and cultural landscape of beer (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005). The brewing industry's current structure, therefore, reflects centuries of technological innovation, economic concentration, cultural negotiation, and resistance (Poelmans & Swinnen, 2011).

While the preceding historical account reveals the long structural, technological, and cultural forces shaping the modern brewing landscape, quantitative evidence further clarifies the magnitude of transformation that occurred during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The global craft beer resurgence did not emerge in a vacuum; it unfolded against the backdrop of an industry that had reached unprecedented consolidation and stylistic uniformity, followed by an explosive re-pluralisation of production models (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). To illustrate this systemic shift-from decline to proliferation-Table 2.1 synthesises long-run historical data capturing the contraction of breweries during the industrial era, the nadir of diversity in the mid-twentieth century, and the extraordinary expansion associated with the Beer Revolution from the 1980s onwards.

Table 2.1. Global growth trajectory of the craft beer industry (1979-2023)

Year	United States (No. of Breweries)	United Kingdom (No. of Breweries)	Germany (No. of Breweries)	Global Estimated Total	Key Structural Features
1979	89	200	1200	3200	Post-industrial nadir; near-total dominance of industrial lager; early homebrewing revival (US legalisation).
1985	110	300	1250	3500	Emergence of first US microbreweries; CAMRA grows in influence; first signs of diversification.
1995	1050	450	1300	4500	Acceleration of US craft expansion; experimentation with hops; early IPAs gaining traction.
2005	1460	700	1250	6000	Brewpub boom; revival of traditional ales; early diffusion into Scandinavia, Italy, Spain.
2010	1800	800	1330	7800	Global diffusion; rise of gypsy brewers (e.g., Mikkeller); beginnings of NEIPA experimentation.
2015	4200	1700	1350	13000	Hyper-growth era; craft festivals proliferate; taproom-centric business models explode.
2018	7300	2000	1500	18500	Market segmentation intensifies; sour ales, barrel ageing, wild fermentations gain mainstream traction.
2020	8400	2200	1550	20000	Pandemic disruptions; shift to direct-to-consumer delivery; resilience of localised production.
2023	9100+	2400	1600	23000+	Craft industry stabilises; maturity phase; consolidation and premiumisation trends; rise of NA craft beer.

Source: Author's own compilation and elaboration based on Brewers Association Annual Craft Brewing Industry Production Reports (2019-2023), Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) Statistical Reports (2021), Garavaglia and Swinnen (2018), and OECD Food and Beverage Industry Historical Datasets.

The longitudinal data presented in the table above reveal several analytically significant patterns that deepen our understanding of structural change in the brewing industry. First, the extraordinary contraction of brewing capacity by the late 1970s marks a historical low point in global brewery diversity. The United States' fall to just 89 surviving breweries by 1979-down from thousands in the early twentieth century-epitomises the extent to which industrialisation, consolidation, and regulatory pressures

homogenised the market (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000). This numerical collapse is not merely a statistical curiosity; it represents the erasure of regional brewing traditions, local yeast ecologies, and centuries-old production practices (Poelmans and Swinnen, 2011).

Second, the table illustrates that the Beer Revolution exhibits an exponential growth curve, not a linear recovery. Between 1979 and 1995, US brewery numbers increased tenfold-a classic signature of an emergent entrepreneurial ecosystem (Moore, 1995). But the truly explosive phase occurs after 2005, when the combination of globalisation, digital marketing, distributed knowledge, and the maturation of consumer tastes generated a structural shift (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). Brewery numbers more than doubled in the decade 2010–2020 alone. This scale of expansion is without historical precedent: no earlier era, including medieval Europe's guild-based brewing, saw comparable rates of entry (Mathias, 1995).

Third, a notable insight concerns the asynchronous but convergent trajectories across countries. The UK revival begins earlier, rooted in the CAMRA-led real ale movement, whereas the US is catalysed by homebrewing legalisation and an entrepreneurial subculture (Elzinga, Tremblay and Tremblay, 2015). Germany, in contrast, shows comparatively slower numerical growth due to institutional constraints (e.g., Reinheitsgebot, market conservatism), yet even there brewery numbers increase meaningfully from 2010 onward (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). This variation supports theories of institutional embeddedness, which emphasise how liberalisation, cultural norms, and regulatory frameworks shape the speed and form of market diversification (Granovetter, 1985; North, 1990).

Fourth, the global totals-rising from approximately 3200 breweries in 1979 to over 23000 by 2023-capture the re-pluralisation of beer at a planetary scale. Such growth demonstrates that the craft beer movement is not a niche subculture but a fundamental restructuring of the global brewing field (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). Moreover, growth continues even under macroeconomic shocks; the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, did not reverse the trend but transformed business models (e.g., direct-to-consumer logistics, subscription services, decentralised distribution) (Reid, 2021). This suggests that the craft beer industry has shifted from the emergent phase described by Moore (1995) to a mature, institutionally embedded entrepreneurial ecology, supported by specialised suppliers, festival circuits, education platforms, and regulatory adaptations.

Finally, the table underscores that the Beer Revolution is best interpreted not as a temporary trend but as a structural counter-movement to a century of consolidation. The resurgence of breweries indicates a broader reorientation towards locality, sensory diversity, authenticity, and small-scale production-signals consistent with wider post-industrial patterns in food, culture, and consumption (Johnston and Baumann, 2015; Pachura, 2019). The quantitative expansions are therefore not only economic but cultural, reflecting changing consumer logics premised on identity, craft, and experience.

2.2. The Craft Beer Revolution

The transformation commonly referred to as the Craft Beer Revolution constitutes one of the most consequential shifts in the contemporary global brewing landscape-an upheaval that is cultural, economic, institutional, and epistemic in equal measure. The deeper significance of this movement lies in its challenge to a century-long industrial paradigm premised on consolidation, standardisation, and the technological rationalisation of taste. The term "revolution" is thus neither metaphorical excess nor marketing flourish: it names a profound reordering of how beer is produced, valued, consumed, and socially imagined (Oliver, 2011, pp. 92-97; Hieronymus, 2012, pp. 14-19).

From a sociological perspective, this transformation aligns with Barbara Fatyga's (2013) analysis of everyday cultural practices, wherein consumption becomes a site of identity construction and symbolic differentiation. Craft beer consumption operates as a form of cultural participation through which individuals actively engage in taste-making, community belonging and resistance to industrial homogenisation.

For most of the 20th century, brewing had been subsumed into a Fordist system of mass production. Technological intensification-refrigeration, mechanisation, pasteurisation-combined with distributional expansion and aggressive marketing to generate a global beer market dominated by a handful of multinational conglomerates. These firms competed not through stylistic experimentation or local embeddedness but through economies of scale, market share, and brand visibility (Knoedelseder, 2012, pp. 55-62). What emerged was a monoculture of taste, a narrowing of sensory repertoires, and the near-erasure of local brewing identities. Michael Jackson famously described the outcome as a "flattening of flavour," a sensory metaphor that also captured broader cultural homogenisation (Jackson, 2009, pp. 33-39).

The Craft Beer Revolution arose against this backdrop. It was a counter-movement not simply to industrial beer, but to the broader modernist logic of standardisation. Just as the slow food movement challenged agricultural industrialisation, and third-wave coffee challenged commodity coffee markets, craft beer emerged as a rebellion against anonymity, uniformity, and efficiency-driven quality loss. To understand its force, one must situate it at the intersection of regulatory liberalisation, cultural revalorisation, and shifting patterns of consumer agency.

In the United States-the epicentre of the movement-the 1978 legalisation of homebrewing constituted a catalytic rupture. Although often narrated as a minor legal footnote, the policy shift fundamentally altered the epistemic landscape of brewing (Acitelli, 2013, pp. 41-49). For decades, prohibition-era restrictions had confined brewing expertise to corporate professionals; legalisation democratised it. Thousands of hobbyists began experimenting with styles long extinct in industrial markets, building informal knowledge networks and cultivating tacit sensory and technical skills. In effect, the homebrewing community functioned as a distributed innovation ecology-a decentralised R&D system operating outside commercial constraints and generating precisely the experimental milieu from which entrepreneurial novelty could emerge.

Crucially, the Craft Beer Revolution cannot be understood without recognising the institutional architecture that made such experimentation possible. Cultural shifts and entrepreneurial energy were necessary but insufficient; they unfolded within regulatory environments that either constrained or enabled brewing innovation (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). Across the post-war period, governments enacted a series of legal reforms-some deliberate, others inadvertent-that restructured market entry barriers, redistributed brewing knowledge, and shifted power balances between industrial conglomerates and emergent small-scale producers (Poelmans & Swinnen, 2011; Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2018).

These regulatory inflection points constitute the institutional backbone of the global craft beer resurgence. In the United States, homebrewing legalisation democratized brewing expertise (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000); in the United Kingdom, the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) activism intersected with licensing reforms that protected cask ale and resisted homogenisation (Parker, 2017); in Japan, the 1994 lowering of minimum production thresholds opened an entirely new landscape for *ji-bīru* breweries (George, 2019); and across Scandinavia and Central Europe, changes to alcohol

monopolies and post-socialist liberalisation created unexpected opportunities for entrepreneurial re-entry (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018).

Table 2.2 synthesises the major regulatory milestones between 1945 and 1995, highlighting how these legal transitions progressively dismantled the monopolistic architecture of 20th-century brewing and laid the institutional groundwork for the global diversification that followed.

Table 2.2. Growth of U.S. craft breweries before and after the 1978 homebrewing llegalisation

Year	Country	Regulatory change	Mechanism of impact	Consequence for craft beer
1948	Uk	Monopolies and restrictive practices act	Initial regulation of tied-house dominance	Enables early consumer movements (pre-camra)
1971	Uk	Camra founded (advocacy organisation)	Cultural-not legislative-but influences regulation	Revival of cask ales, anti-industrial activism
1978	Usa	Homebrewing legalised	Knowledge democratisation; low-cost experimentation	Birth of us craft movement, brewery formation
1983	Usa	Brewpubs legalised in key states	Hybrid business model becomes viable	First wave of brewpub entrepreneurship
1994	Japan	Deregulation of minimum production volume	Lowers barrier for microbreweries	"ji-biiru" boom
1990s	CEE countries	Post-socialist privatisation	Institutional voids; market liberalisation	Opening for entrepreneurial craft entry

Source: Author's own compilation and elaboration based on Brewers Association (2023), Garavaglia and Swinnen (2018), Tremblay and Tremblay (2005), Swinnen (2018), and national regulatory histories of brewing in the United Kingdom, United States, Japan and Central and Eastern Europe.

The regulatory developments summarised in Table 2.2 reveal a striking pattern: the craft beer phenomenon did not emerge spontaneously from cultural preference alone; it required institutional permission, legal space, and structural oxygen. In every national context, the loosening of regulatory constraints preceded-and often directly triggered-waves of entrepreneurial entry.

The U.S. case illustrates how a seemingly modest legislative amendment - the 1978 legalisation of homebrewing-generated far-reaching, unintended consequences by fostering a distributed, community-based innovation system outside commercial constraints (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Elzinga, Tremblay and Tremblay, 2015). In the United Kingdom, civil society activism through the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), combined with changes in pub licensing and beer-tie regulations, helped preserve and revitalise brewing traditions that would otherwise have been eroded by

consolidation (Parker, 2017; Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). In Japan, the 1994 deregulatory reform that lowered minimum production thresholds acted as a shock event that immediately recalibrated the brewing landscape and enabled small-scale experimentation after decades of bureaucratic rigidity (George, 2019).

These regulatory shifts demonstrate that the Craft Beer Revolution was institutionally mediated: policy reforms expanded access to brewing knowledge, reduced capital and scale thresholds, reconfigured market architectures, and redefined the boundaries of entrepreneurial possibility (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). Far from being a purely cultural or aesthetic movement, the resurgence of craft brewing was the outcome of sustained interactions between law, culture, and entrepreneurial agency, each reinforcing and amplifying the other (Poelmans and Swinnen, 2011; Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018).

This institutional lens is essential for explaining why the revolution diffused unevenly across countries and why Poland and Ukraine-examined later in this chapter-experienced their craft accelerations only after post-socialist regulatory reforms created analogous openings for experimentation, small-batch production, and market differentiation (Pachura, 2019; Welter and Smallbone, 2011).

Parallel cultural shifts intensified these structural changes. The late 20th century witnessed a broader artisanal turn in consumer culture-across wine, cheese, coffee, sourdough baking, charcuterie-which reflected not simple nostalgia but a deeper critique of industrial rationality. Consumers increasingly sought products that embodied provenance, transparency, narrative identity, and a sense of place-qualities systematically erased by industrial beer (Williams, 2018, pp. 22-29). Craft beer positioned itself as one of the clearest articulations of these cultural preferences. Its value proposition was simultaneously aesthetic (sensory diversity), ethical (local embeddedness, sustainability), and epistemic (brewing as creative authorship rather than industrial optimisation).

The comparative evidence in Table 2.3. clarifies that craft beer did not flourish because consumers suddenly developed a taste for diversity; rather, consumers could only express such preferences after institutional architectures were recalibrated. The U.S. case demonstrates this with particular clarity: the legalisation of homebrewing produced a decentralised, community-driven R&D ecosystem-one that industrial breweries were structurally incapable of replicating. Brewing knowledge, once monopolised by corporate laboratories, became diffused across kitchens, garages, clubs, and informal networks.

The epistemic democratisation of brewing was thus inseparable from its regulatory liberalisation.

Table 2.3. Interaction of regulatory, cultural, and entrepreneurial preconditions in the emergence of craft beer.

Regulatory preconditions	Homebrewing legality Deregulation Licensing reform
Cultural preconditions	Artisanal turn Localism and provenance Anti-industrial ethos
Entrepreneurial field	Homebrewers Tinkerers Innovator
Craft Beer Revolution	New styles New business models Localised identities

Source: Author's own compilation and analytical elaboration based on Brewers Association (2023), Garavaglia and Swinnen (2018), Tremblay and Tremblay (2005), Swinnen (2018), Acitelli (2013), Protz (1997), and national regulatory histories of brewing in the United Kingdom, United States, Japan, and Central and Eastern Europe.

The table illustrates how regulatory shifts (access to brewing), cultural trends (localism, authenticity), and entrepreneurial fields (hobbyist experimentation) interacted to produce the Craft Beer Revolution.

Similarly, the United Kingdom's trajectory shows how civil society activism-Campaign for Real Ale's protection of cask ale traditions-intersected with changes in licensing and pub ownership laws to create space for non-industrial beer to regain cultural legitimacy (Parker, 2017; Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2018). In Japan, the dramatic lowering of minimum production thresholds directly triggered a wave of entrepreneurial entries, illustrating how regulatory shifts functioned as shock events that reorganised entire brewing ecosystems (George, 2019). And in Central/Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, the collapse of socialist brewing monopolies created institutional voids that invited rapid market experimentation (Pachura, 2019; Poelmans & Swinnen, 2011).

The interaction of these domains, as depicted in Table 2.3, highlights a critical theoretical insight: institutional, cultural, and entrepreneurial conditions did not merely support the Craft Beer Revolution-they co-constituted it (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). Regulatory shifts created legal permission and material access; cultural movements generated demand for authenticity, provenance, and sensory diversity; and entrepreneurial communities operationalised these openings through experimentation

and new venture creation (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). Each domain intensified the others through recursive feedback loops. Regulatory liberalisation expanded homebrewing; homebrewing cultivated consumer taste repertoires; and expanding demand, in turn, legitimised further reforms and encouraged new firm entry (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018).

This dynamic is particularly evident in the United States, where the 1978 legalisation of homebrewing produced what can be described as a decentralised innovation ecology (Elzinga, Tremblay and Tremblay, 2015). Such bottom-up knowledge production-diffuse, tacit, and community-driven-stood in stark contrast to the centralised R&D systems of industrial breweries (Poelmans and Swinnen, 2011). In structural terms, it represented a radical epistemic redistribution: brewing expertise migrated from corporate laboratories into households, garages, clubs, and informal learning networks (Reid, 2018). The result was not merely more beer but more ways of imagining and producing beer.

The United Kingdom offers a complementary configuration. Civil society activism-embodied in CAMRA-intersected with licensing reforms that protected cask-conditioned ale traditions (Parker, 2017). In Japan, the dramatic lowering of minimum production thresholds in 1994 functioned as a regulatory shock event, immediately recalibrating market boundaries and enabling entrepreneurial entry after decades of bureaucratic constraint (George, 2019). Across Central and Eastern Europe, post-socialist liberalisation dismantled state brewing monopolies, creating institutional voids into which craft breweries rapidly inserted themselves-producing some of the fastest craft trajectories globally (Pachura, 2019; Welter and Smallbone, 2011).

Across these contexts, the pattern is analytically consistent: craft beer emerged where regulatory constraints loosened, where cultural repertoires shifted toward artisanal authenticity, and where entrepreneurial actors possessed both the knowledge and opportunity to experiment (Granovetter, 1985; North, 1990). The Craft Beer Revolution was therefore an institutionally mediated transformation, not merely a cultural or taste-based shift. It represents the joint product of structural opening, cultural realignment, and grassroots ingenuity (Scott, 2014; Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018)

The American craft beer movement, consequently, was not the rediscovery of a dormant tradition but a creative reinvention made possible by the collapse of tradition itself. Following the dismantling of regional breweries after Prohibition and subsequent mid-century consolidations, the United States entered the late 20th century with

comparatively few surviving local brewing lineages. Paradoxically, this absence produced a unique form of freedom. Early innovators-Anchor Brewing, Sierra Nevada, New Albion, Boston Beer-were not stewards of inherited styles but inventors of new ones. Unburdened by stylistic orthodoxy, they hybridised European brewing traditions with New World agricultural and sensory resources, especially American hop varieties whose citrus-pine profiles would ultimately define the aesthetic signature of U.S. craft beer (Brown, 2013, pp. 71-75).

The sociological composition of this entrepreneurial milieu mattered. It was a field populated not only by businesspeople but also by tinkerers, chemists, hobbyists, musicians, and countercultural actors. Their motivations-creative expression, anti-corporate sentiment, community building-produced an industry whose values and organisational forms diverged sharply from those of industrial brewing. By the time U.S. craft brewery numbers surpassed 2000 in 2012 and 9500 by 2023 (Brewers Association, 2023), the movement had demonstrated that its significance lay not simply in numerical proliferation but in how it redefined the ontological possibilities of beer itself.

Contrary to a linear diffusion narrative, Europe did not simply "adopt" American craft brewing. Instead, European trajectories followed distinct pathways shaped by national institutions, historical brewing ecologies, and consumer expectations. In the United Kingdom, CAMRA's formation in 1971 predated the American movement and represented early resistance to the industrial erasure of ale culture (Protz, 1997, pp. 13-21). Yet CAMRA's focus on preservation contrasted with the experimental ethos of American craft brewing. Only in the 2000s, under the influence of hop-forward American styles and new entrepreneurial entrants, did British brewing undergo substantive reinvention.

In Scandinavia, craft beer developed within the constraints of state alcohol monopolies-conditions that paradoxically enabled innovation. Breweries such as Nogne and Mikkeller thrived not despite regulation but by constructing non-traditional distribution models and pursuing extreme stylistic experimentation (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 211-218).

Germany's trajectory was shaped by the cultural weight of the Reinheitsgebot. For decades, the purity law served both as a mark of quality and as a constraint on innovation. Yet the German craft renaissance of the 2010s-slower and more contested than elsewhere-demonstrated that experimentation was possible even within path-dependent traditions (Schneider, 2016, pp. 44-51).

Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia, witnessed some of the most rapid accelerations. The collapse of state-owned brewing enterprises during post-socialist transitions created institutional voids that entrepreneurial actors rapidly filled, constructing new markets in real time (Cabras and Bamforth, 2016, pp. 92-98). This environment of institutional fluidity approximated Schumpeter's notion of creative destruction more closely than any Western context.

By the 2010s, the Craft Beer Revolution had become fully global. Yet globalisation did not produce homogenisation; it produced pluralisation. Japan's regulatory reforms in 1994 catalysed the rise of ji-biiru breweries blending European styles with Japanese ingredients and techniques-green tea IPAs, yuzu saisons, sake-yeast hybrids (JCBA, 2021). Brazil's breweries incorporated cassava, Amazonian herbs, and regional fruits, demonstrating that the craft ethos encourages localisation, not replication (Machado, 2018, pp. 65-71). South Korea, South Africa, Australia, Chile, and China each developed distinctive craft cultures shaped by their culinary traditions, climatic conditions, and regulatory environments.

In this sense, craft beer globalisation resembles the globalisation of jazz, hip-hop, or third-wave coffee: a diffusion of cultural grammar that allows for infinite local reinterpretation. Craft beer becomes not a single product but a translocal system of meaning.

The revolution reshaped the industry along three structural dimensions:

a) Competitive logic transformation.

Industrial brewing competed through cost, logistics, and advertising. Craft beer shifted competition toward flavour intensity, sensory complexity, symbolic capital, storytelling, and authenticity (Oliver, 2011, pp. 101-107). What counted as "quality" was redefined.

b) Distribution model reconfiguration.

Taprooms, brewpubs, and direct-to-consumer channels enabled small breweries to circumvent wholesalers and retain higher margins. This was not a minor efficiency gain; it was a direct disruption of the three-tier system that had structured U.S. beer markets since Prohibition**.**

c) **Consumer identity reconstruction.**

Consumers became co-producers of value. Limited releases, barrel programs, collaborations, and festivals turned beer into an experiential, participatory, culturally

coded consumption practice (Hieronymus, 2012, pp. 233-239). Beer fandom emerged, with tasting cultures, rating platforms, and aesthetic connoisseurship comparable to wine.

In aggregate, these changes dismantled the epistemic foundation of industrial beer. Craft beer reintroduced risk, experimentation, locality, failure, and creativity into brewing-elements that industrial optimisation had systematically eliminated.

Thus, the Craft Beer Revolution must be understood as a multidimensional shift-not simply a proliferation of small breweries, but a profound re-articulation of what beer is, what it means, and how it is organisationally and culturally produced. It restored a sensory diversity that industrialisation had erased; it reactivated dormant brewing traditions; it catalysed new entrepreneurial identities; and it embedded beer once more in the textures of local life, community, and cultural expression.

It is precisely this mixture of historical reconstruction, cultural innovation, entrepreneurial experimentation, and institutional transformation that makes the Craft Beer Revolution essential to understanding the empirical phenomena analysed.

2.3. Business models in the craft beer industry

Business models in the craft beer sector differ fundamentally from those of industrial brewing. Local embeddedness plays a decisive role in shaping these alternative business models. According to Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004), local communities provide informal infrastructures of trust and reciprocity that facilitate economic coordination under uncertainty. Craft breweries mobilise these relational resources to stabilise operations, secure loyal consumer bases and legitimise premium pricing. Whereas large breweries operate according to a logic of scale, efficiency, and distributional optimisation, craft breweries mobilise heterogeneous pathways of value creation rooted in specific socio-cultural, regulatory, and spatial contexts. In this sense, business models are not merely organisational templates; they function as institutionalised expressions of identity, locality, and market positioning (por. Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, s. 143-152). They articulate how craft producers combine material resources (equipment, labour, ingredients), symbolic assets (authenticity, provenance), and relational infrastructures (community ties, collaborations, tourism ecosystems). Lenart-Gansiniec and Sułkowski (2020, pp. 321–323) highlighted that strategic practices are shaped by institutional context, suggesting that organizational responses to uncertainty vary across national and regional settings.

Drawing on business model ontology (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010) and economics of brewing (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005; Swinnen, 2018), this subsection maps the dominant organisational configurations found in contemporary craft brewing: microbreweries**, brewpubs, regional craft breweries, contract/gypsy breweries, taproom-centric operations**, and hybrid models.

Table 2.4. Key features of major business models in the craft beer industry

Business model	Core value proposition	Production logic	Distribution structure	Cost structure	Revenue sources	Strategic advantages
Microbrewery	Product diversity, experimentation, locality	Small-batch production; high rotation; labour-intensive	Local bars, bottle shops, self-distribution, taproom	High per-unit cost; premium ingredients	Packaged beer, draught, taproom sales, events	Deep community ties; strong authenticity
Brewpub	Integrated production + hospitality experience	On-site brewing; constant freshness	100% direct-to-consumer (on site)	Mixed brewing + restaurant costs	Beer, food, merchandise	High margins; control over context
Regional craft brewery	Scalable craft identity; flagship brands + innovation	Mid-scale production; capital intensive	Regional/national distribution; wholesalers	Significant fixed assets; logistics costs	Packaged beer, draught, tours	Brand visibility; economies of scale
Contract / gypsy brewing	Creativity without capital investment	Outsourced brewing; flexible	Export, niche distributors, bars	Very low fixed costs	Packaging, export, collaborations	Fast market entry; high flexibility
Taproom-centric brewery	Experience-led consumption; hyper-locality	Small production dedicated to taproom	Direct-to-consumer (80-100%)	Moderate brewing costs; high retail overheads	Taproom sales, events, membership clubs	Highest margins; strong branding
Hybrid models	Combining production + taproom + distribution	Modular	Multi-channel	Mixed	Mixed	Adaptability; resilience

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), Garavaglia and Swinnen (2018), Tremblay and Tremblay (2005), Brewers Association (2019-2023), Reid (2016; 2018), and Oliver (2011).

The comparative table serves not as a static classification of organisational types, but as an interpretive framework for understanding how different craft brewery models crystallise around distinct production logics, distribution architectures, cost-revenue configurations, and symbolic or strategic advantages. These models should be viewed as historically contingent responses to the structural tensions of the craft beer field-tensions

between scale and authenticity, growth and locality, experimentation and consistency, autonomy and market integration-rather than as fixed organisational categories.

At the heart of contemporary craft business models lies a deliberate inversion of the industrial brewing logic that dominated the sector for most of the twentieth century. Whereas industrial conglomerates optimise for economies of scale, stable volumes, and ubiquitous distribution, craft breweries organise around principles of differentiation, embeddedness, and experiential intensity. This inversion entails accepting structurally higher per-unit costs in exchange for greater margins per litre sold, and it replaces mass advertising with narrative-driven branding, direct interpersonal interaction, and community-based market formation (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 7-11). The resulting organisational forms blur the boundaries between manufacturing, hospitality, cultural production, and place-making-forms that emerge not as deviations from industrial efficiency but as alternative logics of entrepreneurial action embedded in specific socio-spatial contexts. Pachura (2012, pp. 48-53) argued that organisations function as complex adaptive systems in which strategy is enacted through everyday practices and interactions rather than formal plans. Strategic coherence becomes visible only retrospectively, as patterns of action stabilise over time.

Microbreweries embody this alternative logic most clearly. Their small-scale systems enable experimentation, seasonal rotation, and stylistic diversity, creating a "distributed niche" structure in which value is created through novelty, sensory complexity, and artisanal credibility.

Distribution strategies are correspondingly intimate: taprooms, specialty venues, and relationships with local bars and bottle shops serve as primary channels. Premium pricing operates not merely as a margin mechanism but as a symbolic signal of quality, locality, and authenticity (Watson, 2012, pp. 94-102; Brewers Association, 2023). Because their cost base is ingredient- and labour-intensive, microbreweries depend on cultivating loyal, often geographically proximate communities whose consumption practices reinforce the brewery's identity and financial viability.

Brewpubs reconfigure the value chain by integrating production and hospitality in a single site. This enables the internalisation of retail margins and the construction of curated consumption environments where beer quality, interior design, service aesthetics, and local symbols merge into a coherent experiential offering. As empirical studies show, brewpubs frequently function as urban "anchor institutions," catalysing neighbourhood revitalisation and supporting adjacent small businesses (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005,

pp. 189-196; Cabras and Bamforth, 2016, pp. 102-108). Yet this integration introduces managerial complexity: kitchen operations, staffing, regulatory compliance, and service design must be coordinated with brewing processes, making brewpubs demanding organisational hybrids.

Sobotkiewicz's work supports the thesis claim that market advantage is not only a matter of product features but also of how organisational functions are configured to produce and communicate value. When marketing is embedded structurally in the enterprise-rather than treated as an isolated unit-it becomes a source of durable competitive advantage through coherence of positioning, channel choices, and customer relationship maintenance. This logic resonates with craft brewery models, where differentiation relies on consistent alignment of product narrative, distribution architecture, and community-based engagement (Sobotkiewicz, 2010; 2019).

Regional craft breweries illustrate the tension between operational scale and the preservation of craft identity. Their portfolio strategies balance the stability of flagship beers with the dynamism of limited releases, maintaining consumer interest while stabilising cash flow (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 143-152). Expansion into regional or national distribution networks offers economies of scale but triggers the authenticity dilemma: the risk that consumers interpret broader market integration as dilution of craft values or capitulation to industrial norms (Swinnen, 2018, pp. 115-120). These breweries therefore engage in symbolic labour-transparent ownership structures, investment in visitor centres, continued participation in local cultural life-to sustain credibility while scaling.

Contract and gypsy breweries introduce innovation at the level of asset configuration. By outsourcing production to host breweries, they bypass capital-intensive investments and operate as creative studios or brand platforms (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 172-178). Value creation centres on recipe design, storytelling, and stylistic experimentation, while relational assets such as trust with host breweries or access to bottling infrastructure become critical. This model has facilitated the rapid international diffusion of craft styles and collaborations, enabling breweries to respond to emerging trends with agility that owned facilities could not easily support.

Taproom-centric breweries construct on-site consumption as the core of their business logic. By capturing both producer and retail margins, they build highly profitable micro-ecosystems where spatial aesthetics, visibility of tanks and barrels, and community events generate symbolic value and attachment (Brewers Association, 2023). This model

thrives in dense urban or tourist environments but is vulnerable to local disruptions, such as the pandemic-related closures, which have pushed many taproom breweries to hybridise through canning, online sales, or subscription-based clubs.

Distribution choices further distinguish craft business models. Industrial breweries rely on large wholesaler networks optimised for volume maximisation; craft breweries navigate a more fragmented and relational terrain shaped by identity and regional regulations. Early-stage breweries often depend on self-distribution to maintain control over product handling and margins. As they grow, some adopt selective partnerships with regional distributors who respect cold-chain integrity and rotation practices. Direct-to-consumer channels-taprooms, brewery shops, online sales, and subscription clubs-create recurrent revenue streams and reinforce community ties. The viability of these configurations is strongly shaped by regulatory environments, including three-tier systems, excise structures, and postal restrictions.

Collaboration, festivals, and beer tourism illustrate how craft brewing operates not only as a market but as a socio-cultural field. Joint brews, co-branded releases, and shared events serve as mechanisms for knowledge exchange, network building, and mutual marketing (Slob et al., 2018, pp. 41-47). Beer festivals act as field-configuring events that allow breweries to test innovations, observe trends, and engage consumers directly. Meanwhile, beer tourism integrates breweries into regional economic and symbolic landscapes-through tours, tastings, workshops, and merchandise-reinforcing what Thurnell-Read (2019, pp. 62-70) terms “liquid localism,” or the consumption of place through beverages.

Sztangret’s research on value creation emphasises that value increasingly emerges through cooperative configurations rather than isolated firm action. She conceptualises value as multi-dimensional and co-created through networks of actors and processes, which is consistent with your argument that craft brewery models integrate material production with symbolic and relational infrastructures (Sztangret, 2020).

Innovation and experimentation permeate all craft business models. Unlike industrial breweries-whose innovation is typically directed toward efficiency, packaging, or marketing-craft breweries innovate in flavour, process, narrative, and cultural meaning (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). This experimentation drives differentiation in saturated markets, supports premiumisation, and generates the continuous “news value” that sustains attention in social-media-driven environments (Schnell and Reese, 2014; Reid, 2018). However, the pursuit of novelty also introduces

risks: inconsistent quality, batch failures, and consumer fatigue (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018). Successful breweries balance a stable core portfolio with a rotating frontier of experimental releases, managing the tension between consistency and novelty (Elzinga, Tremblay and Tremblay, 2015).

Sustainability has moved from a peripheral concern to a central dimension of craft identity. Craft breweries increasingly adopt ethical and environmental practices-local sourcing of malt, hops, and fruit; renewable energy; water-reuse systems; circular use of spent grain; and low-waste packaging (Hill and Donnelly, 2021, pp. 45-53). These investments, while often raising short-term costs, create differentiation and resilience in markets where consumer willingness to pay correlates with perceived environmental responsibility (Bjorn and Reisch, 2021, pp. 88-95). Quality management constitutes an integral component of organisational strategy and influences the organisation's long-term capacity for sustainable operation (Starostka-Patyk, 2018, pp. 58–61).

The economic architecture of craft brewing is marked by structural tensions: high production and labour costs, volatile demand for experimental products, capital-intensive equipment, and tight cash-flow dynamics. Access to finance-bank loans, private investment, or crowdfunding-shapes which organisational models are feasible and how they scale (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 178-183). This financial fragility is amplified by regulatory volatility and shifts in consumer behaviour, demanding ongoing strategic adaptability.

In sum, craft beer business models are best conceptualised as situated strategic configurations-dynamic assemblages of practices, resources, identities, and narratives that respond to the institutional, historical, and cultural dynamics shaping the field. Rather than selecting from a menu of models, craft breweries continually negotiate the paradox at the heart of the sector: sustaining differentiation, locality, and experimentation while operating within the economic constraints of a market dominated by large-scale incumbents. Their long-term viability depends on the careful orchestration of distribution architectures, collaborative networks, innovation routines, sustainability practices, and revenue structures, all embedded in the broader socio-economic and cultural landscapes in which they operate.

2.4. The Craft Beer Revolution in Poland and Ukraine

The emergence of the craft beer sector in Poland and Ukraine reflects two sharply divergent trajectories of post-socialist market transformation, shaped by heterogeneous

institutional legacies, regulatory architectures, socio-cultural orientations, and geopolitical disruptions. Although both countries experienced the collapse of socialist-era industrial brewing complexes and subsequent liberalisation, the timing and structuring of new market fields differed substantially. These divergences indicate deeper distinctions in regulatory capacity, cultural repertoires, entrepreneurial agency, and field-level dynamics (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, pp. 63-67; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, pp. 25-48). Rather than a simple transfer of Western consumption trends, the Craft Beer Revolution in each context illustrates how market categories become embedded within broader socio-economic transformations and processes of identity reconstruction.

In Poland, craft beer emerged through a relatively stable and predictable field-evolution mechanism. Following the systemic transformation of the 1990s, the Polish beer market became one of the most consolidated in Central Europe, with multinational corporations-Heineken (Grupa Żywiec), Carlsberg Polska, and Kompania Piwowarska-controlling approximately 85-90% of national output by the mid-2000s (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 143-147). This oligopolistic field structure generated high standardisation, vertically integrated distribution channels, and limited stylistic differentiation. Such market homogenisation exemplifies coercive and normative isomorphism, wherein incumbent logics reproduce themselves through shared institutional templates (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, pp. 70-72).

However, beneath this industrial equilibrium, emergent homebrewing communities began accumulating cultural and technical capital. These groups formed what Bourdieu (1984, pp. 99-102) describes as "taste-producing microfields," cultivating sensory literacy and stylistic experimentation that later diffused into the entrepreneurial domain. The breakthrough occurred in 2011 with Atak Chmielu by Browar PINTA - widely recognised as the symbolic origin of Polish craft brewing. This event functioned as a "category creation act" (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001, pp. 549-553), reframing beer from an industrial commodity into a locally embedded craft product imbued with narratives of authenticity, experimentation, and quality.

The period from 2013 to 2017 saw rapid ecosystem expansion, including multi-tap bars, speciality distributors, and craft festivals. This corresponds to the density-dependent legitimation phase described by Hannan and Freeman (1989, pp. 75-80), during which new entrants collectively reinforce field credibility. Figure 2.4 documents the role of multitap bars and festivals as institutional infrastructures enabling rapid diffusion and market formation in the Polish craft beer sector. To illustrate the

infrastructural foundations of this legitimation process, Figure 2.4 presents key visual representations of multitap bars and craft beer festivals in Poland. These spaces did not merely facilitate consumption but operated as institutionalised arenas of repeated interaction, enabling the stabilisation of aesthetic norms, professional roles, and quality expectations within the emerging craft beer field.

Figure 2.4. Multitap bars and festivals as institutional anchors of the Polish craft beer sector.

Source: Polish Craft Brewers Association (PSBR); Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) industry reports (2016-2022).

The images depict dense tap infrastructures, curated beer selections, and collective consumption practices that collectively signal the institutional maturity of the Polish craft

beer ecosystem. From a field-theoretical perspective, multitap bars functioned as meso-level field infrastructures, mediating between producers and consumers while simultaneously educating both groups through sensory exposure and comparison. Festivals further intensified this process by temporarily concentrating field actors, accelerating the diffusion of stylistic classifications and reinforcing symbolic boundaries between industrial and craft beer.

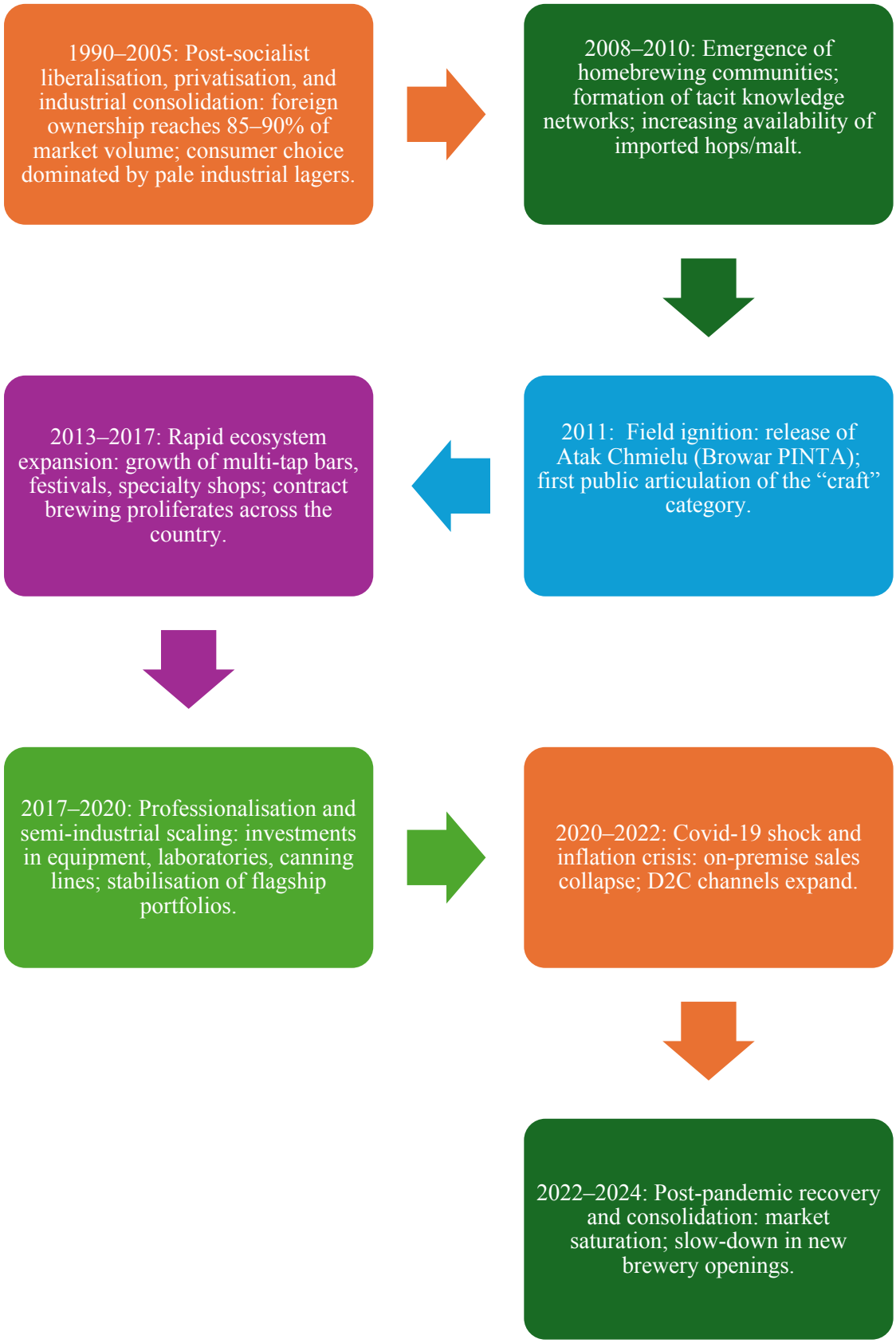
The visual sequence captures the transition from industrial concentration and product homogeneity to symbolic disruption and subsequent ecosystem expansion. The image referencing *Atak Chmielu* functions as a visual marker of category creation, signalling a redefinition of beer as a craft product embedded in narratives of experimentation and authenticity. Subsequent images document the institutionalisation of this category through festivals and retail presence, indicating the gradual incorporation of craft beer into mainstream consumption while preserving its symbolic distinction.

This visual progression reinforces the analytical claim that Poland's craft beer sector evolved through a relatively linear, path-dependent process shaped by regulatory stability, EU market integration, and the accumulation of consumer cultural capital.

Importantly, these infrastructures reduced entry barriers for small producers by providing access to distribution and legitimacy without reliance on mass retail or corporate intermediaries. The visual density and repetition observable in these spaces substantiate the argument that Polish craft beer field formation followed a cumulative, institutionally supported trajectory rather than an improvisational or crisis-driven path.

To summarise these stages, the key milestones of the Polish craft beer field are presented in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5. Timeline of craft beer field formation in Poland (1990-2024)



Source: Author's synthesis based on industry reports, GUS data, Nielsen retail data, and secondary literature.

Poland's craft field thus follows a relatively linear pattern of emergence, expansion, institutionalisation, and partial consolidation. Despite the shocks of Covid-19 and inflation, the field exhibited strong resilience, attributable to mature distribution infrastructure and high levels of consumer cultural capital (Johnston and Baumann, 2010, pp. 34-41).

Ukraine's Craft Beer Revolution unfolded along a fundamentally different path - compressed, discontinuous, and profoundly shaped by geopolitical rupture. Prior to 2014, the Ukrainian market remained dominated by industrial incumbents (Obolon, Carlsberg, AB InBev), with per capita consumption focused overwhelmingly on homogenous pale lagers. Institutional voids such as regulatory ambiguity, inconsistent enforcement, and underdeveloped logistics restricted field emergence (Khanna and Palepu, 1997, pp. 45-49). Although small-scale breweries and brewpubs existed, their impact remained marginal due to the absence of supportive intermediaries and weak consumer familiarity with non-industrial styles.

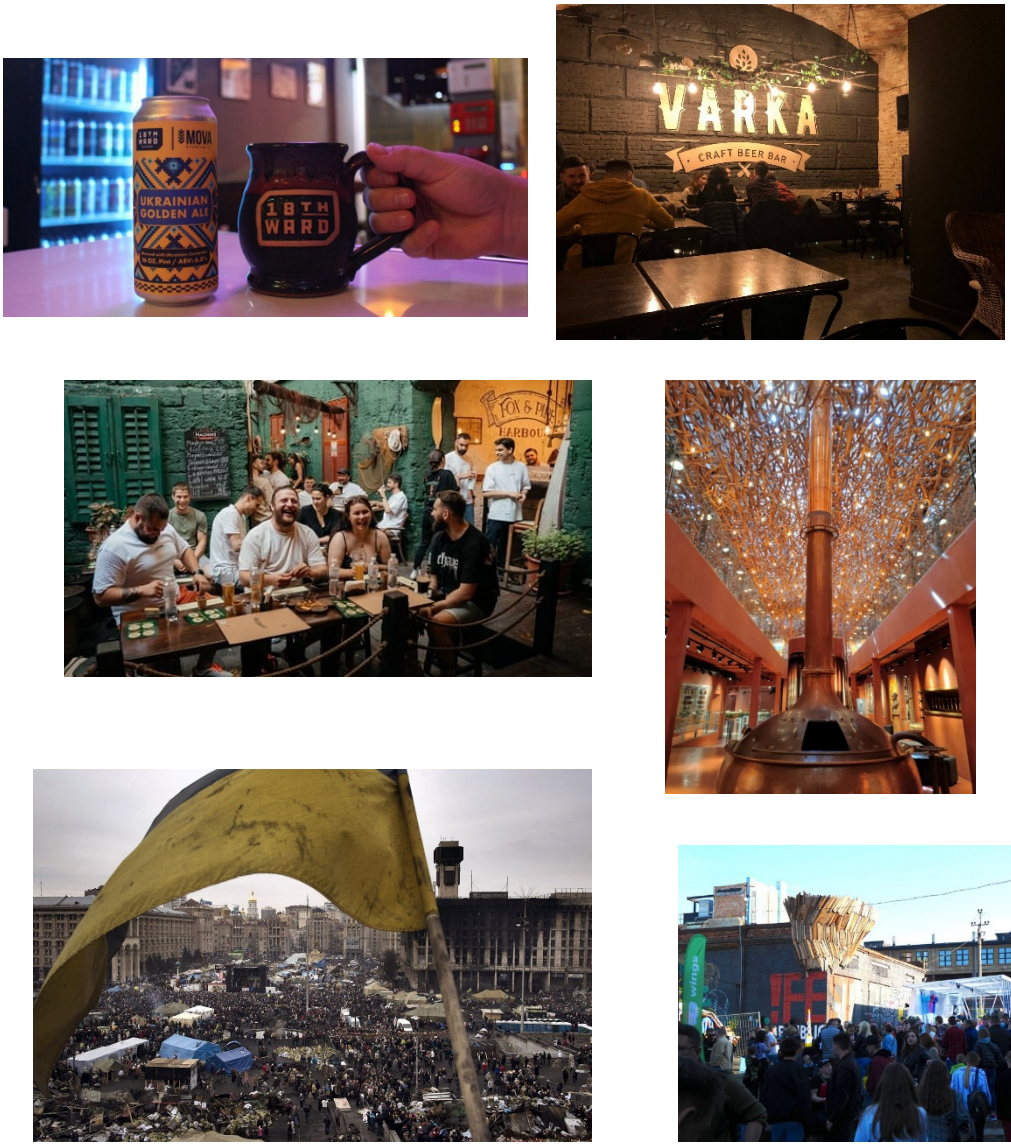
The Euromaidan revolution of 2013-2014, the annexation of Crimea, and the onset of the Donbas conflict constituted a profound field-disruptive event (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, pp. 91-95). These developments reoriented urban cultural consumption patterns toward European identity frameworks, catalysing rapid diffusion of Western taste repertoires. Migrants returning from Poland, Germany, Czechia, and North America imported new aesthetic dispositions and consumption norms. This aligns with Swidler's (1986, pp. 278-281) theorisation of cultural "toolkits" reshaped under periods of social upheaval.

Between 2014 and 2019, Ukraine's craft sector expanded from roughly 10 breweries to 150-200, supported by rapidly growing festivals, collaborative brewing, and local speciality venues (Lytvynenko, 2021, pp. 569-573). This acceleration resembles the punctuated equilibrium model of organisational evolution (Gersick, 1991, pp. 16-22): long periods of stability followed by sudden, shock-induced reconfiguration. In contrast, Ukrainian entrepreneurship unfolds under conditions of structural instability. Andrzej Zybertowicz (2012) emphasises that in weak institutional environments, actors rely on informal coordination, improvisation and adaptive strategies. Ukrainian craft breweries exemplify this mode of resilience-oriented entrepreneurship.

The full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 imposed severe infrastructure losses, energy disruptions, and labour mobilisation. Yet the sector demonstrated extraordinary resilience, with breweries relocating to western regions, forming international

collaborations, and exporting to diaspora markets. Figure 2.6 situates Ukrainian craft beer entrepreneurship within its spatial and wartime context, illustrating how economic activity persists within historic urban environments under conditions of systemic disruption.

Figure 2.6. Craft beer venue operating in a historic urban building in Ukraine during wartime conditions



Source: Association of Independent Brewers of Ukraine; FAO (2022); UNDP (2023).

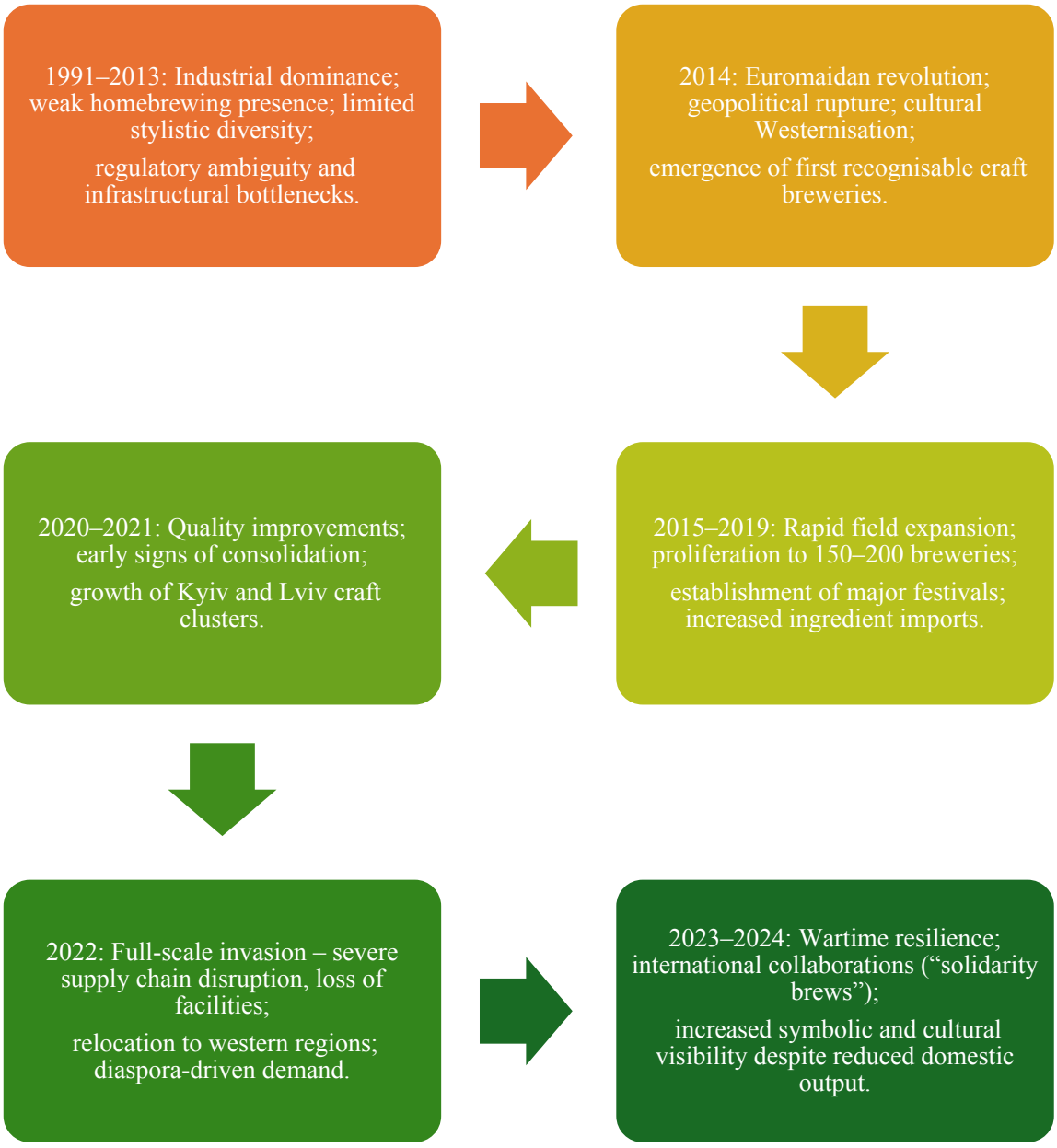
Unlike the Polish case, where craft beer venues primarily symbolise leisure and lifestyle consumption, the spaces depicted here function as hybrid sites of economic survival, social cohesion, and symbolic resistance. The juxtaposition of artisanal interiors with wartime constraints illustrates how craft beer venues operate as anchors of normalcy and continuity, mobilising local social capital under extreme uncertainty.

These images empirically substantiate the conceptual framing of Ukrainian craft beer entrepreneurship as resilience-oriented and culturally embedded. They demonstrate how market practices become intertwined with identity construction and collective endurance during periods of geopolitical crisis. The compressed visual sequence reflects the punctuated nature of Ukrainian craft beer field formation. The insertion of Euromaidan as a central visual rupture marks a decisive reorientation of cultural frameworks and entrepreneurial motivations. Subsequent images illustrate rapid post-2014 expansion and internationalisation, facilitated by diaspora networks and transnational collaborations.

This timeline visually corroborates the analytical argument that Ukrainian craft beer entrepreneurship unfolds under conditions of structural instability, privileging effectual logic, improvisation, and symbolic mobilisation over long-term strategic planning.

These adaptive strategies correspond to resilience entrepreneurship (Williams and Shepherd, 2016, pp. 741-749), where firms improvise under extreme constraints and mobilise social capital for survival. Craft beer also acquired heightened symbolic significance as an artefact of identity, defiance, and national sovereignty (Mälksoo, 2015, pp. 222-224). The critical phases of this evolution are summarised in Figure 2.7**.**

Figure 2.7. Timeline of craft beer field formation in Ukraine (1991-2024)



Source: Author's synthesis based on Brewers of Ukraine, market reports, industry interviews, and secondary literature.

These contrasting timelines illustrate two fundamentally different configurations of post-socialist market formation. Poland's evolution follows a causal, institutionally stabilised pathway of gradual diversification and ecosystem maturation. Ukraine's development reflects effectual, improvisational entrepreneurship under acute uncertainty, producing a craft field strongly anchored in cultural symbolism and identity politics. Their structural differences are synthesised in Table 2.5**.**

Table 2.5. Comparative model of craft beer field formation in Poland and Ukraine

POLAND	UKRAINE
Evolutionary, incremental path	Compressed, crisis-driven path
Stable EU institutional framework	Institutional voids; wartime shocks
Gradual ecosystem formation	Rapid field emergence post-2014
Causal entrepreneurship	Effectual, improvisational entrepreneurship
Cultural narrative: authenticity	Cultural narrative: identity, resistance
Strong distribution infrastructure	Weak logistics; diaspora-facilitated export
Market saturation and consolidation	Growth under uncertainty; symbolic expansion

Source: Author's own comparative elaboration based on secondary statistical data, sector reports, and empirical interview material concerning the craft beer industries in Poland and Ukraine.

Collectively, these findings show that the Craft Beer Revolution in both countries reflects distinct intersections of institutional transformation, cultural meaning-making, and entrepreneurial agency. Poland's trajectory resembles broader Western European patterns of gastronomic diversification, while Ukraine's constitutes a unique case of market construction under the pressures of geopolitical upheaval and war. In both contexts, craft beer operates as more than a beverage category - it functions simultaneously as an economic good, a cultural artefact, and a medium of identity negotiation in post-socialist societies.

CHAPTER 3.
METHODOLOGY OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The methodological foundation of this dissertation is grounded theory, understood not merely as a qualitative technique but as a rigorous epistemological framework for generating mid-range theory inductively from empirical data. In contrast to hypothesis-driven research traditions, grounded theory provides a structured yet flexible pathway for discovering conceptual categories and explanatory mechanisms that emerge from the field rather than being imposed upon it. This makes it particularly well suited to studying entrepreneurial strategies in the craft beer sector-a domain characterised by fluid organisational boundaries, evolving market categories, and heterogeneous actor logics that resist prior theoretical classification.

Grounded theory was introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their seminal work The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967), which emerged from their empirical investigation of hospital staff interactions around end-of-life care. Their methodological innovation lay in articulating a systematic approach to qualitative analysis that elevated inductive reasoning to a legitimate mode of theory construction. Instead of treating qualitative research as preparatory or illustrative, Glaser and Strauss argued that theory could-and should-be derived directly from systematically collected data. Although written more than five decades ago, their framework continues to structure methodological debates across the social sciences.

The diffusion of grounded theory has been uneven across disciplines and geographies. While it gained early traction in North American sociology, nursing studies, psychology, and later in management and organisation research, its influence in continental Europe-particularly in Poland-expanded more slowly. Polish scholarship engaged seriously with grounded theory only in the 1990s, with Krzysztof Konecki's (2000) work representing a key milestone in adapting the method to local research traditions. The late translation of The Discovery of Grounded Theory into Polish (2009) and French (2010) underscores the delayed institutional reception of this approach beyond anglophone academia.

Nevertheless, grounded theory has since become a global methodological reference point. The publication of The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) and Charmaz's constructivist reinterpretation Constructing Grounded Theory (2006; PL edition 2009) introduced new epistemological orientations,

expanding grounded theory beyond its initial positivist and objectivist underpinnings. These developments diversified the method into distinct strands-classical, Strauss-Corbin, constructivist, and situational-each with its own assumptions regarding the nature of data, researcher reflexivity, and theory construction.

Within this dissertation, grounded theory is adopted for both analytical and ontological reasons. First, the entrepreneurial strategies of craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine cannot be fully explained through pre-existing models developed in stable market economies. The sector is structurally fluid, institutionally heterogeneous, and deeply embedded in local cultural narratives; consequently, deductive frameworks risk misrepresenting its dynamics. Grounded theory offers a means of identifying latent processes, strategic responses, and interpretive repertoires that are specific to the empirical context. Second, the method's emphasis on constant comparison, iterative coding, memoing, and theoretical sampling aligns with the complexity of the research setting, where entrepreneurial behaviour unfolds through situated decision making rather than universal strategic templates.

This chapter therefore outlines the methodological architecture of the study: the rationale for choosing grounded theory; the interpretive stance underpinning its use; the procedures for sampling, data generation, comparative analysis, and memo writing; and the criteria for theoretical saturation and conceptual integration. The aim is not only to describe technical procedures but to demonstrate how grounded theory functions as a methodological logic that structures the entire research process-from data collection to theoretical abstraction-ensuring that the resulting substantive theory is empirically grounded, analytically robust, and contextually meaningful for understanding entrepreneurial strategies in the craft beer industry.

3.1. Introduction to the methodological framework

Grounded theory constitutes the methodological foundation of this research, offering a rigorous yet flexible approach for developing theory inductively from empirical data. In contrast to traditional research designs that begin with predetermined hypotheses or conceptual frameworks, grounded theory assumes that theoretical insight should emerge through systematic engagement with the field. This assumption is particularly relevant for studying entrepreneurial strategies in the craft beer industry, where organisational practices evolve rapidly, formal structures remain fluid, and existing theories provide only partial explanations of strategic behaviour. The grounded theory

approach therefore enables an empirically sensitive, contextually embedded, and theoretically generative exploration of the phenomenon.

In its classical formulation, grounded theory is defined as "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This definition signals a departure from mid-twentieth-century sociology, which was dominated by deductive reasoning and hypothesis testing. Instead of validating external theoretical constructs, grounded theory aims to construct new conceptual frameworks grounded in the empirical patterns identified during data analysis. The researcher begins not with what is already known, but with what the data suggest. This orientation toward emergence is central to the method's epistemological stance. This methodological orientation aligns with the Polish tradition of grounded theory analysis. Krzysztof Konecki (2000; 2012) conceptualises grounded theory as a logic of reconstructing social processes as they unfold in practice, rather than as a mechanical coding technique.

A core methodological principle is the simultaneity of data collection and analysis. Unlike linear models of research design, grounded theory treats these activities as mutually constitutive and iterative. After each interview or observation, initial coding begins immediately; emergent insights shape the direction of subsequent sampling, interview questions, and analytical focus. This recursive process continues until theoretical saturation is achieved-that is, when additional data no longer extend or challenge the developing categories. Saturation thus becomes the methodological criterion for determining adequacy of the sample rather than numerical representativeness.

While grounded theory was originally articulated in a predominantly positivist tone, subsequent developments have diversified its philosophical underpinnings. Sabina Cisek (2007) notes that grounded theory has been described variously as a methodology, research strategy, analytic framework, and theory-building approach. Over time, it has evolved into distinct methodological traditions. Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (2006; 2009) foregrounds the interpretive role of the researcher, emphasising that theory emerges through interactional processes rather than being "discovered" in a neutral sense. Meanwhile, the SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) identifies at least seven interpretive variations, including post-positivist, objectivist, constructivist, situational, postmodern, and computer-assisted versions. This plurality reflects the method's adaptability to diverse epistemological positions and research environments.

In the Polish academic context, grounded theory has gained momentum largely due to the contributions of Krzysztof Konecki (2000), who emphasises its relevance for qualitative sociological inquiry. Konecki's commentary on Charmaz's work underscores a critical methodological insight: grounded theory is not a rigid set of procedural recipes but a framework of principles that must be interpreted in relation to the specific empirical situation. As Charmaz (2009, p. 12) observes, grounded theory "is at the service of the context," meaning that methodological decisions are shaped by the nature of the phenomenon, the research environment, and the researcher's analytical judgement. This flexibility is essential for studying complex organisational fields such as the craft beer industry, where entrepreneurial practices are not standardised and where the meaning structures shaping strategic choices differ across socio-economic settings.

Despite interpretive diversity, the fundamental components of grounded theory as articulated by Glaser (1978) and Strauss (1987) remain pivotal. These include:

1. Simultaneous data gathering and analysis, ensuring that insights guide subsequent inquiry;
2. Analytic coding and category generation**,** employing constant comparison to refine conceptual distinctions;
3. Progressive conceptual development**,** elevating analysis from descriptive codes to abstract categories;
4. Extensive memo-writing**,** used to articulate analytic ideas, category properties, and emerging theoretical relationships;
5. Theoretical sampling**,** which prioritises conceptual relevance over representativeness;
6. Delayed literature review, aimed at minimising preconceptions and avoiding the imposition of existing theoretical frames.

These principles help ensure that the emerging theory remains empirically grounded, conceptually rich, and analytically coherent. Glaser and Strauss emphasised that grounded theory should demonstrate fit*,* work*,* relevance*,* and modifiability: it must align closely with the data, explain observable processes, address stakeholders' concerns, and remain flexible enough to incorporate new insights. Their methodological contributions positioned grounded theory as an alternative to deductive, armchair theorising, thereby legitimising qualitative research as a robust and explanatory mode of inquiry.

Grounded theory provides a methodological framework especially suited to investigating entrepreneurial strategies in the craft beer sectors of Poland and Ukraine. These sectors are characterised by dynamic market formation, cultural meaning-making, post-socialist economic legacies, and-particularly in Ukraine-geopolitical disruption. The organisational field lacks stable categories and established strategic trajectories, making inductive theory-building necessary. Grounded theory allows the researcher to capture these complexities by generating categories directly from interviews, observations, documents, and reconstructed historical accounts, thereby offering a conceptual model that reflects the lived strategic realities of brewery founders.

The research design therefore integrates core grounded theory procedures: purposive and theoretical sampling; open, axial, and selective coding; memo-writing; constant comparison; and progressive abstraction toward an integrated theoretical model. These procedures function not as discrete steps but as overlapping, recursive processes that shape one another. Throughout the study, particular attention is devoted to avoiding "forcing the data" (Glaser, 1992), ensuring that emerging categories remain anchored in the empirical experiences and strategic logics of the actors themselves.

In sum, grounded theory provides a methodological architecture that is both rigorous and responsive, allowing for the systematic development of theory within an evolving, contextually embedded organisational field.

3.2. Qualitative research process and methods

Before any empirical study can be meaningfully designed, the researcher must possess a solid and reflexive understanding of the research process. This concerns not only knowledge of individual techniques, but also an appreciation of the logic, sequence and interdependence of research activities. In grounded theory, such understanding is particularly important because the method does not unfold as a rigid linear procedure, but as an iterative, evolving strategy in which data collection, analysis and theorising continually inform one another (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 1-5; Charmaz, 2006, pp. 9-11). Only on this basis can methodological choices be aligned with the substantive aims of the study and with the epistemological assumptions underpinning grounded theory.

Grounded theory research involves the application of a set of specified methods and processes. Methods may be understood as "systematic modes, procedures or tools used to collect and analyse data" (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006, p. 2). In grounded theory, these methods are combined into an iterative system: studies typically commence with

purposive sampling, followed by concurrent data generation, data collection and analysis through various stages of coding, undertaken alongside constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memo writing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 45-47; Birks and Mills, 2015, pp. 11-13). Theoretical sampling is then employed iteratively until theoretical saturation is reached and the emerging theory acquires both conceptual density and explanatory reach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 212-213). Lenart-Gansiniec et al. (2023, pp. 22–24) emphasized that analytical rigor in qualitative and integrative research is enhanced through transparent structuring of constructs, mediators, and contextual conditions.

In this thesis, grounded theory is not treated as a mechanical recipe but as a coherent system of principles and practices. The following section therefore does not present a step-by-step "protocol"; instead, it offers an integrated account of the qualitative research process as it is conceptualised in grounded theory. Figure 3.1 (Three-lane grounded theory process model) provides an overview of the key components of this process, illustrating the interplay between sampling, coding, constant comparison, memoing and theoretical saturation. The figure visualises grounded theory as a dynamic, cyclical configuration of methods rather than as a simple sequence of isolated steps (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007, pp. 1-4).

Leading grounded theorists such as Glaser, Strauss, Bryant and Charmaz have therefore paid close attention to the methodological architecture of grounded theory. Their work emphasises that its power lies not in any single procedure, but in the way methods are interwoven into an unfolding pattern of actions and interactions (Glaser, 1978, pp. 2-5; Charmaz, 2006, pp. 9-13). The framework in Figure 3.1 reflects this insight: it indicates that the research process in grounded theory is fundamentally cyclical rather than strictly linear. Data collection, analysis and theorising are not separated into clearly demarcated stages, but instead form a mutually informing, recursive process. New data reshape existing codes; provisional categories guide further sampling; emerging theoretical insights, in turn, direct subsequent rounds of coding and comparison (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 15-17). Pachura (2014, pp. 33-35) argued that inductive and interpretative methodologies are particularly suited to analysing strategic phenomena characterised by complexity and non-linearity, where theoretical order emerges from empirical practice rather than deductive modelling.

At the outset of a grounded theory study, the researcher must decide where and with whom to begin. As shown in Figure 3.1, the initial procedure that directs the

collection and generation of data is purposive sampling. The aim at this stage is not to secure statistical representativeness, but to obtain material that is rich, relevant and conceptually promising. Participants and data sources are therefore selected because they are likely to shed light on the research question and to illuminate key processes under investigation (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 18-19).

In the context of a study on entrepreneurial strategies in craft breweries, for example, purposive sampling may involve selecting founders, managers or key employees who have experienced strategic turning points, crises or phases of rapid growth. It may also include documents, social media content or industry reports that articulate how breweries position themselves and justify their strategic choices. What matters is that these cases are theoretically relevant: they are chosen because they can help to initiate conceptual exploration rather than because they "represent" a predetermined population (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 55-56).

Purposive sampling is closely linked to another defining feature of grounded theory: the contemporaneity of data collection and analysis. Initial data are not simply accumulated and stored for later analysis; they are coded and examined as soon as they are generated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 62). This early analytic engagement allows tentative concepts and questions to emerge, which then guide the next sampling decisions. On this basis, theoretical sampling can be employed to identify gaps in the developing analysis, clarify uncertainties, pursue surprising patterns and test emerging interpretations (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 201-203).

In this way, purposive sampling opens the empirical field, while theoretical sampling progressively refines and deepens the empirical basis of the evolving theory. The researcher moves from cases that are broadly relevant to those that are strategically chosen to challenge, elaborate or saturate specific categories. Sampling thus becomes a theoretically driven activity rather than a preliminary technical step (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 134-137).

The analytical core of grounded theory is the method of constant comparative analysis. This procedure is used for coding and category development and begins with the very first data generated or collected. The researcher identifies incidents in the data-events, actions, statements, meanings-and assigns initial codes to them (Birks and Mills, 2015, p. 95). The first stage of analysis involves comparing each incident with other incidents coded in the same way. This comparison tests whether a code genuinely captures a recurring pattern or whether it requires refinement, splitting or redefinition.

The overall research procedure applied in this study can be summarised through a three-lane process model, which reflects the concurrent, iterative and mutually informing nature of grounded theory. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of this process.

Figure 3.1. Three-lane grounded theory process model

Data Collection		Coding		Integrative Process
↓		↓		↓
Purposive Sampling	→	Open Coding	→	Constant Comparative Method (ongoing)
↓		↓		↓
Initial Data Collection	→	Axial Coding	→	Memo Writing (ongoing)
↓		↓		↓
Additional / Focused Data Collection	→	Selective Coding	→	Integration of Data Collection Insights
↓		↓		↓
GROUNDED THEORY PRODUCTION				

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), Charmaz (2006).

Subsequently, initial codes are compared with one another and grouped into more abstract categories. The researcher compares incidents within a category with previous incidents, both in the same and in different categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 105-110). As analysis progresses, new codes are compared with existing ones and categories are compared with other categories. New data are constantly compared with data obtained earlier, across all phases of analysis. Through this process, the researcher continuously checks whether new material confirms, modifies or challenges the emerging conceptual structure.

Constant comparison therefore involves both inductive and deductive thinking. Inductively, the researcher allows patterns to emerge from the data; deductively, they test these emerging patterns against subsequent data and alternative interpretations (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 54-57). The constant comparative technique facilitates the emergence of more abstract concepts by forcing the researcher to move beyond description towards conceptualisation. It helps to identify both uniformities (what seems to recur across cases, contexts or time) and differences (where processes diverge, where unexpected variants appear), and thereby continuously refines concepts and theoretically relevant categories (Birks and Mills, 2015, pp. 111-113).

Over time, this process leads from numerous, detailed codes to a more integrated set of conceptual categories that form the backbone of the emergent theory. In a study of

craft breweries, for instance, constant comparison might reveal that seemingly different strategic choices-such as focusing on local taproom sales, collaborating with other breweries, or entering export markets-are linked by a shared underlying concern with managing dependence on distribution intermediaries. Such insights are rarely visible in the first reading of the data; they emerge through repeated, systematic comparison (Glaser, 1978, pp. 55-57).

The central aim of data analysis in grounded theory research is the development of theory. Coding is the principal analytic procedure through which this aim is pursued. It enables the researcher to identify concepts, similarities and conceptual repetitions in the data, and to transform raw empirical material into increasingly abstract theoretical constructions.

According to Charmaz (2006), "coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 46). Coding is therefore not a technical labelling exercise but an interpretive act: in assigning a code, the researcher takes a position on what is significant about the data and how it might be understood.

Most grounded theory traditions distinguish three basic types or phases of coding: open, axial and theoretical (or selective) coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 61-62). Each phase serves a different analytic function, and together they provide a structured but flexible pathway from concrete incidents to abstract theory.

Open coding seeks to generate as many ideas as possible inductively from early data. It fractures the material into small units and asks what each segment might indicate conceptually (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 63-69).

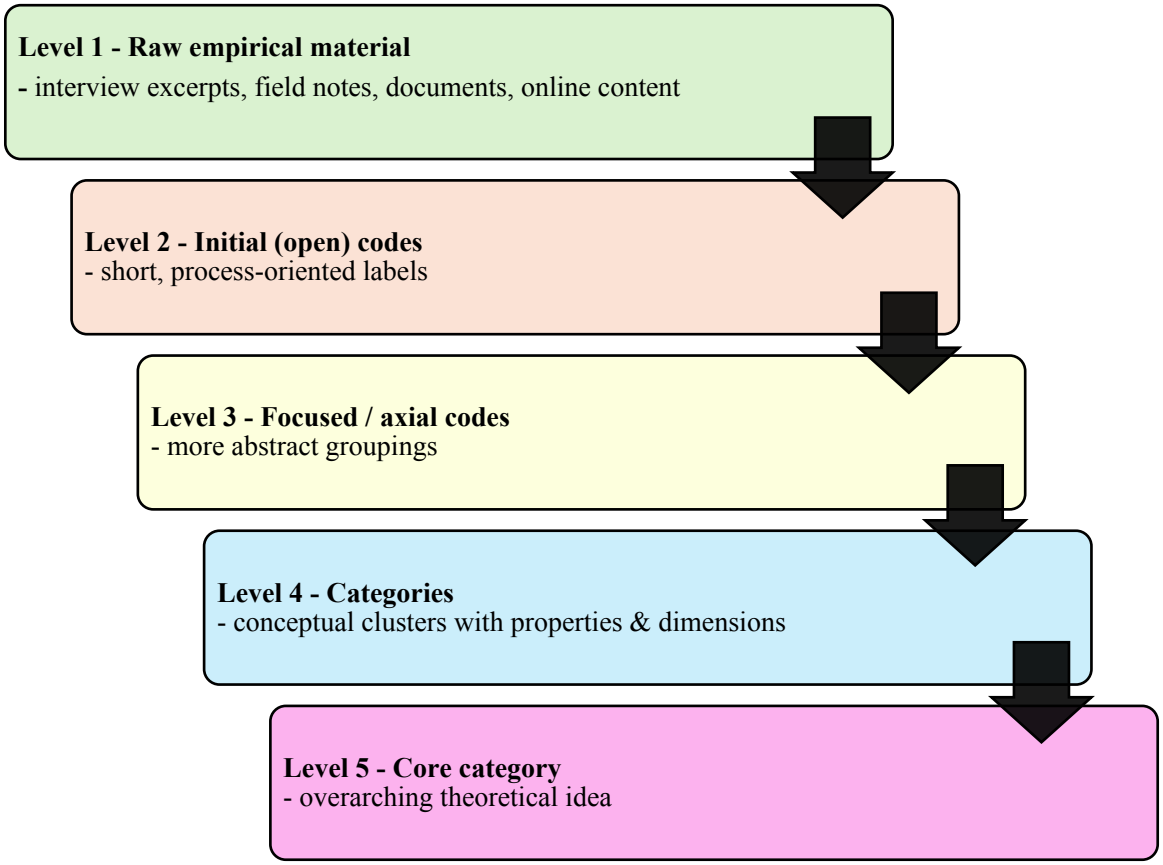
Axial coding then reassembles these fragments by specifying relationships between categories and subcategories, often using a coding paradigm focused on conditions, actions/interactions and consequences (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 96-99).

Theoretical or selective coding integrates the developed categories around a core category, articulating the main theoretical story of the research and the relationships that give it coherence (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 116-118; Charmaz, 2006, pp. 63-65).

In practice, these phases may overlap and recur; grounded theory does not prescribe a strictly sequential application. Rather, the researcher moves back and forth between them as new data, comparisons and memos reshape the conceptual landscape (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 195-197).

To clarify the relationship between different levels of coding, Figure 3.2 presents a simplified coding hierarchy as it was applied in this study. The figure shows how raw data segments are first labelled with initial codes, then clustered into more focused codes and categories, and finally integrated into a core category that organises the emergent theory.

Figure 3.2. Coding hierarchy: from raw data to core category



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), Charmaz (2006).

Although different coding procedures may be applied in grounded theory methodology depending on the school (Glaserian, Straussian, constructivist), open coding is usually the first systematic approach to the data. Open coding consists of posing sensitising questions and constantly comparing data and codes. It focuses on conceptualising and categorising phenomena through intensive and thorough analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 63-73).

In the first step of open coding, researchers break the data into smaller, analytically manageable units-sentences, paragraphs, turns in conversation, or sequences

of action-and examine them in depth. The aim is to identify the central idea, action or meaning expressed in each segment and to generate a code that captures it. In doing so, the researcher often uses gerunds (“negotiating prices”, “balancing risks”, “building reputation”) to foreground processes rather than static attributes (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 49-50).

In the second step, these smaller analytical parts are compared in terms of similarities and differences. The researcher asks whether two different incidents might be expressions of the same underlying process, or whether seemingly similar statements actually point to distinct concerns. Through this comparison, codes are sharpened, split, merged or abandoned, and the first contours of categories begin to appear (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 67-69).

To denote a phenomenon, Strauss and Corbin (1990) distinguish between concepts and categories, assigning particular concepts to higher-order categories (pp. 68-69). As a result, emerging concepts are related to each other, higher-level categories appear, and different aspects of these categories can be specified. During this process, researchers determine the theoretically relevant characteristics of each category and describe them in coding notes or memos (Mey and Mruck, 2011, pp. 10-12). These notes capture properties (what defines the category), dimensions (how it varies) and conditions under which it is more or less salient.

To reach this goal, researchers pose sensitising questions that stimulate new insights (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 72-73). Examples include (Mey and Mruck, 2011; Strauss and Corbin, 1990):

1) Who - which people are involved?
2) What - what phenomenon is described and characterised?
3) How - which aspects and qualities of the phenomenon are addressed?
4) Why - which justifications are given or can be deduced?
5) Whereby - which strategies are applied?
6) For what - which consequences are expected?

These questions help to keep the analysis open and grounded in the data, while also encouraging the researcher to probe beneath surface descriptions. Researchers draw on their professional experience and on knowledge derived from relevant literature to formulate and refine such questions, while attempting to avoid imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks prematurely (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 15-17). Once open coding has progressed sufficiently and the gathered data are conceptualised to a first degree, the

analysis moves to axial coding, considered the second major step in grounded theory coding.

As analysis unfolds, the emerging relationships between intricate concepts need to be integrated into a framework organised around one or more principal categories in order to develop a grounded theory. Glaser (1978) refers to this integrative work as theoretical coding (pp. 72-73); Strauss and Corbin (1990) distinguish between axial and selective coding, but emphasise that the difference primarily concerns the level of abstraction, not a completely separate procedure (pp. 96-97).

The axial coding process investigates relationships between the concepts and categories generated in open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 96-115). According to Strauss and Corbin, researchers should work out these relations by examining the data and codes using a coding paradigm that focuses on:

1) Causal conditions - incidents or occurrences that give rise to the phenomenon.
2) Context - the specific set of conditions and characteristics in which strategies of action and interaction take place in order to manage, analyse or respond to the phenomenon.
3) Intervening conditions - broader structural or situational elements that influence how actors respond (e.g. institutional constraints, market dynamics, regulations).
4) Action/interaction strategies - the patterns of action and interaction used to handle, perform or react to the phenomenon.
5) Consequences - the outcomes of these strategies, which may be immediate or long-term, actual or anticipated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 99-103).

This type of analysis helps to discover genuine connections between concepts and categories at a meta-level. The coding paradigm is therefore considered a key element of grounded theory; without it, the resulting theory may lack density (insufficiently detailed specification of categories) and precision (unclear relationships between them) (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 104-107). Understanding how the coding paradigm operates is thus central to the grounded theory approach.

After open coding has fractured the data, axial coding reconnects them in new ways. Links are worked out between categories and their subcategories, and the phenomenon is examined in relation to conditions, actions and consequences. For instance, in a grounded theory of craft brewery strategies, a category such as “managing dependence on distributors” might be related to causal conditions (e.g. market concentration in distribution), contextual factors (e.g. local consumer culture), strategies

(e.g. opening a taproom, participating in festivals) and consequences (e.g. increased brand recognition, reduced vulnerability).

Consequences can also modify their frame of reference over time: they can be the result of an action or interaction and, at a later point, become part of the causal conditions for another phenomenon. In the fourth edition of Basics of Qualitative Research, Corbin and Strauss (2015) reduce the coding paradigm to three main features: "conditions", "actions/interactions", and "consequences or outcomes" (pp. 90-92). This simplification underlines that grounded theory aims to explain how actors respond to particular conditions and with what effects, rather than to list isolated themes.

The first grounded theory experts, such as Glaser, Strauss and their colleagues, were social scientists, and the aspects chosen for their coding paradigm reflect this disciplinary background. These aspects do not necessarily correspond perfectly to the needs of every research field. For this reason, some researchers have adapted the axial coding procedure. While they maintain the central idea-specifying relationships between phenomena described in categories developed during open coding-they adjust the dimensions of the coding paradigm to fit their empirical context more closely (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 61-63).

The next step of grounded theory coding is selective coding, which aims to integrate the different categories developed and related during axial coding into a cohesive theory. While axial coding elaborates relationships across multiple categories, selective coding focuses on integration around a core category.

Axial coding and selective coding are therefore closely linked. However, selective coding is the process in which categories are subsumed under a core category that is connected to all other categories established during axial coding. At this level, categories are integrated into a coherent overarching theoretical explanation. The core category determines "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116). It functions as the main "story line" of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 146-147).

Some categories may need to be refined, collapsed or further elaborated to obtain more specific properties or causal conditions. Researchers must analyse all emerging categories thoroughly-their properties, outcomes and interrelationships-because the result of selective coding strongly influences the final form of the grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, pp. 196-199). Inadequate integration at this stage can lead to a theory that is fragmented or overly descriptive.

Once the core category has been identified and its relationships with other categories clarified, the central phenomenon of the research becomes visible. The research question can then be answered at a theoretical level by articulating how this core process operates across different contexts and conditions. Identifying the core category marks the point at which the main product of the grounded theory process appears: the substantive theory generated from the data.

Throughout all these stages, memoing represents a crucial analytic process and is widely regarded as central to ensuring quality in grounded theory (Birks and Mills, 2015, p. 180). Memos are not mere reminders or marginal notes; they participate directly in the formulation of theory throughout the research. Memo writing is a permanent research activity that builds intellectual assets, fosters an analytic mindset and informs the grounded theory findings (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 72-74; Birks and Mills, 2015, pp. 181-183). It begins with the first codes, extends through the development of categories and continues to the end of the research process (Strauss, 1987, pp. 109-112).

Memos are reflective, interpretive texts that document ideas, thought processes and key events in the research. They may take many forms: short reflections, conceptual figures, analytic questions, comparisons between cases, or provisional hypotheses. Memos serve to "track theory development", and the theory is effectively "captured in the memos" if the process is carried out systematically (Scott, 2009, pp. 34-36). In this sense, memo writing bridges the gap between coding and higher-level theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2015, pp. 161-163).

Glaser (1998) argues that "memos are the theorising write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analysing data, and during memoing" (p. 177). Charmaz similarly maintains that researchers generate analytic notes to explain and elaborate categories by writing memos (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 72-73). Memos provide space for multiple types of comparison: between data and data, data and codes, codes and other codes, codes and categories, categories and concepts, as well as for articulating conjectures about these comparisons (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 73-74). They also record why and how decisions were made in relation to sampling, coding, generating categories and identifying relationships, thus enhancing the transparency and auditability of the research process (Birks and Mills, 2015, pp. 182-184).

In sum, memo writing forms a core component of grounded theory. It provides a chronological and conceptual record of the research and of the evolving analysis. Through

memos, researchers can revisit earlier insights, reconnect abandoned ideas and trace how categories have changed over time. Without memoing, the resulting theory risks remaining superficial; concepts may appear as isolated labels rather than as elements of a coherent explanatory framework. Memoing permits the researcher to write running notes based on identified concepts and serves as a bridge between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis, since memos contain the concepts, relationships and theoretical moves that emerge during grounded theory research. In this way, memoing directly contributes to theory generation (Birks and Mills, 2015, p. 185).

Collecting and analysing data is a hallmark of the grounded theory process. Glaser famously argued that researchers may use both quantitative and qualitative data, since "all is data" (Glaser, 1998, p. 8). Although interviews are often the primary method of data gathering, grounded theory is open to a wide variety of sources: surveys, questionnaires, transcripts, government reports, organisational documents, grey literature, artefacts, videos, music, blogs, social media posts and even the researcher's own field notes and memos (Mills, Birks and Hoare, 2014, pp. 107-110).

A distinction can be drawn between available data, which include materials already in existence such as documents, reports or published literature, and elicited data, which are produced by participants in response to the researcher (e.g. interviews, diaries, written reflections). Grounded theory does not privilege one type over the other a priori; instead, the value of any data source depends on its contribution to the development of conceptual categories (Birks and Mills, 2015, pp. 53-56).

The way in which data are collected or generated influences their analytic potential. The researcher's relationship with the field, the questions posed, the situational context of the encounter and the mode of recording (audio, notes, transcripts) all shape the data. Consequently, the quality and usefulness of the data for theory-building are not merely "given"; they are co-produced in interaction. Birks and Mills (2015) therefore stress that the researcher's reflexivity-awareness of their own role in shaping the data-is crucial for evaluating how each piece of data contributes to the final grounded theory (pp. 57-59).

Finally, a central practical and methodological question concerns how much data is required. Researchers working with grounded theory emphasise that a key task is to generate and gather enough data to allow clarifying concepts, categories, range and qualities of the investigated phenomena to emerge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 30-32;

Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 212-213). It is therefore crucial to obtain an appropriate sample in order to generate valid and conceptually rich data.

In grounded theory, the answer to the question of sample size is tied to the notion of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 212-213). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), theoretical saturation occurs when:

- no new or relevant data emerge in relation to a category,
- the category is well developed in its properties and dimensions and demonstrates variation, and
- strong relationships between categories have been established and validated (pp. 212-213).

In other words, the researcher continues sampling until new data cease to add substantive insights to the emerging categories and their interrelationships. At that point, additional cases mainly confirm rather than extend the theory. In practice, this may require 15, 25, 40 or more interviews, depending on the scope of the study, the heterogeneity of the field and the complexity of the phenomenon (Morse, 2000, pp. 4-7).

If theoretical saturation is not reached, the resulting theory may rest on inadequately developed concepts and insufficiently tested relationships; empirical validity and explanatory power may then be compromised (Jones and Noble, 2007, p. 4). Importantly, there is no fixed numerical rule that determines when saturation has been achieved (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 212). The sample size depends on the research question, the analytic strategy and the richness of the data (Morse, 2000, pp. 4-6).

Several factors can influence when saturation is reached. One is the nature or sensitivity of the studied phenomena. Participants may be reluctant to disclose certain experiences, particularly in areas related to personal beliefs, values or perceived vulnerability. Topics such as ethical dilemmas, failures, or informal practices may require more time and trust to be discussed openly. In such cases, more interviews or repeated encounters with the same participants may be needed to gain sufficient, rich data for deep understanding (Morse, 2000, p. 7). Building a trusting interview environment is therefore not a minor ethical consideration but a methodological requirement: it directly affects the likelihood of reaching saturation.

Another factor is the researcher's ability, experience and knowledge (Morse, 2000, pp. 5-6). Experienced researchers with strong interviewing skills can often elicit detailed, relevant data more efficiently, thereby reaching saturation with fewer

participants (Morse, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 229). Interviewing skills typically improve with practice: researchers learn how to put participants at ease, ask probing questions, follow up on interesting leads and navigate sensitive topics (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 228-229). Likewise, the researcher's understanding of the phenomena-constructed through engagement with literature, preliminary exploration or practical experience-helps them to bypass irrelevant data and to formulate questions that guide interviews more effectively. At the same time, grounded theory requires the researcher to prevent prior knowledge from rigidly pre-structuring the analysis; theoretical sensitivity must be balanced with openness (Glaser and Holton, 2004, pp. 11-13). Pachura (2014, pp. 36-39) noted that in complex environments, strategic patterns become visible only retrospectively, through the analysis of actions, interactions and adaptive responses documented in empirical data.

Consequently, the factor that ultimately determines sample size in grounded theory is not a numerical target but the achievement of theoretical saturation. The extent and timing of saturation are affected by the scope of the research questions, the heterogeneity and complexity of the phenomena studied, and the researcher's analytic skill and experience. Within this methodological logic, questions of "how many interviews" are reframed as questions of "how far theory has developed": sampling continues as long as additional data modify, extend or challenge the emerging categories and relationships.

3.3. Core integrative processes in grounded theory: theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity

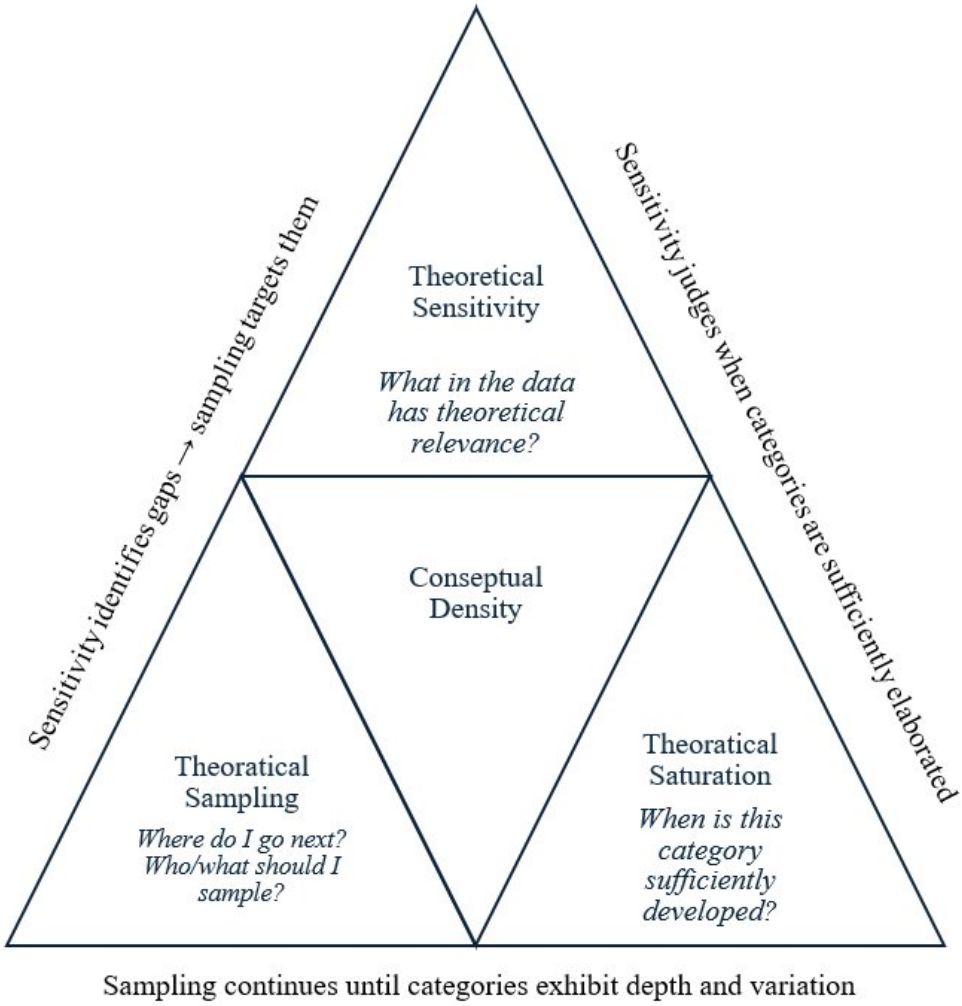
A defining feature of grounded theory is its reliance on a set of interlocking analytic procedures that unfold iteratively throughout the research process. Whereas Section 3.2 described the operational components of data collection and coding, this section turns to the meta-analytic processes that integrate those components into a coherent methodology: theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and theoretical sensitivity. These processes ensure that grounded theory moves beyond thematic description toward the development of a robust, explanatory, and data-anchored theory.

The presentation below builds directly on the logic of the research cycle visualised in Figure 3.3, which depicts the coordination between data collection, coding, constant comparison and memo writing. The figure illustrates that grounded theory does not proceed linearly; instead, sampling, coding and theorising occur concurrently and

recursively. Within this dynamic methodological architecture, theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity function as the central mechanisms through which conceptual density, theoretical rigour and analytic integration are achieved.

The interdependence of these three processes can be summarised in a triadic model. As shown in Figure 3.3, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation and theoretical sensitivity form a mutually reinforcing system: sampling determines *where* to look next, sensitivity shapes how data are interpreted, and saturation indicates *when* further elaboration is no longer required.

Figure 3.3. Triadic relationship between theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), Charmaz (2006).

Theoretical sampling constitutes one of the most distinctive and foundational elements of grounded theory methodology. First defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the concept refers to the process of sampling driven by concepts, not by demographic

representativeness or statistical logic. As they famously write, theoretical sampling involves "seeking pertinent data to develop the emerging theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 45). The purpose is not breadth but conceptual yield.

a) definition and core logic

Theoretical sampling is best understood as a methodological engine that connects data collection to analysis and theory building. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define it as "the process of collecting data for the purpose of generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them" (p. 201). This definition underscores three essential principles:

1. Sampling follows analysis-not the reverse.
2. Sampling decisions respond to gaps, variations or ambiguities in emerging categories.
3. Sampling continues until categories achieve both depth and variation.

In other words, theoretical sampling operationalises the iterative movement illustrated in Figure 3.3: codes lead to questions; questions lead to additional data; additional data refine codes; and refined codes reshape the theoretical structure in development.

b) the role of purposive sampling as the entry point

As explained in Section 3.2, grounded theory typically begins with purposive sampling, which identifies initial participants or materials capable of shedding light on the research question (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). However, purposive sampling performs only the opening move in the research design. Once preliminary concepts emerge through open coding, the sampling logic shifts from purposive relevance to theoretical necessity.

c) how theoretical sampling operates in practice

Theoretical sampling unfolds in several analytic moves:

1. Identifying gaps or ambiguities in initial codes (e.g., category lacks variation).
2. Targeting participants or settings that can illuminate these gaps.
3. Modifying interview questions based on emerging analytic needs (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 96-99).
4. Returning to previous participants if deeper clarification is needed.
5. Contrasting deviant or negative cases to test conceptual boundaries (Glaser, 1978, pp. 67-72).

The procedure is cumulative: “each interview is a selection of data that holds consequences for the entire analysis” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 204). The sampling does not progress by increasing size, but by increasing conceptual precision.

d) the purpose of contrasting cases

As Dey (1999) argues, theoretical sampling must pursue both similarities and contrasts (p. 108). Sampling for similarity helps consolidate the properties of categories; sampling for contrast prevents premature closure and reveals conceptual range. For example, in a study of craft breweries, selecting both novice entrepreneurs and mature breweries may illuminate how strategic practices evolve over time.

e) integration with coding and constant comparison

Theoretical sampling is inseparable from coding and constant comparison. As Kwortnik (2003) emphasises, grounded theory gains its explanatory strength through “iterative movement between data and conceptualisation” (p. 134). Sampling therefore becomes the link that continually feeds new material into the constant comparative process, reinforcing the evolving theory.

This structure is precisely denotes: theoretical sampling, open/axial/selective coding, constant comparison and memo writing operating in parallel, each informing the others.

Where theoretical sampling answers the question “What should I collect next?”, theoretical saturation answers the question “When should I stop?”. Yet saturation is often misunderstood, oversimplified or incorrectly equated with data redundancy. In grounded theory, saturation is neither a mechanical endpoint nor a purely numerical threshold; rather, it is an analytic judgement grounded in conceptual development.

a) Classic definition and core criteria

Glaser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as the point at which:

1. no new data emerge that add properties to a category (p. 61);
2. repeated instances confirm the same conceptual patterns;
3. the analyst becomes empirically confident that the category is fully elaborated.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) add that saturation requires:

1. variation within the category,
2. firm linkage with related categories, and
3. conceptual density (pp. 212-213).

Thus, saturation refers to the maturity of conceptual development-not to reaching a particular number of interviews.

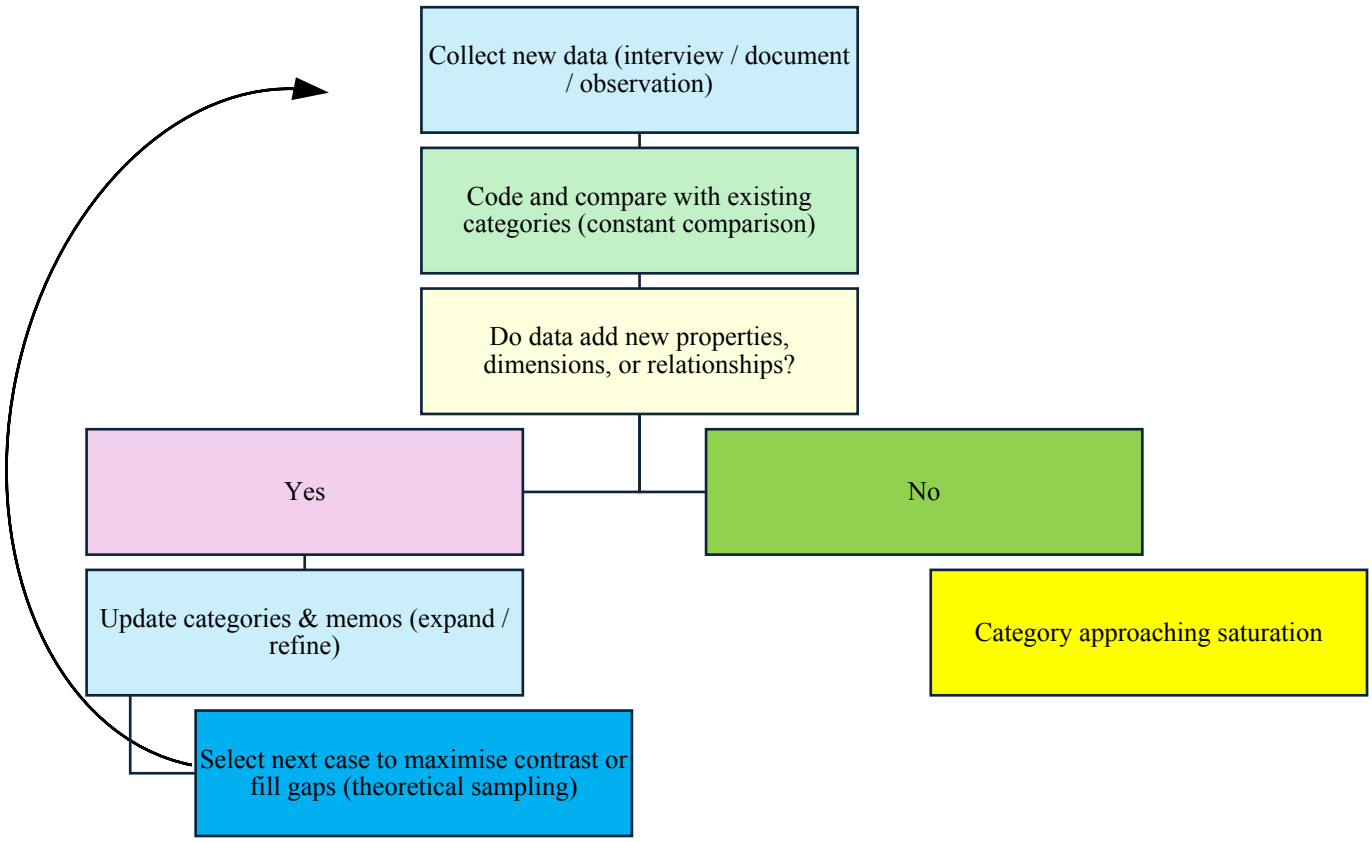
b) Relationship between saturation and theoretical sampling

Saturation is logically impossible without theoretical sampling: categories can only be saturated if they have been actively developed, tested and refined through targeted data collection. This is why sampling, coding and comparison must be intertwined, as shown in Figure 3.3.

Bryman (2012) stresses that theoretical saturation is achieved only when "sampling, data collection and analysis cease to generate new theoretical insights" (p. 579). This articulation reinforces that saturation is a decision made in vivo, during analysis, rather than predetermined by design.

The interaction between theoretical sampling and saturation can be illustrated as a decision-oriented micro-cycle (Figure 3.4). Rather than fixing a sample size ex ante, the researcher repeatedly evaluates whether new data extend, refine or merely confirm existing categories and adjusts sampling decisions accordingly.

Figure 3.4. Micro-cycle of theoretical sampling and saturation



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Charmaz (2006).

c) Misconceptions: why saturation is not data redundancy

A frequent error is to treat saturation as a synonym for repetition. In reality:

- Repetition may occur early in a study without categories being conceptually developed.
- Conceptual breakthroughs may arise late, requiring further sampling.
- Sensitive topics may require multiple interviews before participants reveal crucial information (Morse, 2000, pp. 4-6).

Thus, saturation is not redundancy; it is completeness, depth, variation and explanatory power.

d) Ensuring saturation in practice

Researchers enhance the likelihood of reaching saturation by:

- exploring extreme or deviant cases (Glaser, 1978, p. 105);
- sampling across diverse contexts to explore variation (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100);
- using memos to track conceptual gaps (Birks and Mills, 2015, pp. 70-73);
- analysing data concurrently with collection to avoid premature closure.

In grounded theory, saturation operates as a quality criterion: a theory lacking saturated categories is a theory lacking analytic robustness.

The third core integrative process is theoretical sensitivity-the researcher's analytic capacity to interpret, compare and conceptualise data. Grounded theory assumes that data do not "speak for themselves"; theoretical insight must be actively developed, documented and validated.

Glaser and Holton (2004) define theoretical sensitivity as "the ability to generate concepts from data and to relate them according to the rules of theory construction" (p. 12).

Birks and Mills (2015) similarly describe it as "recognising and extracting from the data elements that have relevance for the emerging theory" (p. 58).

Thus, theoretical sensitivity is both a cognitive skill and a methodological orientation.

Glaser (1978) identifies several sources of theoretical sensitivity:

1. The literature-used not to pre-structure the data, but to expand conceptual possibilities (pp. 31-46).
2. Professional experience-which enhances recognition of subtle processes.
3. Analytic practices-memo writing, constant comparison, figureming.

4. The data themselves-which deepen insight through repetition, contrast and variation.

Charmaz (2006) adds reflexivity as a crucial element: researchers must be aware of their own interpretive lens (pp. 131-135).

Memo writing is the main site where theoretical sensitivity grows. As Strauss (1987) argues, memos support "the continuous, unfolding, self-corrective dialogue between concept and data" (p. 65). They enable the researcher to:

1. articulate conceptual hunches;
2. identify category properties;
3. document comparisons;
4. formulate questions guiding theoretical sampling.

The iterative structure shown in Figure 3.1 captures this dynamic: memo writing runs parallel to data collection and coding, feeding back into both.

Sensitivity is not given at the outset; it develops over time. Birks and Mills (2015) emphasise that as researchers become immersed in the data, "their level of theoretical sensitivity to analytic possibilities increases" (p. 62). This progressive refinement is intrinsic to grounded theory's inductive logic.

These three integrative processes are analytically distinct but practically inseparable. Their interrelation can be summarised as follows:

1. Theoretical sampling identifies where the theory needs elaboration.
2. Theoretical sensitivity enables the researcher to detect what needs elaboration.
3. Theoretical saturation signals when elaboration is complete.

Together, they ensure:

a) conceptual depth,
b) analytic rigour,
c) explanatory power,
d) methodological transparency,
e) and groundedness in empirical data.

This triadic relationship is exactly what Figure 3.3 illustrates: sampling, coding and integrative processes move in parallel and converge toward Grounded Theory Production.

Table 3.1. Comparison of theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity

Integrative process	Key question it answers	Main function in the study
Theoretical sampling	*Where and what should I sample next?*	Directing data collection towards gaps, contrasts and underdeveloped categories.
Theoretical saturation	*When can I stop sampling for this category?*	Determining when categories have sufficient depth, variation and linkage.
Theoretical sensitivity	*What in the data is theoretically significant?*	Recognising, interpreting and articulating patterns at an abstract level.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), Charmaz (2006).

In the context of this dissertation-focused on entrepreneurial strategies in craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine-these processes are not abstract methodological ideals but practical analytic tools.

a) Theoretical sampling guided the selection of breweries, founders and documents that represented contrasting strategic models (e.g., urban vs rural breweries, export-oriented vs locally rooted).
b) Theoretical sensitivity developed through prolonged engagement with interview data, industry documents, and analytic memoing about emerging categories such as local embeddedness, bricolage strategies, collaboration networks and quality as ethos.
c) Saturation was approached once categories displayed substantial variation across national, organisational and temporal contexts, and when further interviews ceased to generate new properties relevant to the core category (e.g., anchored entrepreneurial strategy).

By integrating these processes, the study ensures that the resulting theory is not a descriptive summary but a conceptually rich, empirically grounded explanation of how craft breweries construct and enact entrepreneurial strategies under different structural, cultural and market

Theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity form the analytical backbone of grounded theory. They transform grounded theory from a set of coding techniques into a rigorous, concept-generative methodology. Each process reinforces the others: sampling fuels analytic development, sensitivity guides interpretation, and saturation stabilises the emerging theory.

Within the methodological architecture depicted in Figure 3.1, these processes ensure that grounded theory remains faithful to its intellectual heritage: a method capable

of generating theory that is abstract enough to provide explanation, yet grounded enough to retain empirical integrity.

3.4. Research aims, hypotheses, and research questions

Research on complex and emergent management phenomena requires methodological approaches that are sensitive to process, context, and interaction. Szarucki emphasises that the choice of research methods should be driven by the structure of the research problem rather than by disciplinary convention. When organisational processes are dynamic, multi-actor and context-dependent, explanatory depth cannot be achieved through linear or purely quantitative designs. Instead, research coherence depends on aligning epistemological assumptions, research questions and analytical procedures in a way that allows phenomena to be examined as they unfold in practice (Szarucki, 2016). This perspective supports the methodological orientation of the present study, which addresses entrepreneurial strategy as a process embedded in everyday organisational action.

The formulation of the research aims in this dissertation diverges from conventional strategic management studies, which typically define aims, hypotheses and research questions as fixed, a priori constructs derived from pre-existing theoretical models. In contrast, the present study is grounded in the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the constructivist version of grounded theory, which recognises that knowledge is neither simply discovered nor imposed, but co-constructed through continuous interaction between the researcher, participants and the socio-material context. Within such a framework, research aims are not immutable declarations preceding inquiry but dynamic orientations, shaped and refined through engagement with empirical phenomena.

This methodological stance resonates with the environments in which the studied craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine operate. These enterprises do not function within stable, predictable market structures that would justify classical approaches based on forecasting, formal modelling or competitive positioning. Instead, they exist in fluid socio-economic ecosystems shaped by local meanings, sensory and embodied practices, relational obligations, institutional ambiguities and material constraints. Under such conditions, entrepreneurial strategy does not emerge as a linear managerial plan but as a situated, lived and emergent practice, continuously negotiated in the rhythm of everyday

action. Accordingly, the aims of this dissertation arise from the need to identify and interpret the ways in which strategic action is enacted, made meaningful and narrated by entrepreneurs embedded in such contexts.

Main Aim and Specific Aims

In order to remain fully consistent with the constructivist grounded theory logic, the aims formulated in this study are treated as sensitising orientations rather than rigid targets. The main aim of the dissertation corresponds directly to the formulation given in the Introduction and is expressed as follows:

Main aim: to reconstruct and theoretically interpret the emergent forms of entrepreneurial strategising practiced by craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine, understood as situated, relational and dynamically negotiated practices.

This main aim is supported by the following specific aims:

1. To identify and analyse the dominant modes of entrepreneurial action in craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine, with particular attention to how these modes arise from everyday practices such as brewing, experimenting, engaging with consumers and responding to constraints.
2. To examine innovation as a rhythmic, embodied and identity-forming practice, rather than as a solely market-oriented tool of differentiation.
3. To analyse the role of locality, relationality and socio-cultural embeddedness in shaping strategic practices in both relatively stable (Poland) and crisis-conditioned (Ukraine) environments.
4. To interpret contextual barriers as generative forces that catalyse improvisation, cooperation, bricolage and resilience, rather than functioning merely as obstacles.
5. To synthesise these insights into a grounded theoretical model that explains how microbreweries achieve competitiveness through the dynamic interplay of authenticity, innovation, locality, cooperation and adaptive pragmatism.

These aims are not viewed as external constraints imposed on the research process but as a flexible, evolving framework guiding theoretical sampling, data collection and analysis.

Hypotheses as sensitizing propositions

Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, the hypotheses formulated in this dissertation do not serve a strictly deductive testing function. Instead, they operate as sensitising propositions, offering theoretically informed expectations that guide

interpretive inquiry while remaining open to modification. In order to maintain coherence with the Introduction, the hypotheses are articulated as follows:

H (main): Entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is a practice-based, emergent and contextually embedded process that cannot be adequately explained by classical, plan-based models of strategic management.

On this basis, the following specific sensitising hypotheses are derived:

H1: Entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is predominantly practice-based rather than plan-based, emerging from relational and embodied engagement rather than formal analysis.

H2: Innovation in craft breweries manifests as a continuous, experimental and identity-producing practice, rather than as a conventional market-oriented differentiation tool.

H3: Locality performs different strategic functions across contexts-primarily symbolic and identity-related in Poland, and adaptive and survival-oriented in Ukraine.

H4: Contextual barriers-such as financial constraints, institutional voids and infrastructural vulnerabilities-actively shape entrepreneurial practices by generating new forms of improvisation, collaboration and resilience.

H5: Competitiveness in craft microbreweries arises from the integration of relational, cultural and material practices rather than from classical strategic positioning.

These propositions provide an initial conceptual compass but are deliberately kept open to refinement in the course of analysis.

Research questions

Derived from the aims and sensitising hypotheses, the research questions adopt an exploratory, interpretive logic. They do not seek to test causal relations but to open conceptual pathways for analysing the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of entrepreneurs:

1. How do owners of craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine identify, describe and interpret the strategic practices they enact in everyday entrepreneurial life?
2. What meanings do brewery owners ascribe to innovation, and how do they experience and operationalise it under conditions of resource scarcity and contextual uncertainty?

3. In what ways do locality, relational ties and community embeddedness influence the formation, enactment and legitimacy of entrepreneurial strategising?
4. How do financial, institutional, infrastructural and communicative barriers shape entrepreneurial action, and in what sense can these barriers be understood as generative mechanisms rather than mere constraints?
5. How do these elements collectively contribute to the emergence of competitiveness as a relational, context-dependent and culturally meaningful process?

These questions guide the analytic trajectory of the dissertation and reflect its commitment to theorising strategy as an emergent, embedded and interpretively co-constructed phenomenon rather than a predetermined managerial construct.

The relationships between the specific aims, sensitising hypotheses and research questions are summarised in Table 3.2. The table is designed not as a rigid matrix for deductive testing but as a heuristic device illustrating how the different components of the research architecture converge on the central objective of understanding entrepreneurial strategising as emergent, practice-based and embedded.

Table 3.2. Correspondence between specific research aims, sensitising hypotheses and research questions

Specific Research Aim	Hypothetical Orientation	Corresponding Research Questions
To identify and analyse the dominant modes of entrepreneurial action in craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine.	Strategies arise not from formal planning but from relational, embodied and context-dependent experiences.	RQ1: How do brewery owners identify, describe and enact the strategic practices that structure their everyday activities? RQ5: How do these practices contribute to the emergence of competitiveness?
To examine innovation as a rhythmic, embodied and identity-forming practice.	Innovation is a continuous, experimental process constituting a central mechanism of competitiveness.	RQ2: How is innovation conceptualised, practised and justified in conditions of scarcity and uncertainty?
To analyse the role of locality, relationality and socio-cultural embeddedness.	Locality and relationality perform different roles in stable versus crisis-conditioned contexts.	RQ3: How do relational networks and local cultural environments shape entrepreneurial strategising in Poland and Ukraine?
To interpret contextual barriers as generative forces structuring entrepreneurial practice.	Barriers catalyse improvisation, bricolage and resilience.	RQ4: How do entrepreneurs negotiate, transform or resist contextual constraints, and what adaptive mechanisms emerge from these interactions?

Specific Research Aim	Hypothetical Orientation	Corresponding Research Questions
To synthesise insights into a grounded theoretical model of competitiveness.	Competitiveness emerges from the integration of innovation, authenticity, locality, cooperation and pragmatism.	RQ5: What mechanisms and processes constitute the embedded becoming of competitiveness in small-scale breweries?

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Considered as a whole, the aims, hypotheses and research questions formulated in this chapter do not constitute a rigid analytical framework imposed upon empirical reality, but rather a sensitising structure that enables an interpretive entry into the world of craft brewery entrepreneurship. Their coherence derives not from deductive closure but from their collective capacity to illuminate the complex, situated and relational nature of strategic action in micro-scale contexts. By grounding the research architecture in constructivist grounded theory, the dissertation deliberately rejects a traditional separation between aims and empirical phenomena, acknowledging instead that the aims themselves acquire meaning only through their dialogical engagement with the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs under study.

The resulting conceptual framework reflects this epistemological position. The aims direct analytical attention toward identifying strategy as emergent practice; the hypotheses articulate theoretically informed expectations rather than testable predictions; and the research questions open a space for exploring meaning, embodiment, locality, relationality and adaptive improvisation. In this configuration, the analytical components do not function in isolation but form a mutually reinforcing constellation that renders visible the dynamic interplay between innovation, identity, local embeddedness, cooperation and contextual constraints.

Equally important, the comparative perspective embedded in this section ensures that the inquiry does not remain at a purely descriptive level. Instead, it foregrounds the contrasts between different socio-institutional environments-Poland's relatively stable regulatory landscape and Ukraine's crisis-conditioned context-allowing the study to capture how similar entrepreneurial logics manifest differently under divergent structural pressures. The research aims therefore function not merely as guiding tools but as analytical commitments to uncovering how context co-produces entrepreneurial meaning and how small-scale actors carve out strategic space within environments marked by volatility, scarcity and uncertainty.

In this sense, the section establishes the conceptual and methodological foundations for the entire dissertation. It delineates the intellectual terrain within which the empirical inquiry unfolds and articulates the interpretive framework through which strategy is understood as a culturally situated, socially embedded and continuously emergent process. The subsequent methodological chapter builds directly on these foundations, specifying the research design, sampling logic and analytic procedures through which the aims, hypotheses and questions elaborated here are operationalised in practice.

3.5. Poland and Ukraine as empirically grounded contexts for strategic analysis

The selection of empirical contexts constitutes a central methodological decision in qualitative, process-oriented and theory-building research. Within interpretive and constructivist research paradigms, case selection is guided not by statistical representativeness but by theoretical relevance, analytical leverage and the capacity of empirical settings to render underlying processes visible in their formative stages. Consequently, the focus on Poland and Ukraine in this study is neither arbitrary nor driven by accessibility. Rather, it reflects a deliberate methodological choice grounded in structural, sectoral, institutional and analytical considerations that make these countries particularly suitable for investigating micro-level strategic processes and systems of strategic management in the craft beer industry.

Within the broader European brewing landscape, Poland and Ukraine occupy a distinctive and analytically productive position. Both countries experienced a comparatively late emergence of the craft beer sector, followed by a period of rapid expansion after 2010. This trajectory contrasts sharply with Western European markets-such as Germany, the United Kingdom or Belgium-where the craft segment emerged earlier and has since entered a phase of partial consolidation and institutional stabilisation. From the perspective of processual strategy research, late-emerging sectors provide especially valuable empirical conditions, as strategic orientations, organisational routines and decision premises have not yet fully sedimented into standardised or professionalised forms.

Sectoral data substantiate the empirical relevance of Poland and Ukraine. Longitudinal statistics on brewery counts and market structure indicate exceptionally dynamic growth trajectories in both countries during the period 2010-2023. As shown in

Table 3.3, the number of breweries in Poland increased from approximately 65 in 2010 to over 350 by 2023, while Ukraine recorded an increase from roughly 15 to nearly 100 breweries over the same period. Average annual growth rates in the number of breweries exceeded 18-22% in Poland and 20-25% in Ukraine between 2010 and 2019, significantly surpassing growth rates observed in most Western European craft beer markets during the same timeframe.

Table 3.3. Development of the craft beer sector in Poland and Ukraine (2010-2023)

Indicator	Poland	Ukraine
Number of breweries (2010)	65	15
Number of breweries (2015)	196	45
Number of breweries (2019)	320	75
Number of breweries (2023)	350-370	90-100
Average annual growth rate (2010-2019)	18-22%	20-25%
Dominant brewery size	Micro / small	Micro / small
Market concentration (craft segment)	Low	Very low

Source: author's own elaboration based on Eurostat (PRODCOM), national brewing associations and sectoral reports.

Crucially, this growth was driven almost exclusively by independently owned micro- and small-scale breweries rather than by corporate diversification strategies of multinational brewing groups. As a result, the organisational landscape in both countries is characterised by low market concentration, limited capitalisation and strong local embeddedness. These structural features correspond directly with the analytical focus of this dissertation, which conceptualises strategy as an emergent, practice-based and systemically embedded phenomenon rather than as a formalised planning activity.

Although Poland and Ukraine display similar quantitative growth patterns, they differ markedly in their institutional trajectories. Poland's craft beer sector developed within the context of increasing regulatory stability associated with European Union membership, harmonisation of food-production standards and gradual professionalisation of the brewing industry. Ukraine's sectoral expansion, by contrast, occurred under conditions of persistent institutional volatility, regulatory ambiguity and macroeconomic uncertainty. This divergence creates a natural comparative contrast, enabling the analysis of how similar organisational forms and strategic practices are shaped by differing degrees of institutional consolidation.

The analytical value of Poland and Ukraine becomes particularly evident when contrasted with alternative European cases. Table 3.4 situates selected countries according to the historical timing and current maturity of their craft beer sectors.

Table 3.4. Timing and maturity of the craft beer sector in selected European countries

Country	Onset of craft beer movement	Sectoral stage (2020s)
United Kingdom	late 1970s-1980s	Mature / partially consolidated
Germany	early 1990s	Mature, institutionally embedded
Belgium	1980s	Mature, tradition-integrated
Denmark	1990s	Mature, export-oriented
Czech Republic	early 2000s	Semi-mature, tradition-dominated
Poland	post-2010	Late-emerging, dynamic
Ukraine	post-2012	Late-emerging, fluid

Source: author's own elaboration based on historical and comparative analysis of secondary sources.

In mature markets, strategic behaviour is increasingly shaped by established industry norms, professional standards and stabilised business models. Empirical research indicates that under such conditions strategic action becomes routinised, codified and embedded within formalised managerial systems, reducing the visibility of micro-level strategising processes. In contrast, the relative novelty of the craft beer sector in Poland and Ukraine implies that strategic orientations remain actively constructed, negotiated and revised, rendering them empirically accessible to process-oriented analysis.

A second decisive criterion concerns the degree of institutional density surrounding craft brewing. European craft beer sectors differ substantially in the extent to which they are embedded within formal regulatory regimes, professional infrastructures and market-support systems. Table 3.5 synthesises these differences by comparing regulatory complexity, industry formalisation and strategic discretion across selected country groups.

Table 3.5. Institutional density of the craft beer sector

Country group	Regulatory complexity	Industry formalisation	Strategic discretion
Western Europe	High	High	Moderate-low
Nordic countries	Very high	High	Low
Central Europe	Moderate-high	Moderate	Moderate
Poland	Moderate	Emerging	High
Ukraine	Low-moderate	Low	Very high

Source: author's own elaboration based on comparative institutional analysis of European craft beer markets.

In highly institutionalised environments, strategic decision-making is filtered through dense layers of compliance requirements, certification schemes and professionalised managerial scripts. While such conditions enhance predictability and

legitimacy, they constrain strategic discretion and homogenise strategic behaviour. Poland and Ukraine, by contrast, retain comparatively high degrees of strategic freedom, enabling entrepreneurs to interpret, negotiate and construct strategic orientations rather than merely enact predefined models of "best practice".

These institutional differences are closely reflected in organisational structures and the visibility of strategising. As shown in Table 3.6, craft breweries in Western and Nordic Europe typically operate within functionally differentiated or highly professionalised organisational forms, resulting in low visibility of micro-level strategic processes. In Poland and Ukraine, organisational structures remain predominantly founder-centred, with limited role differentiation and close integration of production, marketing, distribution and strategic decision-making.

Table 3.6. Organisational structure and visibility of strategising

Country group	Typical brewery structure	Visibility of strategising
Western Europe	Functionally differentiated	Low
Nordic countries	Highly professionalised	Very low
Central Europe	Mixed	Moderate
Poland	Founder-centred, small teams	High
Ukraine	Founder-dominated, informal	Very high

Source: author's own elaboration based on comparative organisational analysis, sectoral studies of the craft beer industry, and qualitative entrepreneurship and strategy-as-practice literature.

This organisational configuration has direct methodological implications. High visibility of strategising enables the observation of strategic processes as they unfold in practice rather than requiring retrospective reconstruction from formal documents or abstract managerial narratives. In Poland and Ukraine, strategic reasoning, experimentation and adaptation occur in close proximity to everyday operational activity, relational negotiation and material production.

From a grounded-theory perspective, such contexts are particularly valuable. Grounded theory prioritises processual depth, theoretical saturation and analytical coherence over breadth of coverage. Including additional national contexts would substantially increase contextual complexity without proportionate analytical gain, thereby diluting the explanatory focus of the study. The paired selection of Poland and Ukraine provides sufficient variation to examine the interaction between sectoral characteristics, organisational scale and institutional conditions while remaining methodologically manageable within the scope of a doctoral dissertation.

In sum, Poland and Ukraine were selected not because they are exceptional in a descriptive sense, but because they are analytically productive. Compared to other European contexts, they combine rapid sectoral expansion, low market concentration, limited institutionalisation and exceptionally high visibility of micro-level strategising. These characteristics align directly with the theoretical and methodological objectives of this dissertation, making Poland and Ukraine optimal empirical contexts for investigating strategy as an emergent, practice-based and systemically embedded phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4.
ENTREPRENEURIAL STRATEGIES IN THE CRAFT BREWING INDUSTRY: AN EMPIRICAL CASE ANALYSIS FROM POLAND AND UKRAINE

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings of a qualitative empirical study focused on the entrepreneurial strategies employed by the owners of craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine. The analysis was conducted within the framework of the constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 10-13), which implies that the process of data exploration and interpretation was iterative, relational, and co-constructed by both the researcher and the participants. In practice, the study was therefore not merely an act of recording reality but rather a process of co-constructing it: the identities of the breweries under investigation, their logics of action, and their understandings of what constitutes an "entrepreneurial strategy" were revealed through dialogue, negotiation of meanings, and mutual interpretation (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 130-132).

The choice of this methodology was not accidental. Traditional approaches to strategy in management studies tend to emphasize plans, structures, and instruments, portraying enterprises as rational actors implementing actions based on clearly formulated objectives and strategic blueprints (Porter, 1996, pp. 61-78; Mintzberg, 1994, pp. 23-27). The context of craft microbreweries, however, escapes such a framework. Their activities are less the execution of predetermined strategies and more the outcome of a continuous process of "becoming," shaped by local market conditions, scarce resources, social relations, and rapidly shifting consumer trends. In this sense, adopting the perspective of constructivist grounded theory made it possible to capture entrepreneurial strategies not as formal documents but as living practices, embedded in everyday routines, negotiated over time, and co-created in dialogue with the surrounding environment (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 96-101).

An important assumption of the study was also the recognition that the strategies of microbreweries are essentially situated practices. This means that they are always context-dependent and acquire their meaning through their interlinkages with institutional, cultural, and social factors (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 131-136). The actions taken

by brewery owners are not universal solutions but are conditioned by locality, community relationships, infrastructural limitations, and - in the case of Ukraine - by the experience of war and logistical disruptions. The study thus enabled the interpretation of entrepreneurial strategies as forms of practical innovativeness and resilience, shaped within a field of tensions between limited resources and a rich cultural density of meanings.

The empirical material was collected through in-depth narrative interviews with owners and co-owners of twenty-seven craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine. These narratives - often personal, filled with references to biography, local identity, and experiences of crisis - constituted the primary research material. They were subjected to a three-stage process of coding in accordance with the logic of grounded theory: from open coding, through axial coding, to selective coding (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 42-71). This analytic process made it possible to gradually identify key categories, organize them around causal relationships, and integrate them into a coherent theoretical conception.

As a result, a core category was identified, termed "becoming competitive through innovativeness, uniqueness, quality, and local embeddedness." This category served as an integrating nexus of meanings, encompassing all the key dimensions of microbreweries' activities - from experimental product innovation, through the creation of a distinctive brand identity, to deep embeddedness in local communities and relational cooperation. Importantly, this category was not merely an abstract construct imposed by the researcher but reflected the ways in which brewery owners themselves defined the meaning of their work: they spoke of the need to "create something exceptional," "to be part of the local community," or "to educate consumers that craft beer is more than just alcohol" (field notes; interview transcripts, pp. 3-7).

The identified core category provides the foundation for developing a theoretical model that explains the functioning of craft breweries as entrepreneurial actors operating in an unstable and multidimensional environment. The model demonstrates that the competitiveness of microbreweries does not stem from simply replicating market patterns or from access to substantial capital, but rather from their ability to combine product innovation, quality understood as an ethos, brand uniqueness, and local embeddedness into a coherent mode of action (cf. Mintzberg et al., 1998, pp. 302-305). The study thus shows that entrepreneurship in the craft brewing industry should be understood not as the execution of classical strategies in a planning sense, but as a dynamic, creative, and

relational process in which locality and innovativeness intertwine with practices of adaptation and identity-building (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 180-186)

4.1. Profile of the empirical research sample

The research sample comprised a total of twenty-seven craft microbreweries located in Poland and Ukraine, selected according to the principles of purposive and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 96-99; 100-103). This selection was carried out in the spirit of constructivist grounded theory, with particular attention to the principle of maximum variation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 45-47). Consequently, the analysis included breweries operating both in major metropolitan centers and in peripheral regions, as well as entities differing in scale of operations, organizational models, and dominant distribution channels. Such an approach made it possible to capture the diversity of entrepreneurial trajectories in the craft sector, thereby providing a rich empirical basis for the analysis of adaptive and innovative strategies.

Open coding in this study is treated as an interpretive rather than purely technical procedure. As Krzysztof Konecki (2012) emphasises, coding constitutes an analytical act in which the researcher actively reconstructs meanings embedded in action, language and interaction. This approach aligns with constructivist grounded theory, in which categories are not "discovered" as objective entities but co-constructed through systematic engagement with empirical material.

The Polish sample encompassed fourteen breweries, representing a wide range of regions: the Mazowieckie, Dolnośląskie, Śląskie, Małopolskie, Podlaskie, Łódzkie, Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie, and Podkarpackie voivodeships. This distribution allowed for the inclusion of both metropolitan specificities (Warsaw, Wrocław, Katowice, Poznań, Gdańsk) and provincial experiences, where craft brewing developed in smaller towns and rural areas.

The analysis reveals a significant diversity of operational models. Alongside classical stationary breweries (IDIs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14), there were also brewpubs (IDIs 8, 9) and contract breweries, some of which underwent a process of professionalization and invested in their own infrastructure (IDIs 4, 10). This phenomenon illustrates a broader trend in the Polish sector, in which contract brewing functions as a transitional stage - allowing entrepreneurs to reduce entry barriers while

building brand recognition, and subsequently facilitating a shift toward more stable, stationary models.

In terms of employment scale, the majority of Polish breweries fell within the category of micro- and small enterprises, employing on average between eight and fifteen people, which enabled stable yet limited production. The smallest entities relied primarily on the work of the owner and family members (IDI 2), whereas the largest regional breweries reached employment levels of thirty to forty staff members (IDI 13).

Distribution channels in Poland were characterized by considerable diversity. The most common strategies included cooperation with multitap bars and specialist shops, complemented by participation in beer festivals and industry events. Online sales were gaining increasing importance (IDI 10), particularly in the post-COVID-19 period, when consumers were searching for alternative purchasing options. Export remained marginal and incidental, with the exception of a few enterprises with international ambitions (IDI 1). Table 4.1 presents detailed information on the Polish breweries surveyed, highlighting their diversity in terms of location, type of activity, year of establishment, number of employees, and distribution channels.

Table 4.1. Characteristics of the surveyed craft breweries - Poland

IDI	Region	Type of activity	Year established	Number of employees	Distribution channels
1	Śląskie	Stationary brewery	2011	6-20	Multitaps, specialist shops, export
2	Mazowieckie	Small family brewery	2015	2-3	Gastronomy (multitaps), beer pubs
3	Pomorskie	Stationary brewery	2010	10	Specialist shops, retail chains
4	Wielkopolskie	Contract brewery → own facility	2015	10	Wholesalers, pubs, gastronomy
5	Podlaskie	Stationary brewery	2016	10	Traditional trade, modern retail chains
6	Wielkopolskie	Stationary brewery	2018	8	Specialist shops, multitaps
7	Śląskie	Stationary brewery (after rebranding)	2013	10	Multitaps, specialist shops, local sales
8	Mazowieckie	Brewpub	2014	12	Own restaurant, local shops
9	Łódzkie	Stationary brewery with restaurant	2014	20-30	Restaurant, local shops, multitaps
10	Mazowieckie	Contract brewery + own production	2015	few people	Multitaps, festivals, online

IDI	Region	Type of activity	Year established	Number of employees	Distribution channels
					sales
11	Wielkopolskie	Medium-sized stationary brewery	2015	15-20 (seasonal)	Specialist shops, festivals
12	Dolnośląskie	Large stationary brewery with taproom	2014	11-15	Multitaps, own pub
13	Śląskie	Stationary brewery	2016	up to 40	Multitaps (Śląsk region)
14	Śląskie	Independent craft brewery	2012	10	Multitaps, specialist shops, local sales

Source: author's own elaboration.

The Ukrainian sample comprised thirteen breweries located in the Lviv, Zakarpattia, Odesa, Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, and Zaporizhzhia regions. A distinctive feature of the Ukrainian sample was the predominance of western regions (Lviv, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk), where breweries strongly emphasized local traditions, cultural heritage, and regional consumption rituals - illustrating the situated and context-dependent character of entrepreneurial strategies (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 131-136).

The dominant operational model consisted of family-owned microenterprises (IDIs 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 13), employing between two and ten people. Their strategies were rooted in close ties with local communities and in the multifaceted roles of the owners, who simultaneously acted as brewers, distributors, and cultural animators - a typical feature of micro-scale entrepreneurial practice (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 42-44; 96-101). Alongside them were medium-sized enterprises (IDI 6 - 25 employees) and breweries aspiring to the category of small businesses (IDI 8 - 40 employees), which oriented their activities toward export and e-commerce, signaling processes of professionalization and internationalization. These developmental trajectories reflect transitions identified in emergent sampling logic, where entrepreneurs adjust their models in response to new opportunities and constraints (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 61-62).

Distribution channels in Ukraine retained a distinctly local character, involving direct sales at the brewery, cooperation with regional restaurants and beer festivals, as well as partnerships with local shops. Social media and online sales were gaining increasing significance, enabling breweries to reach consumers despite supply chain disruptions and the challenges of wartime conditions (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 130-132). Notably, breweries from the western regions (IDIs 3, 9, 10) considered beer tourism and

folklorized branding to be central components of their development strategies, integrating economic activity with the cultural and touristic offerings of the region. Table 4.2. provides a detailed overview of the Ukrainian sample, illustrating the diversity of organizational models and distribution channels.

Table 4.2. Characteristics of the surveyed craft breweries - Ukraine

IDI	Region	Type of activity	Year established	Number of employees	Distribution channels
1	Odesa	Family-owned stationary mini-brewery	2009	10	On-site sales, online, partner restaurants/pubs
2	Odesa	Small family brewery	2012	10	Local sales, festivals, partner shops
3	Ivano-Frankivsk	Family brewery, culturally embedded	2002	17	Own restaurant, tourists, regional sales
4	Zakarpattia	Family microbrewery, tourism-oriented	2017	2	On-site sales, local shops, regional partners
5	Kyiv	Regional brewery with export ambitions	2017	14	Export, specialist shops, festivals, HoReCa
6	Dnipropetrovsk	Medium-sized urban brewery	2015	25	HoReCa, multitaps, shops, festivals
7	Zaporizhzhia	Microbrewery with social media/community strategy	2017	4	Social media, direct sales, events, HoReCa
8	Kyiv	Large urban experimental brewery	2015	40	Export, specialist shops, multitaps, e-commerce
9	Zakarpattia	Regional brewery with tourism and storytelling	2013	30	Own restaurants, regional shops, beer tourism
10	Lviv	New-wave brewery with folklorized branding	2020	6	Local shops, multitaps, festivals, contract sales
11	Ivano-Frankivsk	Contract brewery, experimental, online-focused	2020	4	Specialist shops, online sales, social media, festivals
12	Chernivtsi	Urban brewery with regional channels	2018	12	Festivals, regional partners, specialist shops
13	Zakarpattia	Small stationary brewery	2022	7	On-site sales, online, partner restaurants/pubs

Source: author's own elaboration.

Although the sampling strategy yielded a rich and diverse set of interviews, access to brewery owners was not without challenges. A substantial number of entrepreneurs declined participation: approximately 168 breweries in Poland and 93 in Ukraine did not respond to the invitation or politely refused, most often citing time constraints or reluctance to discuss business metrics. Among those who did participate, openness varied, yet the majority were willing to speak candidly about their practices, experiences and values, even if they avoided providing precise financial or production figures.

Importantly, across all interviews, only five IDI respondents refused to answer specific questions, typically those concerning sensitive operational or economic details. Despite these boundaries, the overall tone of the conversations was remarkably warm. Owners frequently displayed a sense of humour, self-distance and genuine enthusiasm for discussing their craft. This atmosphere of trust and mutual respect made it possible to gather deep, nuanced, and richly contextualized accounts of entrepreneurial practice, even in cases where certain quantitative details remained undisclosed.

The comparative analysis of the two samples highlights two dominant logics of microbrewery development in Poland and Ukraine. In Poland, the prevailing logic is one of professionalization and commercialization, evident in the dominance of stationary and brewpub models, the transition from contract to own infrastructure, and the gradual expansion into online sales and diversified distribution channels. This trajectory is accompanied by a relatively higher average scale of employment, typically between eight and fifteen staff members. In Ukraine, by contrast, the dominant logic is one of local embeddedness and resilience, reflected in the predominance of family-owned microenterprises, strong ties to local communities and tourism, and pronounced adaptive flexibility in the face of crises such as war and supply chain disruptions - practices that align with the concept of situated action and context-dependent entrepreneurial adaptation (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 131-136).

The research sample thus provides not only empirical material for analysing diverse entrepreneurial practices but also a lens through which to capture broader structural conditions. On the one hand, the Polish trajectory reflects systematic efforts toward professionalization, echoing wider sectoral patterns described in regional craft beer scholarship (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 259-264). On the other hand, the Ukrainian trajectory illustrates resilience and community-rooted entrepreneurship, shaped through conditions of uncertainty and crisis - an example of adaptive mechanisms emerging under shifting structural constraints (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 77-81). It is

worth noting that most breweries in both countries were established within the last ten to fifteen years, reflecting a broader trend of dynamic growth in the craft brewing industry across Central and Eastern Europe. In Poland, the peak of this process occurred between 2012 and 2017, coinciding with the boom of multitaps and the rise of craft beer's popularity (Garavaglia and Swinnen, 2018, pp. 249-252), whereas in Ukraine, intensification was particularly evident between 2015 and 2020, often in conjunction with tourism and a new wave of urban entrepreneurship (Swinnen, 2018, pp. 112-115).

The adopted sampling structure therefore enables the reconstruction of distinct trajectories of microbrewery development in the two contexts: in Poland - geared toward professionalization and commercialization, and in Ukraine - anchored in community embeddedness and resilience. Such a design not only facilitates the comparison of strategies but also allows for the identification of adaptive and innovative mechanisms, which in the subsequent sections of the dissertation will be further examined through open, axial, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 42-71).

4.2. Open and axial coding as a key stage in the conceptualization of empirical data and the construction of theoretical frameworks

The process of data analysis, conducted in accordance with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 10-13), provided the basis for identifying the core category and for organizing the empirical material into a coherent theoretical structure. Coding was not merely an analytical procedure-it constituted an advanced, iterative process of interpretation in which the researcher actively participated as a co-constructor of meaning (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 130-132). In this sense, coding should be understood not simply as the systematization of data, but as a tool for theory-building through deepened engagement with the practices under study (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 45-47).

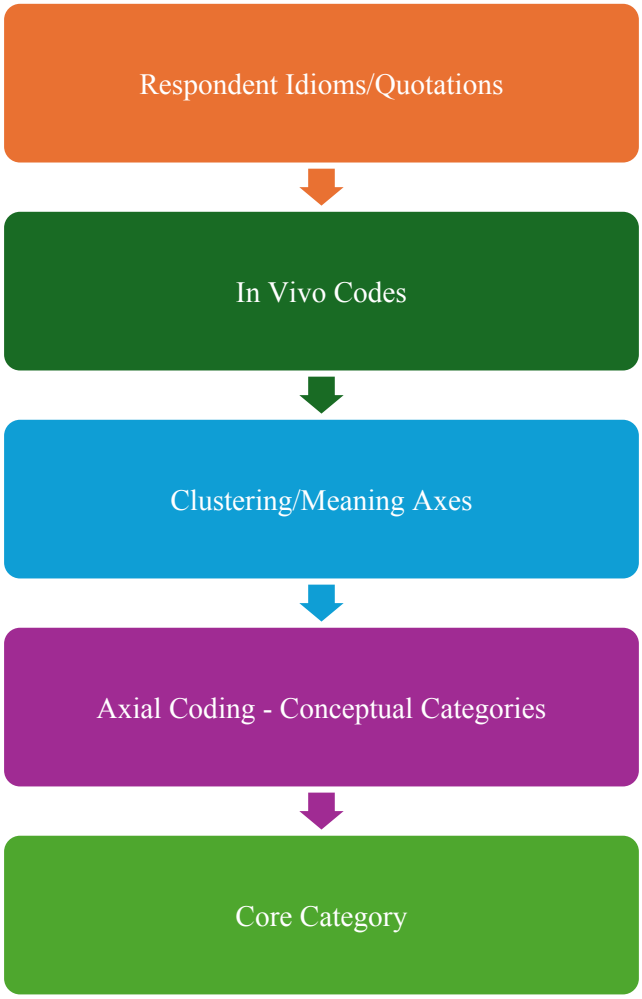
The stage of open coding constituted the starting point for the conceptualization of entrepreneurial strategies within the craft brewing sector. Following the constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), in vivo coding was applied in order to capture the original idioms, metaphors, and expressions employed by the interview participants. Within this analytical logic, language was not treated as a neutral medium of communication but as an active instrument for co-creating social reality (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 55-60). In vivo codes were thus not textual fragments alone but carriers of meaning, embedded in actions, relationships, and identities.

The empirical codes identified at this stage frequently capture mundane, routine actions rather than explicit strategic declarations. This observation resonates with Marek Krajewski's (2005) analysis of everyday practices as sites where social order is reproduced and negotiated. In the craft brewery context, strategic orientations are embedded in ordinary decisions concerning production rhythms, ingredient choices, communication styles and interaction with consumers.

In this perspective, coding was not a technical operation but a form of epistemological co-presence of the researcher with the entrepreneurial world. The analysis of codes was an attempt to reconstruct the underlying logic of entrepreneurial action-a logic that is not always reflected in classical strategic models but becomes visible in everyday decisions, linguistic imagery, and culturally grounded frames of meaning (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 130-136).

To further illustrate this interpretive movement from in vivo language to conceptual abstraction, Figure 4.1 visualises the core analytical pathway that guided the open coding stage. The figure depicts how interview participants' idioms, metaphors and emotionally charged expressions were transformed into meaning-bearing codes and, subsequently, into emerging conceptual categories. This visualisation clarifies the constructivist logic of grounded theory, in which coding is understood as a process of co-constructing meaning rather than mechanically classifying textual fragments (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 60-71).

Figure 4.1. Interpretive flow of open coding (Constructivist Grounded Theory)



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), Charmaz (2006).

During open coding, numerous recurring phrases and idioms emerged, which in consistent yet subtle ways reflected how entrepreneurs conceptualized their activities. Polish IDIs emphasized authenticity and narrative identity. As one stated, "Strategy is the ability to make bold but reasonable decisions. We are not brewing beer for everyone, only for those who appreciate quality and context" (IDI 7, Poland). Another explained, "For me, strategy means listening to the market, but never giving up on who we are. Every beer tells a story - with its name, its label, its style" (IDI 10, Poland). These statements illustrate that entrepreneurial strategies were understood not in terms of abstract models but as lived practices anchored in storytelling and meaning-making.

A distinctive feature of the interview participants' language was its metaphorical and emotionally charged character. As one brewer remarked: "Passion was the beginning.

We wanted to create something authentic, honest, brewed with heart - not just another product" (IDI 2, Poland).

Another observed: "Craft is a marathon, not a sprint. Good beer is not enough - you need a team, strategy, patience, and courage to fail" (IDI 4, Poland). Such expressions demonstrate that decisions were framed less as calculations of market margins than as existential commitments to craftsmanship.

Similarly, Ukrainian entrepreneurs expressed the intertwining of brewing with personal values and local identity. Local embeddedness was also framed as authenticity rather than marketing, as captured in the statement: "We work with locals not because it is trendy, but because we are the same" (IDI 2, Ukraine).

At the same time, the Ukrainian material revealed how strategies were shaped by conditions of instability and war. A brewer from Dnipro summarized the situation bluntly: "Strategy? We are at war, not in a corporation. We react" (IDI 6, Ukraine). Another highlighted the structural obstacles: "Paperwork takes weeks, because one ministry does not function, and another simply refuses" (IDI 8, Ukraine). Such quotations expose how entrepreneurial agency is enacted in conditions of precarity, where adaptation, resilience, and improvisation replace conventional notions of strategic planning.

Open coding thus revealed that these phrases and idioms were not incidental linguistic devices but carriers of deeper frames of meaning. They constituted distinct epistemologies of action, in which craft brewing was understood as a form of personal expression, a manifestation of cultural presence, and a practice embedded within community life. The narratives demonstrated that, for the respondents, beer was never simply a commodity or a market segment, but a medium of relationships, memory, dignity, and local heritage.

Such constellations of meaning-both in their substantive layer and in linguistic form-formed the foundation for the further conceptualization of entrepreneurial strategies as embedded, relational, and strongly individualized practices. Brewing, in this perspective, ceased to be a process of profit optimization and became instead a process of constructing and sustaining meaning within a socio-cultural space.

Among Polish IDIs, the motif of personal involvement in every stage of work appeared frequently, framed as a conscious choice and a declaration of values rather than a mere effect of limited resources. As one brewer noted: "I will not release a beer that I would not drink myself" (IDI 6, Poland). Similarly, IDI 4 (Poland) emphasized: "First

we taste, then we sell," showing that the act of production was inseparably linked to the producer's own quality assessment.

In the Ukrainian narratives, brewing was likewise presented as an organic part of life and identity. As one IDI explained: "We brew the beer we drink ourselves" (IDI 9, Ukraine). Another underlined the ethical dimension of the craft: "This is not about profit, it is about dignity" (IDI 2, Ukraine).

In both contexts-Polish and Ukrainian-the process of brewing was not described exclusively in operational terms. Rather, it was perceived as a sphere of action grounded in responsibility, pride, and direct contact with the consumer. Authenticity was not a marketing slogan but the result of the brewer's personal presence in the process, their sensory contact with the product, and their rootedness in local community relations.

Codes also referred to aesthetics and narrativity. As one Polish brewer stated: "Our team designs our labels - and you can see it" (IDI 3, Poland). From Ukraine, IDI 1 highlighted: "We integrate local color into marketing: the names of our beers are linked with the sea, […] with Ukrainian history" (IDI 1, Ukraine). These quotes illustrate how visual identity and storytelling were understood as integral elements of entrepreneurial practice.

Although such motifs recurred across the material, further analysis was required to structure them into broader fields of meaning. This made it possible to identify semantic axes-clusters of sense around which the interview participants' statements converged-thus preparing the ground for axial and selective coding.

For example, statements such as "We do things our own way" and "We have no catalogue" (IDI 3, Poland), or "We don't copy anyone" (IDI 7, Poland) clustered around an axis of autonomy and independence-not only as operational values but as an ideological core. In turn, remarks such as "Taproom is a conversation, not cash" (IDI 5, Poland) and "Together it is easier to survive" (IDI 8, Ukraine) gravitated toward the axis of relationality and community, revealing the embeddedness of entrepreneurship in interpersonal and local ties. Reid (2017, pp. 4-7) argued that authenticity in the craft brewing sector is strategically produced through narratives of place, local sourcing, and face-to-face interaction with consumers. These practices anchor breweries within specific socio-spatial contexts, allowing them to differentiate themselves without relying on scale or price competition. Authenticity thus emerges as a relational and spatially situated strategic resource rather than a symbolic add-on.Other statements, including "Our beer is our story" (IDI 2, Poland), "Labels are our manifesto" (IDI 1, Ukraine), and "Beer is a

message" (IDI 9, Ukraine) defined an axis of aesthetics and communication, pointing to the cultural and narrative dimension of entrepreneurial practice.

The identified meaning axes functioned as epistemological bridges, mediating between the research participants lived language and the emerging theoretical categories. Rather than flattening interviews into abstract classifications, these axes preserved the contextual depth of the data while enabling theoretical integration. They operated as interpretive frames, translating idioms into conceptual categories, thereby revealing entrepreneurship not as a set of rationalized strategies but as a practice embedded in relationships, communities, and cultural forms.

A systematic mapping of in vivo codes demonstrates this interpretive movement (Table 4.3.). For example, Autonomy and independence was articulated through expressions such as "own way," "no catalogue," "don't copy," or "different story," indicating a rejection of imitation and a strong preference for originality. Relationality and community was expressed in codes like "client comes back for flavor," "taproom = conversation," or "together survive," emphasizing trust, dialogue, and co-presence. Aesthetics and communication encompassed idioms such as "labels - manifesto," "beer = story," or "local color, history," framing beer as a cultural message. Innovativeness and change appeared in statements like "experiment weekly," "something new," or "momentary beers," pointing to experimentation as a constant rather than an exception.

Other meaning axes further expand this picture. Identity and sense of purpose surfaced in phrases like "mission" or "not volume, but meaning," stressing ethical commitments. Locality and community was conveyed in codes such as "from the region" or "local ingredients," grounding entrepreneurship in place and belonging. Cooperation and networking reflected collaborative logics ("share hops," "learn from each other," "collaborations = lifestyle"), while Quality as ethos was framed through idioms such as "quality = most important" and "taste first." In turn, Anti-corporate stance crystallized around codes like "not factory," "against current," or "not growth at any cost," signaling resistance to corporate logics of scale. Authenticity and identity drew on phrases such as "recipes are ours" or "recipe = craftsmanship."

Finally, the axis of existential embeddedness is particularly revealing. Brewers articulated brewing not as a profession but as a life imperative: "cannot do otherwise," "brewing is our life, not a job," "if we stopped brewing, we would lose ourselves," "beer is part of who we are," and "we are brewers before we are businessmen." These

expressions reveal entrepreneurship as an existential practice, in which brewing becomes a vehicle for sustaining dignity, coherence, and identity.

Table 4.3. Map of in vivo codes and meaning axes

Meaning axis	In vivo codes
Autonomy and independence	Own way, no catalogue, don't copy, different story, create, not replicate
Relationality and community	Client comes back for flavor, know clients, taproom = conversation, together survive, first person then client, time for talk
Aesthetics and communication	Labels - manifesto, beer = gesture, beer = story, labels - daughter, local color, history, pride = diversity
Innovativeness and change	Experiment weekly, every style = decision, something new, momentary beers, trial, hands brewing taste
Identity and sense of purpose	Mission, not volume but meaning, emotion
Locality and community	For ours and from ours, from the region, local ingredients, locality = value
Cooperation and networking	Share hops, learn from each other, collaborations = lifestyle
Quality as ethos	Quality = most important, taste first, not release if not drink myself
Anti-corporate stance	Not factory, against current, not growth at any cost, not for stock
Authenticity and identity	Recipes are ours, at the kettle, recipe = craftsmanship
Existential embeddedness	Cannot do otherwise, brewing is our life not a job, if we stopped brewing we would lose ourselves, this is our way of living not just working, beer is part of who we are, we are brewers before we are businessmen

Source: Author's own elaboration based on in vivo coding of qualitative interview data.

Analytically, the meaning axes identified in Table 4.3 did not function as final categories but as intermediate interpretive structures. They clustered in vivo codes into larger fields of meaning (autonomy, locality, cooperation, quality, etc.), while still remaining close to interview participants' own formulations. During axial coding, these axes were compared, combined and differentiated in order to identify higher-order processes that cut across individual interviews and national contexts (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Horizontal flow figure: In Vivo → Meaning axes → Axial categories

In vivo codes	→	**Meaning axis**	→	**Axial category**
"We do things our own way." "We have no catalogue." "We don't copy anyone." "If we have something to say - we brew." "It was never about being pretty - it was about being ours."	→	Autonomy and independence	→	Brand uniqueness
"Beer is a message." "Taste is a voice." "Our storytelling does not sell beer - it invites people into our everyday life." "Labels are our manifesto." "Our team designs our labels - and you can see it."	→	Aesthetics and communication	→	Brand uniqueness
"I will not make a beer that I would not drink myself." "I am responsible for every bottle. It is like my signature." "Experiment, but never at the expense of taste." "People stay because they know we don't cheat here." "Every beer passes our table."	→	Quality and responsibility	→	Quality as ethos
"For ours and from ours." "Local ingredients, local stories." "We brew for our own people." "Beer is a story about our village." "We weave local identity into the brand."	→	Local embeddedness	→	Local embeddedness
"Together it is easier to survive." "We share hops, equipment, everything." "Collabs are not competition - they are culture." "Sometimes we let the brewer make a batch that goes straight to the bar. It increases pride." "We had no hops, no labels, no people. But we had a network - that saved us."	→	Cooperation and solidarity	→	Relational cooperation
"Last year we released 76	→	Innovativeness and	→	Experimental innovation

In vivo codes	→	Meaning axis	→	Axial category
premieres." "We are always ready for new flavours." "We cannot stop experimenting." "Innovation is a way of breathing." "People were not afraid to try madness."		change		
"We cannot do otherwise." "Brewing is our life, not a job." "If we stopped brewing, we would lose ourselves." "This is our way of living, not just working." "We are brewers before we are businessmen."	→	Existential embeddedness	→	Core identity work

Source: Author's own elaboration based on in vivo coding of qualitative interview data.

For instance, the axes innovativeness and change, quality as ethos, authenticity and identity and existential embeddedness repeatedly co-occurred in segments where brewers spoke about experimentation, risk, responsibility and the emotional charge of their work. Phrases such as "experiment weekly," "something new," "not release if not drink myself," "cannot do otherwise" and "brewing is our life, not a job" appeared together in descriptions of recipe development, tasting rituals and decisions to introduce or withdraw specific beers. Through constant comparison, these clusters were reinterpreted not as isolated values, but as elements of a single process in which brewers experiment under conditions of responsibility, identity and embodied commitment. This integrative pattern provided the basis for the axial category later labelled Experimental innovation.

A similar movement occurred in relation to the axes Aesthetics and communication, Authenticity and identity and Autonomy and independence. In narrative sequences where interview respondents discussed labels, names, humour, visual style and "doing things our own way," codes such as "labels - manifesto," "beer = story," "recipes are ours," "own way," "don't copy," and "different story" frequently appeared together. These combinations did not merely indicate a concern with marketing design, but pointed to a broader process of expressive positioning: the brand as a medium through

which brewers articulated who they are, what they believe in and how they wish to be seen. Through axial coding, these intertwined dimensions were re-assembled into the category Brand uniqueness, understood as a practice of narrating and aestheticising entrepreneurial identity rather than only differentiating products.

The axis quality as ethos was likewise not treated as a self-standing topic, but analysed in terms of the conditions, actions and consequences associated with it. Segments coded with expressions such as “quality = most important,” “taste first,” and “I will not release a beer that I would not drink myself” were examined alongside descriptions of tasting rituals, batch testing and decisions to withdraw or correct products. These passages consistently revealed a patterned sequence: personal responsibility and fear of losing trust (conditions) → sensory and collective checking practices (actions) → stable reputation, returning customers and a sense of dignity (consequences). Axial coding therefore reconceptualised quality from a static attribute into a normative process, later captured in the category quality as ethos.

The axes locality and community and relationality and community formed another important cluster. In both polish and ukrainian material, codes such as “for ours and from ours,” “from the region,” “local ingredients,” “taproom = conversation,” “know clients,” and “together survive” frequently appeared in proximity. When examined through the lens of conditions-actions-consequences, these clusters pointed to a consistent mechanism: emotional and biographical attachment to a place (conditions) → practices of working with local ingredients, narrating local stories, participating in community events and maintaining personal contact with customers (actions) → outcomes in the form of loyalty, recognition and symbolic anchoring in the local milieu (consequences). This pattern justified the construction of the axial category local embeddedness, emphasising that locality is enacted through everyday relationships rather than simply given by geography. Reid and Gatrell (2015, pp. 41-47) emphasised that craft brewery strategies are heavily conditioned by regulatory regimes, zoning laws, and distribution infrastructures, which vary significantly across regions. These spatially differentiated constraints limit strategic options and encourage breweries to develop locally adapted business models, such as taproom-centred sales or short distribution channels. Strategy, therefore, is shaped less by managerial intention than by geographic and institutional context.

The axis cooperation and networking, often intertwined with relationality and community, yielded yet another processual configuration. Statements coded as “share

hops," "learn from each other," "collaborations = lifestyle," "together survive," or "we share customers, not compete" described situations in which breweries navigated resource constraints, logistical problems or creative stagnation through collaborative action. By examining how these in vivo codes were situated within broader narrative sequences, axial coding reconstructed cooperation as a pattern involving: scarcity, uncertainty or opportunity (conditions) → sharing ingredients, infrastructure and knowledge, co-brewing, co-organising events (actions) → increased resilience, learning, expanded visibility and a sense of belonging to a craft community (consequences). These recurrences gave rise to the axial category Relational cooperation, which captures both the operational and the value-laden dimensions of collaboration.

Crucially, axial coding was not a one-time "re-labelling" exercise but an iterative movement between data and emerging structure. Provisional linkages between meaning axes and nascent categories were constantly tested against new interview fragments, including negative or deviant cases. For example, in breweries more oriented towards commercial scaling or export, the axes of autonomy and authenticity sometimes coexisted with more conventional strategic rhetoric. Instead of discarding such cases, they were used analytically to delineate the boundaries of categories and to refine their properties (e.g., when authenticity is mobilised rhetorically rather than embedded in daily practice).

Throughout this process, analytic memos played a central role. They documented how particular clusters of in vivo codes and axes seemed to "pull together" into broader processes, as well as how these processes related to one another. For instance, early memos noted overlaps between innovativeness and locality in situations where experimentation explicitly drew on local ingredients; later memos distinguished when such practices were more strongly driven by the logic of experimental innovation and when by local embeddedness. In this way, axial coding did not erase the complexity of the data but organised it into interconnected processes whose properties and dimensions could be systematically compared.

The outcome of this stage was a set of axial categories-such as experimental innovation, brand uniqueness, quality as ethos, local embeddedness and relational cooperation-each defined not only by thematic content but by identifiable conditions, actions/interactions, consequences and contextual influences. These categories retained a clear connection to the original language of IDI`s, through their roots in in vivo codes and meaning axes, yet at the same time operated at a higher level of abstraction, capable of explaining patterns across cases and national contexts.

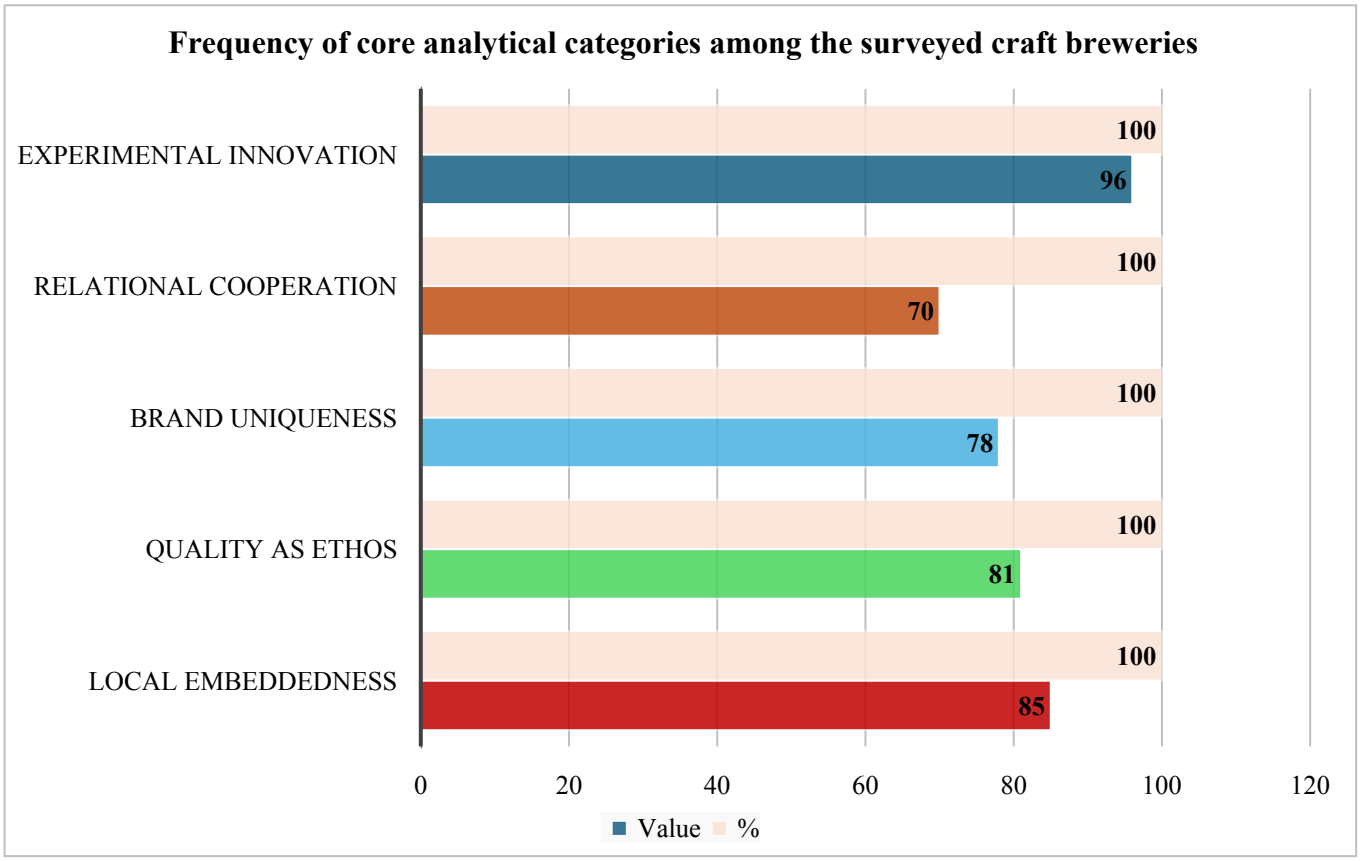
In sum, the transition from in vivo codes to meaning axes and then to axial categories constituted a layered interpretive movement. It allowed the analysis to move beyond isolated statements towards reconstructing entrepreneurial strategies as embedded, relational and processual practices. This, in turn, prepared the ground for the subsequent stage of selective coding, in which the relationships between axial categories were integrated into a core category and an overarching theoretical model of craft entrepreneurship.

4.3. Meaning-constituting categories of craft brewery practices identified through axial coding

Building on the insights generated during open coding, the axial coding stage enabled the analysis to move from dispersed in vivo expressions toward more integrated conceptual patterns. Through this process, five central meaning-categories were identified-experimental innovation, brand uniqueness, quality as ethos, local embeddedness, and relational cooperation. It is crucial to emphasize that these categories were not predetermined or derived deductively from existing literature. Rather, they surfaced inductively from the accumulated empirical material, emerging through constant comparison, memo-writing, and the analysis of how different interview participant framed their practices, constraints, values, and relationships. These categories therefore function as grounded interpretive axes that capture the core dimensions of entrepreneurial action within the craft brewing sector.

To demonstrate their analytical weight, the Figure 4.3 visualises the relative frequency with which each category appeared across the interviews. Frequency does not imply importance in the positivist sense; instead, it indicates the analytical density and saturation of each theme within participants' narratives. The distribution was established during axial coding and subsequently confirmed through selective coding, in line with the logic of theoretical saturation. The relationships reconstructed through axial coding reflect broader institutional conditions shaping entrepreneurial action**.** Witold Morawski (2001) argues that organisational strategies are always embedded within institutional arrangements that define available resources, constraints and legitimate courses of action. The axial categories identified here therefore capture not only individual responses but patterned adaptations to regulatory, market and cultural environments.

Figure 4.3. Frequency of core analytical categories among the surveyed craft breweries (N = 27)



Source: Author's own elaboration based on the qualitative interview data.

Experimental innovation (96%) proved to be the most pervasive category, reflecting the centrality of improvisation, iterative experimentation, and sensory-driven adaptation in the day-to-day operational logics of the breweries studied. Local embeddedness (85%) and quality as ethos (81%) followed closely, demonstrating that entrepreneurial practices were anchored not only in production-based values but also in spatial, cultural, ethical, and community-oriented commitments. Brand uniqueness (78%) emerged as a durable component of identity work and as a key mechanism for narrative and aesthetic differentiation. Finally, relational cooperation (70%), although invoked less frequently, surfaced as a crucial integrative category-one that supported collective learning, resource-sharing, and the diffusion of tacit knowledge and reputation within the craft sector.

These categories perform a dual function. Analytically, they provide the scaffolding necessary to interpret the dispersed actions, metaphors, and idioms expressed in the interviews. Substantively, they illuminate how brewers construct the meaning of their entrepreneurial activity, which values they privilege, and how they negotiate their

entrepreneurial identities under conditions of volatility, scarcity, and cultural responsibility. Importantly, these dimensions do not operate in isolation. Instead, they form a dynamic and interdependent system, wherein innovation, locality, identity, quality, and relationality co-constitute one another. As the subsequent sections will demonstrate, it is precisely this interplay-rather than any single category-that shapes the complex logic of action in the craft brewing sector.

4.3.1. Experimental innovation

Experimental innovation emerged as one of the most saturated and internally coherent categories at the stage of axial coding. In contrast to classical conceptions of innovation-such as Joseph A. Schumpeter's definition of it as "the introduction of a new combination of factors of production" (Schumpeter, 1934, p. 66)-the owners of craft breweries did not treat innovativeness as a strategic act of introducing market novelties. Their understanding of innovation was rooted not in a functionalist logic of efficiency, but in everyday practices, production rituals, and relations with the local environment

Lenart-Gansiniec et al. (2023, pp. 19–21) noted that innovation in small organizations frequently arises from iterative experimentation and adaptive routines, particularly where formal innovation systems are absent. The figure 4.4 presents the principal empirical statements that confirm the embeddedness of innovativeness as a daily practice:

Figure 4.4. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Experimental innovation"

Experimental innovation	"We constantly test new styles. We have introduced Pastry Sour, Cold IPA, and non-alcoholic beers. We treat trends as an inspiration, but we do not follow them blindly." (IDI 1, Poland)
	Modern fermentation processes, quality control, cooling systems. But also innovation in the way of thinking about the product…" (IDI 6, Poland)
	"One of the favorite experiments: a lager brewed with citrus peel and oak bark. You won't find anything like this in a store." (IDI 7, Ukraine)
	"We are always experimenting. We have brewed over 170 varieties. We produce classic IPA, Stout, Doppelbock, Pils, but our focus is on experiments: smoked beer with whisky aromas, or beer with pepper, beetroot, onion, dill - their popularity remains stable." (IDI 11, Ukraine)
	"We use a modern fermentation system that allows us to create different beer styles and maintain consistent product quality." (IDI 5, Ukraine)
	"We actively experiment with ingredients such as honey, wild hops, and juniper, which give our beer a distinctive taste. We also use spring water from local Carpathian sources, which adds unique purity and aroma to the beer." (IDI 9, Ukraine)
	"We release on average 70–80 new beers per year. Only Bavarian Pale remains permanent - everything else is experimentation: new hops, additives, styles, often unconventional ideas. Sometimes we draw inspiration from others, sometimes the idea arises by chance. Innovation is our strength." (IDI 2, Poland)
	"We have introduced barrel-aged beers in bourbon casks, beers with the addition of fruits, coffee, spices, as well as modern styles such as Hazy IPA and Cold IPA." (IDI 7, Poland)

Source: Author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews

In the cases analysed, innovation was not merely a reaction to external competitive pressures nor simply a tool of differentiation. While some respondents acknowledged that experimentation facilitated the acquisition of new customers and contributed to building brand distinctiveness, the underlying logic of action was not market-instrumental. Instead, experimental innovation emerged as an immanent mode of practice-a routinized and internalized activity, constituting an integral element of both the professional identity of brewers and the organizational culture of their breweries.

Its defining features included rhythmicity, emergence, embodiment, emotional intensity, and a deep embeddedness in local flavor and material resources. Experimentation was described not only as a search for novelty but as a form of care: for the meaningfulness of work, for the quality of relations within the team, and for the creation of products marked by individuality and emotional engagement. For the brewers interviewed, innovativeness was not a strategy imposed from the outside, but rather stemmed from an internal need to act in ways consistent with their values and identities.

As one Polish IDI brewer explained:

"We do not innovate because the market demands it. We simply cannot do otherwise. If we stop experimenting, it feels as if we stop brewing with our hearts. Without it, the brewery becomes just production-and that is not for us." (IDI 2, Poland)

Innovative practices encompassed barrel-aged beers, the use of adjuncts such as fruit, coffee, or spices, and the adoption of new global styles such as Hazy IPA or Cold IPA. The need for constant exploration of new flavors was consistently emphasized as a condition of sustained development:

"We introduced barrel-aged beers, beers with fruits, coffee, spices, and modern styles like Hazy IPA or Cold IPA. We are always ready for new flavors. Without this, we cannot keep going." (IDI 4, Poland)

Novelty was not understood as a one-time event or a marketing campaign, but as an integral element of the organizational rhythm:

"Last year we released 76 premieres. We did not repeat a single label. Novelty for us is not a campaign-it is a way of breathing" (IDI 3, Poland)

For some, innovativeness was tied to the principle of accessibility: the pursuit of uniqueness did not exclude the aspiration to keep new products understandable and available to a wide range of consumers:

"We constantly experiment with recipes and ingredients. New releases are introduced with accessibility in mind-so that they do not become elite, but reach broadly. Innovation does not have to be niche-our goal is to combine uniqueness with availability." (IDI 5, Poland)

Ukrainian brewers echoed this pattern, stressing the anchoring of innovation in local resources, both sensory and narrative:

"In 2021 we brewed 41 batches. Only four beers were repeated. The rest were experiments-with tea, with nuts, with smoked malt, with sour plums." (IDI 8, Ukraine)

"In addition, we actively experiment with local ingredients to create unique flavors that reflect the characteristics of our region." (IDI 7, Ukraine)

Experimentation extended beyond recipes to encompass forms of distribution and communication: seasonal releases available only on weekends, taproom-only sales, and deliberate departures from commercial labeling conventions. These practices reinforced team cohesion and fostered collective responsibility:

"In our team we encourage ideas. Sometimes we let the brewer make a 'brewer's batch' that goes straight to the bar. It increases engagement and pride." (IDI 7, Ukraine)

Taste was consistently described as the foundational value, non-instrumental and independent of marketing pressures:

"…for us, taste is not marketing-it is the heart of beer. True, deep, and non-trivial. We always say in the team: 'experiment, but never at the expense of taste.' Our brewer? Definitely too creative. He loves to mix everything that can be ground or brewed. One day he made a beer with nettle. Reactions in the company were… well, different. Some laughed, others shook their heads. But we released only 80 bottles-and they disappeared in two days. People were not afraid to try madness. And that is exactly what matters to us." (IDI 13, Ukraine)

The sensory and narrative function of innovation was also evident in metaphors repeatedly used by IDIs brewers: "Taste is a voice," "Beer is a message," "It is not only taste-it is emotion." Innovation thus became a communicative practice with consumers, rather than merely a technique of market differentiation.

At the same time, innovativeness functioned as a clear marker of distinction from the mass market:

"If a brewery says it is craft but introduces two beers a year-for me, that is not craft. We do two premieres every month." (IDI 11, Poland)

On average, respondents reported between 20 and 60 premieres annually, with record cases reaching 96 batches. Only 5-10% of these beers were repeated in identical form, which confirms that innovation was not an exception but an organizing pattern of action. Analytical memos revealed that innovativeness served not only a declarative function but also a practical one: it operated as a tool for testing consumer reception, adapting to available resources, and consistently building brand identity.

Experimental innovation, therefore, was neither marginal nor supportive but constituted a structural core of entrepreneurial models. Its role extended beyond technological aspects (such as recipe testing) to include identity work and communicative

practice. Through innovative series, limited editions, and surprising flavor combinations, the breweries forged distinctive styles and established recognizable identities in the market. Sztangret's work supports interpreting experimentation not only as product development but as a learning mechanism grounded in market knowledge circulation. Where knowledge is continuously acquired, interpreted, and shared, innovation becomes an emergent outcome of relational learning rather than a discrete R&D function. This view is consistent with the craft brewery logic of frequent releases and iterative learning from audiences and peers, reinforcing innovation as a rhythmic practice embedded in everyday interaction (Sztangret, 2013).

In this sense, innovation was not implemented intentionally and sequentially as in technocratic models, but rather reproduced continuously and organically as an embedded meaning-making practice.

As such, experimental innovation naturally led into the next category: brand uniqueness, understood not only as product differentiation but also as the construction of narrative, aesthetics, and language of communication. For many of the breweries studied, "being different" did not simply mean offering unusual products but entailed the creation of a comprehensive package of meanings. Examples such as labels designed by family members, references to regional dialects, humorous allusions to popular culture, or self-ironic marketing texts illustrated that the communication of craft brands was embedded in the language of culture, not merely in the logic of the market. As one Ukrainian brewer remarked:

"Our storytelling does not sell beer-it invites people into our everyday life. Beer is only the medium." (IDI 12, Ukraine)

While the empirical material demonstrates the depth and emotional intensity of experimentation in craft breweries, grounded theory analysis makes it possible to conceptualise how innovation unfolds as a process. Through constant comparison across cases and contexts, the category stabilised around four analytical dimensions: triggers, actions, results, and influencing conditions (Table 4.4). These dimensions reveal that experimental innovation functions as a dynamic, context-responsive practice rather than a singular event.

Table 4.4. Experimental innovation as a process in craft microbreweries

Triggers	Actions	Results	Influencing conditions
Seasonal/local ingredients	Iterative experimentation in small batches	Emergence of new beer variants	Local culture and craft ethos

Triggers	Actions	Results	Influencing conditions
Supply disruptions, shortages	Ingredient substitution, adaptive reformulation	Strengthened authenticity and identity	Structure/reliability of supply networks
Regional/cultural identity cues	Limited/seasonal editions	Organisational resilience	Sensory and technical skill
Collaboration opportunities	Sensory evaluation loops	Local market distinctiveness	Relational ties and community networks
Direct consumer feedback	Peer consultation, knowledge exchange	Enhanced adaptability	Regulatory and crisis pressures

Source: Author's own elaboration based on in vivo coding of qualitative interview data

Analytic memos indicate that experimental innovation in the studied microbreweries was not initiated through deliberate planning or strategic intent aimed at market novelty. Instead, innovation was consistently activated by contextual stimuli embedded in everyday production environments. These triggers included the seasonal availability of local ingredients, supply shortages that necessitated improvisation, aspirations to express regional or cultural identity, opportunities for collaboration with other producers, and direct consumer feedback obtained during tastings. Through constant comparative analysis, it became clear that brewers did not frame their actions as innovation-seeking per se, but rather as appropriate and situated responses to signals emerging from their material, social, and cultural surroundings. Innovation thus appeared as a reactive and relational process, grounded in attentiveness to context rather than in abstract market orientation.

Following these contextual triggers, brewers engaged in a set of practices that were emergent, negotiated, and embodied. These included systematic sensory experimentation, ingredient substitution and recipe reformulation, the production of limited or seasonal editions, and the incorporation of staff members, peers, and consumers into iterative tasting loops. In parallel, relational networks within the craft brewing community were mobilised for rapid technical problem-solving, enabling flexible adjustments to production processes. These actions align closely with grounded theory conceptions of situated practice: they unfolded through interaction, were shaped by ongoing feedback, and relied on tacit, experience-based knowledge rather than codified procedures.

Across both Poland and Ukraine, these practices generated a range of outcomes that extended beyond product-level novelty. Experimentation resulted in new recipe variants, some of which were subsequently integrated into core product lines. It strengthened perceptions of authenticity and reinforced local identity, positioning innovation as a cultural expression as much as a technical achievement. Moreover, these

practices enhanced adaptive capacity under conditions of uncertainty, supported differentiation in local markets, and contributed to the development of resilience-enhancing routines within production systems. Innovation therefore emerged simultaneously as a strategic resource and a cultural process, embedded in everyday work and organisational identity.

At the same time, innovation was shaped and constrained by a set of influencing conditions that anchored it firmly in place and relationship. Local socio-cultural expectations defined the boundaries of acceptable experimentation, while the strength or fragility of supply networks affected the scope for improvisation. Embodied sensory expertise played a critical role in managing uncertainty related to taste and quality, and relational cohesion among craft actors facilitated knowledge exchange and collective problem-solving. In Ukraine, crisis conditions further intensified the importance of flexibility, improvisation, and mutual support, amplifying the role of innovation as a survival-oriented practice. Taken together, these conditions demonstrate that experimental innovation in microbreweries is deeply anchored-rooted in materials, places, and relationships-and cannot be understood as a detached or universally transferable strategy.

Early memos construed innovation as "a reaction to scarcity," but deeper comparisons revealed that brewers also innovated under stable conditions, driven by seasonal resources, aesthetic impulses and collaborative energies. This required reconceptualising innovation as a rhythmic, ongoing practice rather than an episodic response. Memos documented how brewers articulated experimentation through metaphors of embodiment ("the beer tells you what to do"), affect ("we cannot stop experimenting") and relation ("innovation keeps the team alive"). These insights suggested that experimentation operates as a practice of care: care for taste, care for meaning, care for community.

Cross-country comparison further deepened the memo analysis. Polish cases emphasised sensory refinement; Ukrainian cases emphasised resilience under infrastructural instability. Yet the core process-trigger → action → consequence → conditioned by environment-remained constant, confirming saturation. Memos converged on the insight that innovation is anchored in place, materials, relationships and embodied knowledge, rather than being driven by abstract market logic.

In this sense, experimental innovation does not merely produce new beers-it constructs identities, relationships and meanings. It forms a foundational mechanism

through which brewers articulate who they are and what their breweries stand for. As the next section demonstrates, this anchored approach to experimentation feeds directly into the development of brand uniqueness, understood not simply as market differentiation but as the cultural, aesthetic and narrative expression of craft identity.

4.3.2. Brand uniqueness

The category of brand uniqueness emerged in the analysis as a natural consequence of experimental practices. While innovativeness organized the rhythm of brewery operations and served as a way of renewing meaning within the production process, brand uniqueness manifested itself at the level of communication, aesthetics, and narrative. For the entrepreneurs studied, "being different" did not signify simple product differentiation within the logic of the market, but rather constituted a form of expression-articulating personal convictions, cultural identities, and individual stories. Organisational identity and branding processes contribute to the interpretation of strategic priorities by articulating values, goals, and expectations. Gębarowski (2018) observes that internal branding initiatives often involve multiple, coexisting interpretations of organisational identity, reflecting diverse perspectives among organisational members. Employees therefore actively participate in shaping how strategic intentions are translated into everyday practice.

Interview participants consistently emphasized that distinctiveness did not arise from a competitive imperative but from the need for authentic self-expression. The brand became a medium of self-articulation, through which brewers could communicate their values, sense of aesthetics, and relationships with their surroundings. In this sense, uniqueness was not a technique of market positioning (Kotler and Keller, 2016, pp. 252-258), but a narrative practice rooted in everyday life, sensitivity, and culture.

In the analysed material, uniqueness manifested itself in multiple dimensions: through the aesthetics of labels designed within family circles, through references to local dialects and histories, and through radical "anti-branding" strategies that challenged dominant communication patterns. These actions were not perceived as decoration or marketing gimmicks, but as cultural practices in which the brand became a carrier of values and experiences, and beer-a medium for storytelling. Figure 4.5 presents a figure that synthesizes these dimensions, highlighting how aesthetic, cultural, and narrative practices intersect to form the category of "Brand uniqueness".

Figure 4.5. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Brand Uniqueness"

Brand uniqueness	"What distinguishes us is a deep attachment to historical recipes, the use of local ingredients, and the preservation of Lviv's cultural traditions. We also actively collaborate with local artists and designers, which enables us to create not only high-quality beer but also original packaging that becomes an integral part of our brand." (IDI 10, Ukraine)
	"That is why, instead of pretending to be 'folk', we prefer to be authentic. The fact that the labels are designed by one of our daughters, that the beer is produced on site, that you personally know the people who make it - this, for us, is true tradition. Not superficial, but rooted in relationships, quality, and respect for craftsmanship." (IDI 10, Poland)
	"In short: trends change quickly, but if you have an identity and a team that understands the market, you can adapt to them without losing your soul. And that is what we strive to do." (IDI 11, Poland)
	"The labels are cheeky, humorous, with a bit of an edge. The names are ours - Polish, often unusual, but memorable. People recognize us because we are consistent and authentic." (IDI 4, Poland)
	"Our beer is made with artesian water, European malt, and hops from three continents. We are not simply about 'bottling and selling.' We brew classics with respect for technology: long maturation, pure yeast, and temperature control. When everyone on the market is chasing hazy IPAs and milkshake sours, we say: here, have a lager unlike any you have ever tasted. This is our message." (IDI 1, Ukraine)
	"We switched to dry fermentation, minimized waste, and began packaging in craft containers made of recycled glass. It is expensive, but it is the right thing to do." (IDI 2, Ukraine)
	"We try to incorporate Hutsul elements into everything we do: from label design, to the naming of beer styles, and the organization of festivals." (IDI 1, Ukraine)
	"Apart from the core line (lager, dark, wheat, IPA), we regularly launch seasonal varieties, for example with sea buckthorn, basil, ginger, or coffee. At Christmas 2023, we introduced a limited spiced beer with orange peel and cinnamon, which became a real hit with more than 700 bottles sold in a week." (IDI 13, Ukraine)

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews

The respondents repeatedly emphasized that distinctiveness did not stem from the imperative to compete through formal differentiation, but from an inner necessity to articulate themselves, their histories, and their values. As one Polish brewer explained:

"It was never about being pretty-it was about being ours." (IDI 2, Poland)

Within this logic, one brewery organized artistic evenings in its taproom, during which guests created beer labels-dismantling the boundary between producer and

consumer. Here, aesthetics ceased to serve a decorative function; instead, it became a medium of participation and communal expression (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012, pp. 52-55).

By contrast, one Ukrainian brewery adopted a radical strategy of "anti-branding":

"This is our protest against uniformity. Either it interests you, or you pass by-and that's fine." (IDI 12, Ukraine)

In this case, labels were deliberately illegible, printed on grey paper and signed by hand, representing a conscious act of contesting marketing conventions and a manifesto of aesthetic independence. Such actions align with the logic of narrative demarketing (Brown, 2003), whereby the brand does not seek the attention of the mass consumer but creates conditions for authentic resonance with a narrow, self-aware audience.

These practices reveal a deeper meaning of uniqueness-understood not as "creative image-making," but as a consequence of identity and the courage to remain authentic under market pressures of standardization. Statements such as:

"We don't have a line, we don't have fixed labels. We don't even have a plan. If we have something to say-we brew." (IDI 13, Ukraine)

confirm that, for many breweries, the decision to produce was preceded by a meaning impulse, not a sales calculation.

Empirical data also show that beer could be treated as a medium of expression, not merely a product for sale. Examples include a beer named "Irreversible" (IDI 3, Poland), referring to the experience of loss and post-pandemic trauma, and another ironically titled "Bad" (IDI 7, Ukraine), intentionally referencing a failed technological process. Both cases confirm that the product functions as a carrier of emotion and a communicative gesture, rather than solely as a commodity.

Quantitatively, 21 out of the 27 breweries surveyed employed strategies of aesthetic distinction; 16 utilized linguistic or symbolic otherness (e.g., quotations, poetry, local dialects); and 9 employed humor and self-irony as tools of differentiation. Only four breweries reported using repetitive, systematic branding.

Thus, uniqueness can be regarded not as an exception but as a rule-a central communicative and identificatory mechanism. Its functions were simultaneously:

a) Identity-related - expressing the values and personality of founders,
b) Relational - building community with consumers and locality,
c) Narrative - giving products an affective and story-like dimension.

Uniqueness was therefore not an anomaly but the dominant mode of communication with consumers. It operated as an identity practice, a relational connector, and a narrative medium-becoming a central component of differentiation in a market saturated with similar products.

Sobotkiewicz highlights that market distinctiveness is stabilised not merely by promotional content but by organisational decisions that embed marketing logic into everyday operations-especially decisions about how the firm learns from customers and translates that learning into positioning and communication. In this sense, brand uniqueness is sustained through organisational routines that continuously reproduce a coherent promise of value, rather than through isolated campaigns. This interpretation supports the view that craft brewery "uniqueness" operates as an enacted organisational pattern grounded in how marketing and strategic action are integrated in practice (Sobotkiewicz, 2007).

The analysis showed that brand uniqueness does not function merely as visual distinction or stylistic difference but reflects a deeper processual logic grounded in everyday relational and cultural practices. When examined through axial coding, the category revealed a coherent structure shaped by identifiable triggers, actions, results and contextual conditions. Uniqueness, therefore, is not a static attribute of the brand but a practice-an ongoing enactment of identity, locality and expressive agency. Table 4.5 reconstructs this dynamic in grounded-theory terms.

Table 4.5. Brand uniqueness as a process in craft microbreweries

Triggers	**Actions**	**Results**	**Influencing conditions**
Need for authentic self-expression	Development of distinctive labels, names, symbols	Recognisable brand identity	Aesthetic preferences and team creativity
Desire to articulate locality/culture	Use of regional dialects, histories, humour	Cultural resonance and emotional attachment	Local cultural repertoires
Rejection of industrial norms	Anti-branding, hand-written labels, DIY design	Distinctiveness from mass-market	Craft ethos and anti-corporate stance
Interaction with consumers and community	Incorporating local stories, inside jokes, shared experiences	Relational intimacy with consumers	Taproom culture, social networks
Personal narratives and lived experiences	Storytelling through product names and visual metaphors	Affective meaning embedded in products	Biographical influences, emotional events

Source: Author's own elaboration based on in vivo coding of qualitative interview data

Analytic memos consistently indicate that brand uniqueness in the studied microbreweries was not activated by market incentives or competitive positioning, but by identity-based impulses rooted in the entrepreneurs' sense of self. The drive to differentiate emerged from internal needs to express personal convictions, humour, and biographical stories, as well as from emotional experiences such as pride, loss, irony, or attachment to place. Local cultural symbols that "felt right," a deliberate rejection of corporate aesthetics, and ongoing dialogues with consumers and neighbours further reinforced these impulses. Across cases, the motivation to be unique was anchored in meaning rather than strategy. Constant comparative analysis confirmed that uniqueness originated primarily from who the entrepreneurs were, not from what they believed the market expected of them.

In response to these identity-driven triggers, breweries enacted a distinctive repertoire of brand-making practices that departed markedly from conventional marketing logics. Labels were often designed within family circles or close friendships, drawing on hand-drawn sketches, collage-like visuals, or unconventional typography. Brewers incorporated local dialects, urban humour, folk symbols, and regionally resonant references, while intentionally embracing "anti-branding" techniques such as raw, unpolished, or deliberately imperfect aesthetics. Product names frequently embedded stories, metaphors, and emotional cues rather than functional descriptors. In some cases, breweries created participatory rituals-such as inviting guests to design labels during taproom events-thereby blurring the boundary between producer and consumer. These practices reveal brand uniqueness as an embodied cultural craft and a relational process, rather than as a specialised marketing function.

Across the cases, the outcomes of these practices converged along several dimensions. Breweries developed highly recognisable brand aesthetics, even in the absence of strict visual consistency or formal brand guidelines. Brands elicited deep emotional resonance among local consumers, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity between the brewery and its surrounding community. Uniqueness also functioned as a symbolic boundary, clearly differentiating craft beer from industrial products. Over time, the brand itself emerged as a cultural object-imbued with meaning, narrative, and social significance-rather than merely as a commercial signifier attached to a commodity. In this sense, uniqueness generated both strategic consequences, such as differentiation and loyalty, and existential consequences, related to self-expression and identity affirmation.

The analysis further demonstrates that brand uniqueness was shaped, enabled, and constrained by a set of contextual conditions that anchored it in lived social worlds. Regional cultural codes influenced which symbols and narratives were intelligible or legitimate. The artistic skills, humour, and aesthetic sensibilities of the team shaped the expressive range of branding practices, while the openness and participatory orientation of local consumers determined the extent to which relational and co-creative forms of branding could flourish. The broader craft ethos-emphasising authenticity, transparency, and DIY aesthetics-provided normative support for anti-corporate and experimental expressions. Finally, biographical elements from founders' personal histories supplied the emotional and narrative material from which brand meanings were constructed.

Notably, the earliest analytic memos tended to frame uniqueness as a form of creative marketing. However, through constant comparison, this interpretation proved insufficient. Branding was not subordinate to a promotional logic aimed at persuasion or market capture; instead, it functioned as an expressive, relational, and cultural practice. The recurring phrase "the need to be ourselves" appeared more frequently in the data than any market-oriented rationale. This empirical pattern prompted a decisive analytic shift: from interpreting uniqueness as differentiation to conceptualising it as self-articulation. Brand uniqueness thus emerged as a practice through which entrepreneurs made sense of themselves, their place, and their relationships, embedding identity into material and symbolic form.

Memos also highlighted that uniqueness was a collective practice. Labels designed by a founder's sister, jokes born during brewing sessions, or names referencing neighbourhood stories revealed that branding emerged through intimate social interactions, not professionalised design pipelines. This relational production of identity was especially salient in taproom contexts, where staff and consumers co-created meaning.

Cross-case comparison strengthened the category. In Polish cases, uniqueness often drew from humour, pop-culture references or visual experimentation. In Ukrainian cases, uniqueness often embodied resilience, heritage or emotional narration of collective trauma. Despite different emphases, the underlying process-identity impulse → expressive action → affective resonance → relational validation-was consistent across contexts.

By the stage of selective coding, memos converged on the conclusion that brand uniqueness is not primarily a strategy but a cultural practice of identity-making. It

functions as the expressive layer of entrepreneurial being, translating inner values, local belonging and emotional experiences into symbolic form. This makes brand uniqueness a central meaning-making mechanism in craft entrepreneurship.

4.3.3. Quality as ethos

The third key category identified in the process of axial coding is quality, understood not as a technical specification of the product, but as an ethos of practice-a deeply internalized moral and relational imperative regulating production, social, and epistemic activities. Quality should be understood as a process of continuous improvement embedded in everyday organisational practices rather than as a one-time final state (Starostka-Patyk, 2017, pp. 31–34).Analysis of the empirical material indicates that in microbreweries, quality functions as a meaning-making organizational value, anchored in personal commitment, honesty, and responsibility toward consumers.

Interview excerpts provide strong evidence of this ethos. As one Ukrainian brewer noted:

"I am responsible for every bottle. It is like giving my signature." (IDI 3, Ukraine)

These statements confirm that the decision to release a product into the market is experienced as a symbolic act of identity verification, in which the brewer not only guarantees technical correctness but affirms moral responsibility and professional integrity. Beer, therefore, becomes not merely a commodity but an emanation of personal and professional values. Consistent quality practices contribute to trust, reputation, and organisational identity, particularly in craft-based enterprises (Starostka-Patyk, 2017, pp. 35–38).

To further deepen the interpretation of this category, a conceptual figure (Figure 4.6) was developed, illustrating the different dimensions through which the brewers articulated their understanding of quality.

Figure 4.6. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Quality as an Ethos"

Quality as an ethos	"But certainly, the things that are very, very important in this industry are product quality and fairly rapid adaptation to new trends. […] For us, this is even doubly important, because our beer is unpasteurized and therefore has a short shelf life. Any mistakes in the craft shorten this shelf life even further." (IDI 2, Poland)
	"We strive to ensure that the product is of the highest possible quality, as attractive as possible, and also directed to a wide range of consumers." (IDI 7, Poland)
	"Quality means trust, and trust is difficult to build. If you spoil a batch once, you lose the customer forever." (IDI 5, Ukraine)
	"…quality not as a means to an end, but as identity – a way of being of the brand in relation to its customers." (IDI 7, Ukraine)
	"We have gone from experimental brews to a clearly structured production with an emphasis on consistent quality and modern technologies." (IDI 13, Ukraine)
	"From the very beginning, we knew one thing: either we do it our own way, or not at all. We wanted to show that beer can have personality, that you can speak to people without pretension, with humor, with boldness. Above all, we focus on quality and on uniqueness." (IDI 3, Poland)
	"I don't know if it is a mission, but I have always cared about making balanced beers, beers that are interesting, beers in different styles from around the world. […] To constantly show that beer is something more." (IDI 5, Poland)

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

As illustrated in the conceptual figure above, interview participants understanding of quality was neither technocratic nor procedural. On the contrary, quality was perceived primarily as a value embedded in the brewer's personal relationship with the product-an expression of responsibility, honesty, and care for relations with the surrounding community.

The owners' narratives suggest that quality was not merely an operational standard but functioned as a moral, epistemological, and relational category. For brewers, quality was inseparable from personal commitment, and maintaining it was treated as a form of obligation toward the consumer. One Polish owner articulated this in direct terms:

"I will not make a beer that I would not drink myself." (IDI 6, Poland)

Analogously, a Ukrainian brewer emphasized:

"I am responsible for every bottle. It is like my signature." (IDI 3, Ukraine)

Such statements show that quality in microbreweries is constructed not as a standard or parameter but as a personal decision to release a product that symbolically represents the producer's identity.

In many cases, quality was not the result of laboratory protocols or formal certification systems but of everyday sensory practices rooted in the embodied experience of the producers. Respondents repeatedly stressed that quality control relied not on external technical indicators but on direct contact with the product-taste, smell, color, and consistency-with the process of verification often taking the form of a collective ritual:

"We start with test batches. Then we taste as a team-with uncompromising feedback. Some beers go straight to wider distribution, others need time. But every beer passes our table." (IDI 7, Poland)

"New recipes we usually test in small batches so that every nuance can be detected. The entire team actively participates in tastings and discussions, which allows us to refine recipes and discover new variants of beer." (IDI 5, Ukraine)

Brewers also pointed to the relational dimension of quality, particularly visible in their daily interactions with customers, local gastronomy, and business partners. Quality in this sense was not an abstract value, but a social contract, regulating trust, loyalty, and reputation:

"If I fail once, the pub will not order again." (IDI 5, Poland)

"People come back for taste, but they stay because they know we do not cheat here." (IDI 11, Poland)

Such accounts reveal that quality functioned as a mechanism for sustaining long-term relations-defined not only by the product itself but also by the ethos of conduct toward the consumer. To compromise quality risked not only commercial loss but also the symbolic erosion of credibility.

Quality also performed a distinctive function-marking the boundary between craft breweries and industrial producers or so-called "pseudo-crafts" that, according to interview participants, imitated the language of craft without respecting its values:

"For us, quality is not a strategy. It is shameful if it does not come out right." (IDI 4, Poland)

Such statements demonstrate that quality was also a marker of professional identity-an emblem of belonging to a field grounded in craft values: honesty, responsibility, and continuous improvement. Upholding quality was not an option but a moral obligation and a form of internal self-verification.

Importantly, the empirical analysis confirms this picture quantitatively: 90% of surveyed breweries conduct regular sensory tests; 65% document every batch through organoleptic notes; and in 40% of cases, the decision to release a product was made collectively.

These data indicate that quality was not understood as the sole responsibility of the brewmaster but as a collective practice, grounded in trust, shared knowledge, and a common concern for brand coherence.

The empirical material clearly shows that quality is not treated by microbrewery owners as a technical specification or a market-driven attribute, but as an *ethos*-a moral framework regulating practice, responsibility, and relational accountability. The narratives collected during fieldwork reveal that quality is experienced as a personal and collective obligation, expressed through honesty, care, and embodied sensory engagement. In this sense, quality becomes a defining dimension of craft identity, linking production to moral responsibility, relational trust, and self-verification.

To deepen this interpretation, the category of "quality as ethos" was reconstructed through grounded-theory processual logic (conditions → actions → consequences). The empirical mechanisms underlying this category are summarised in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. Quality as ethos as a process in craft microbreweries

Triggers	**Actions**	**Results**	**Influencing conditions**
Personal responsibility and moral duty	Regular sensory evaluation (individual and collective)	Stable, trustworthy product identity	Craft ethos, honesty, cultural expectations
Fear of losing consumer trust	Small-batch testing, iterative improvement	Long-term loyalty and reputation	Strength of local relationships
Embodied sensory intuition	Organoleptic checks: taste, aroma, mouthfeel, colour	Early detection of defects and consistency issues	Brewer's embodied knowledge and experience
Relational	Transparent	Sustained	Professional norms

Triggers	Actions	Results	Influencing conditions
accountability to gastronomy partners	communication and corrective actions	partnership networks	and peer expectations
Identity verification through product	Collective decision on batch release	Symbolic affirmation of authenticity	Moral economy of craft, team cohesion

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

Analytic memos reveal that quality in the studied microbreweries was not activated primarily through formal technological protocols or external standards, but through relational and moral triggers embedded in everyday practice. Brewers repeatedly framed quality as a matter of personal responsibility, often articulated through expressions such as "my signature on every bottle" or "this beer carries my name." A strong sense of obligation toward regular customers, the anticipated shame associated with releasing a flawed beer, and the high relational expectations imposed by gastronomy partners emerged as central motivating forces. Equally important was the pursuit of self-respect and peer recognition within the craft community. Across the dataset, it was not the fear of failing a technical parameter that initiated rigorous quality practices, but the fear of violating trust-trust placed in the brewer by customers, partners, and peers.

In response to these moral and relational triggers, breweries engaged in a set of deeply embedded practices that framed quality as a collective and sensory accomplishment. These practices included regular collective tastings in which "every beer passes our table," iterative refinement through test batches, and detailed organoleptic note-taking that captured subtle sensory deviations rather than numerical indicators alone. Quality work was sustained through ongoing, often uncompromising dialogue across the team, where feedback was expected to be honest and direct. When doubt arose, corrective actions were taken, including the refusal to release entire batches that did not meet personal standards, even at financial cost. These practices demonstrate that quality functioned as a sensory, relational, and moral activity, enacted through judgment and responsibility rather than through codified procedures.

The outcomes of these quality practices manifested on multiple, interconnected levels. At the product level, they produced consistency and recognisability of the brewery's sensory profile. At the relational level, they strengthened trust among gastronomy partners and generated enduring loyalty among taproom customers. Within the broader craft field, they enhanced credibility and reinforced reputational standing,

clearly differentiating the brewery from industrial or "pseudo-craft" producers. Importantly, the product itself came to function as a symbolic representation of the brewer: a tangible expression of competence, integrity, and commitment. Quality thus emerged as a stable axis around which identity, reputation, and relational resilience were organised.

Further analysis shows that this quality-as-ethos was shaped, enabled, and constrained by a set of contextual conditions anchoring it in lived moral and relational worlds. The craft moral economy-emphasising honesty, responsibility, and transparency-provided a normative framework that elevated quality from a technical concern to an ethical obligation. Local relational networks, particularly those dependent on consistent taste and reliability, reinforced the importance of maintaining sensory standards over time. The brewer's accumulated embodied sensory skill played a crucial role in detecting and interpreting deviations, while team cohesion and shared epistemic practices supported collective judgment and accountability. In the Ukrainian cases, crisis conditions further intensified the moral dimension of quality: releasing flawed beer was perceived not merely as a professional failure, but as a betrayal of a community experiencing disruption and uncertainty. Under such conditions, quality took on heightened symbolic weight.

Early analytic memos initially treated quality as a technical category, closely aligned with production control and process management. However, through constant comparison, this interpretation proved inadequate. Quality was consistently framed by participants as an ethical commitment rather than a technical requirement. The language of responsibility, shame, pride, and trust recurred far more frequently than references to parameters, standards, or certifications. Brewers explicitly conceptualised quality not as adherence to specifications, but as an extension of selfhood-the product "represents me," "carries my name," and "is my signature." This framing aligns closely with craft-theory perspectives on artisanal integrity, in which the product embodies the maker's identity and moral standing.

Cross-case comparison further stabilised this category. In Poland, quality functioned primarily as a relational guarantee to gastronomy partners and consumers. In Ukraine, the same mechanism was reinforced by crisis conditions, amplifying the moral responsibility associated with production. Despite these contextual differences, the underlying process remained consistent across cases: moral triggers activated sensory and relational practices, which in turn generated trust-based outcomes, all conditioned by

a shared craft ethos. Quality, therefore, emerged not as a variable to be optimised, but as a constitutive moral practice through which craft entrepreneurship is enacted and sustained.

By the stage of selective coding, memos converged on the insight that quality in microbreweries operates as an ethical regime: a moral economy regulating behaviour, identity, responsibility and relational trust. It is an epistemic practice (knowing through the senses), a moral practice (acting responsibly) and a relational practice (maintaining trust). It therefore cannot be reduced to technical parameters but must be understood as one of the core pillars of situated craft entrepreneurship. These mechanisms show that quality operates not as a market standard but as a moral economy. This provides a foundation for understanding how quality interrelates with other categories.

4.3.4. Local embeddedness

In conversations with craft brewery owners, the theme of strong embeddedness in the place of origin was repeatedly emphasized. For many of them, the brewery is not just a business-it is part of the local community, a way of telling the story of the region and building ties with the people who live nearby. This is reflected in the names of beers that refer to local landscapes or events, in labels that draw on the language and symbols of culture, and in everyday relationships with customers, who are often neighbors and acquaintances.

Locality was therefore not understood as a marketing strategy but as something entirely natural-an element of identity. Many interview participants stated directly that they brew beer “for our own people” and “from what is ours”: local ingredients, traditional recipes, and stories passed down within the community. In this way, the brewery becomes not only a site of production but also a cultural and social space-organizing events, supporting local initiatives, and becoming a point of reference for community life. It is noted that as craft beer markets mature and become saturated, breweries increasingly rely on niche positioning, hyper-local storytelling, and collaborative practices to maintain visibility and viability. These strategies prioritise depth of engagement over breadth of market reach (Reid and Gatrell (2017, pp. 108-112)).

Lenart-Gansiniec (2016, pp. 2010–2012) conceptualized local embeddedness as a relational-capital system in which repeated interactions generate access to strategic resources and learning opportunities. This multidimensionality is well illustrated by

Figure 4.7 showing that local embeddedness was not a homogeneous phenomenon-it took on different forms and varying levels of depth, yet it almost always served as a point of reference in entrepreneurial strategy. For many breweries, locality meant a conscious linking of production with the history, language, aesthetics, and community of a given place.

As one Polish IDI participant stated:

"We draw inspiration from local history and culture, which is visible in the names of our beers and in events we organize that refer to regional traditions." (IDI 8, Poland)

Another emphasized the narrative function of locality:

"…this is our cultural context-that is why the Poznaj line was created with this city in mind. We try to embed our beers in local traditions, language, and flavors. Our activity is not only production-it is also creating a narrative. And the narrative must be rooted in place." (IDI 4, Poland)

Figure 4.7. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Local embeddedness"

Local embeddedness	"The community has been our constant supporter from the very beginning. We receive a lot of feedback that helps us not only improve the product but also better understand the needs of our customers. Thanks to this, we have been able to establish long-term relationships with our consumers." (IDI 5, Ukraine)
	"Authenticity and deep cultural identity. We are not just beer producers – we are ambassadors of the Silesian spirit. Our beers have roots, while at the same time responding to modern tastes." (IDI 13, Poland)
	"It is part of our identity. Our taproom is an open space for residents, tourists, and families. We organize open brew days, collaborate with artists and foundations, and support local initiatives. Culture is not an addition – it is the context of our activity." (IDI 12, Poland)
	"We often use honey from local apiaries or herbs that grow in our region to add a special taste to the beer. This allows us not only to maintain a connection with traditions but also to emphasize the uniqueness of our product." (IDI 6, Ukraine)
	"We also use spring water from local Carpathian sources, which gives the beer a unique purity and aroma." (IDI 9, Ukraine)
	"We try to highlight our Ukrainian origin through the names of our beers, the use of local ingredients, and participation in cultural events." (IDI 8, Ukraine)
	"People want to be part of something authentic. Moreover, we are the first brewery in […] in decades, continuing the historical brewing tradition in a region where more than 40 breweries once operated." (IDI 3, Poland)

Source: Author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews

Thus, locality was understood not only as physical proximity, but as symbolic and semantic embeddedness. Breweries became narrators of local stories, and their products acted as carriers of history, geographical names, and cultural references. In this sense, brewing was also a form of telling the story of a place-its past, identity, and values.

Several Polish microbreweries combined brewing with cultural and educational initiatives, turning the brewery into a site of meetings, cooperation, and community.

"…this is our place-we grew up here, we live here, and we are building something lasting here. From the very beginning we treated the brewery not only as a company but as part of local identity. We organize open days, brewing demonstrations, educational events for residents-to show that craft is about craftsmanship, not just alcohol. We support local events-fairs, community actions, concerts." (IDI 11, Poland)

"We support local events, we appear at fairs, we cooperate with gastronomy. People know us and know that we are from here." (IDI 7, Poland)

A similar process was evident among Ukrainian breweries, where locality took on narrative, aesthetic, and symbolic forms. Beers were named after the sea, the mountains, or historical heritage, while labels and campaigns evoked traditions of place.

"We integrate local color into marketing: beer names are connected with the sea, with Odesa, with Ukrainian history. One style was dedicated to the city's anniversary, another to the navy. People notice this." (IDI 1, Ukraine)

"Our main products are unique beers such as 'Hutsul Light,' 'Mountain,' and various seasonal styles, which we create with attention to local traditions and tastes." (IDI 9, Ukraine)

Locality also functioned as a mechanism of cultural continuity. One Ukrainian brewery explicitly connected its mission to the revival of Lviv's brewing traditions:

"I was fascinated by the history of Lviv, especially its brewing heritage. This city has ancient traditions, and I wanted to revive them by creating a brewery that combines old recipes with modern approaches." (IDI 10, Ukraine)

Local embeddedness was equally visible in breweries' roles as co-creators of cultural life, through festivals, collaborations with local producers, and participation in municipal initiatives:

"We organize local festivals, support city initiatives, collaborate with local cheesemakers, bakers, and gastro-enthusiasts. We weave local identity into the brand: beer names, label design, event themes-all of this is based on Odesa's traditions." (IDI 2, Ukraine)

"We constantly engage in local events: festivals, lectures, concerts. For example, we are regular participants in the Craft Beer and Vinyl festival in Lviv. In 2022 we co-organized a lecture on the history of Galician brewing with the regional museum. We have also hosted jazz evenings and blind tastings with local restaurant chefs in our pub." (IDI 13, Ukraine)

All of these statements indicate that locality was not understood as a mere geographical category but as a form of cultural presence and significant integration with social space. Breweries did not simply produce in a place-they actively co-created it through their actions, symbols, narratives, and everyday presence.

Local embeddedness thus fulfilled multiple functions:

1) Cultural-creative (engaging with and narrating the place),
2) Identity-building (linking the brand with local heritage),
3) Social (participating in events and relationships),
4) Symbolic (using local signs and names).

Quantitative data reinforce this interpretation: around 72% of the surveyed breweries indicated that their direct sales were concentrated in the immediate region of production, typically within 20-40 km. Furthermore, 68% reported involvement in local events such as brewing demonstrations, fairs, concerts, workshops, or educational activities. For many, this was not simply a promotional tool but a way of deepening ties with their communities and co-creating local beer culture.

While the empirical narratives richly illustrate the symbolic, cultural and relational meanings of locality, grounded-theory analysis reveals that local embeddedness is not simply an attribute or orientation but a processual practice through which breweries continuously negotiate their position within their communities. Rather than functioning as a static condition ("we are local"), embeddedness emerges through ongoing interactions, shared narratives, spatial proximities, and relational commitments.

Reid (2016, pp. 82-88) demonstrated that craft breweries are fundamentally place-embedded enterprises whose strategic behaviour is shaped by local cultural norms, consumer relationships, and regional histories of production and consumption. Rather than pursuing abstract market optimisation, breweries enact strategy through proximity to local customers, participation in community life, and the cultivation of geographically grounded identities. This embeddedness functions not merely as a branding device but as a stabilising strategic resource under conditions of market uncertainty. The category becomes analytically coherent when reconstructed through the grounded theory lens of conditions → actions → consequences, synthesised in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7. Local embeddedness as a process in craft microbreweries

Triggers	Actions	Results	Influencing conditions
Strong identification with place of origin	Use of local names, dialects, symbols and histories	Place-based brand identity	Local cultural repertoires and traditions
Daily contact with local consumers	Taproom conversations, events, educational activities	Relational loyalty and community trust	Density of neighbourhood ties
Desire to co-create local culture	Organising festivals, exhibitions, concerts	Brewery as cultural institution	Municipal support and local creative networks
Access to local producers and resources	Collaborations with cheesemakers, bakers, growers	Embedded supply chains	Regional availability of materials
Crisis-driven solidarity (esp. Ukraine)	Community support, thematic campaigns	Strengthened moral legitimacy	Context of crisis and shared adversity

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

Analysis of analytic memos indicates that local embeddedness in the studied craft breweries was activated not through deliberate strategic positioning, but through relational, emotional, and ethical triggers rooted in everyday life. Brewers' narratives repeatedly invoked identity anchors such as emotional ties to birthplace or neighbourhood, long-standing familiarity with local streets and people, and a sense of continuity between personal biography and place. Daily relational proximity-captured in expressions such as "our customers are our neighbours"-reinforced these ties, while cultural resonance in the form of heritage, dialects, shared stories, and local humour provided symbolic depth. Ethical commitments to the surrounding community, opportunities for collaboration with other local producers, and experiences of shared crises further intensified this process. In the Ukrainian cases in particular, wartime narratives emerged as a powerful trigger, transforming locality into a site of collective resilience and moral responsibility. Across the dataset, these triggers reveal that embeddedness was relationally and emotionally initiated rather than strategically imposed.

Breweries engaged in a broad repertoire of practices that actively reinforced place-based ties. Local history, geography, and folklore were integrated into product lines, while labels and visual identities drew on regional symbols, dialects, and family stories. Breweries hosted taproom events such as concerts, tastings, and artistic evenings, participated in community fairs, charity initiatives, and neighbourhood projects, and collaborated closely with local gastronomic partners and artisans. Many also co-created

educational and cultural initiatives, including workshops, lectures, and exhibitions. Through these practices, breweries positioned themselves not merely as producers of beer, but as active cultural actors embedded in the social and symbolic life of their locality.

Sztangret shows that relationships and information flows can function as structural resources sustaining cooperation networks, particularly in environments where value depends on interaction and mutual adjustment. This supports interpreting local embeddedness as more than geographic location: it is a practical system of knowledge circulation, shared expectations, and co-created meaning. In this sense, embeddedness becomes an infrastructure for strategic coordination under uncertainty (Sztangret, 2013).

These practices generated a set of stable and mutually reinforcing outcomes. Strong community loyalty emerged, with consumers frequently identifying the brewery as "one of us" rather than as an external business. Breweries acquired legitimacy as cultural and social contributors, not merely commercial entities, which in turn supported stable local demand even during periods of economic uncertainty. Mutual visibility and recognition developed between brewery and city or district, while co-created narratives bound product identity tightly to place identity. Embeddedness thus produced not only symbolic and relational value, but also economic resilience grounded in trust and familiarity.

The analysis further demonstrates that the depth and intensity of local embeddedness were shaped by several contextual conditions. Regions with rich cultural and historical resources provided a denser symbolic repertoire for place-based meaning-making. Spatial integration-such as the visibility and walkable proximity of taprooms-facilitated everyday interaction and reinforced relational proximity. Existing networks of local producers enabled collaboration, while the openness of the community to cultural initiatives shaped the brewery's capacity to act as a social hub. Crisis conditions, particularly in Ukraine, amplified solidarity and moral commitment, while founders' personal biographies-often deeply rooted in the locality-anchored embeddedness in lived experience.

At the early stages of analysis, locality appeared primarily as a narrative or symbolic element expressed through beer names, label aesthetics, or short place-based stories. However, as coding progressed and constant comparison was applied, it became evident that locality played a far deeper role. It was not merely referenced in products; it was enacted through everyday interactions with the surrounding social world. What

emerged was a shift in analytic perspective: locality is not a static descriptor of where breweries are situated, but an ongoing process through which relationships, responsibilities, and meanings are constructed. As Reid (2018, pp. 63–67) observes, spatial proximity between breweries and consumers enables rapid feedback loops that support continuous experimentation and incremental adaptation. In this sense, strategy unfolds as an ongoing learning process rather than a fixed plan.

Memos repeatedly highlighted the language of belonging used by interviewees-phrases such as "our people," "our place," "we grew up here," and "this city made us." These expressions did not function as marketing slogans; rather, they reflected genuine emotional attachment and a sense of shared fate with the community. For many owners, the brewery was woven into the cultural fabric of the area, hosting events, supporting local initiatives, and serving as a venue for artistic and educational activities. In this context, the brewery functioned less as a commercial venue and more as a cultural space where stories, traditions, and local identities were continuously reproduced.

Comparative analysis between Polish and Ukrainian cases deepened this insight. Polish breweries often articulated locality through humour, neighbourhood traditions, and informal community gatherings. Ukrainian breweries, by contrast, emphasised cultural continuity, historical narratives, and forms of solidarity shaped by wartime experience. Despite these contextual differences, the underlying mechanism remained consistent: identity, relationships, and cultural engagement drove the actions that reinforced embeddedness.

By the final stage of axial coding, analytic memos converged on a clear conclusion: local embeddedness constitutes one of the central organising principles of craft entrepreneurship. It provides breweries with symbolic legitimacy, social trust, and cultural meaning-resources that are difficult to imitate and impossible to scale through purely market-driven strategies. Locality, therefore, is not merely the background against which entrepreneurship unfolds; it is an integral part of the entrepreneurial process itself, shaping decisions, rhythms of work, and the ways in which brewers understand their role within the social world.

4.3.5. Relational cooperation

Relational cooperation emerged as a multidimensional practice, extending from operational resource-sharing to creative collaborations and collective survival strategies. For many brewers, cooperation was not optional but inherent in the logic of small-scale

production. Joint brewing, collabs, and networks of mutual support were described as spaces of learning, solidarity, and cultural exchange. In times of crisis, these relational ties often proved more valuable than material infrastructure, highlighting cooperation as a structural and value-laden component of craft entrepreneurship.

To illustrate the diverse dimensions of cooperation, the Figure 4.8 presents selected IDI brewers statements, highlighting the multilayered nature of relational practices-ranging from operational aspects, through normative and creative dimensions, to symbolic and communal ones.

Figure 4.8. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Relational cooperation"

Relational cooperation	"We brewed beers with other breweries, and we are planning more collaborations. We are open – not to competition, but to shared development." (IDI 7, Poland)
	"We do 2–3 collaborations a year. Not for profit, but for relationships. It is a way to exchange experiences and integrate the community. In the industry there is a lot of healthy competition, although there are also situations that I consider unethical - for example, selling the same beer under different brands. For me, that is a deception of the customer." (IDI 4, Poland)
	"Cooperations are not only about brewing a beer together – they are about exchanging experiences and promoting beer culture. For us, this is a value in itself." (IDI 6, Poland)
	"We cooperate with other breweries in Lviv and often organize joint tasting evenings, which allow us to interact and exchange experiences. Such cooperation helps to increase the popularity of craft beer in our region." (IDI 5, Ukraine)
	"Last year, together with a young brewer from Vinnytsia, we brewed an experimental wheat ale with Cascade hops grown in the south." (IDI 2, Ukraine)
	"Collabs are our hallmark. We cooperate, among others, with Funky Fluid, Maltgarden, Zichovec, and Bakunin. Each such cooperation is an exchange of knowledge and a form of promotion." (IDI 11, Poland)
	"Yes, we do cooperate, although we prefer not to disclose the details. In our industry, there is a certain spirit of solidarity - when needed, one helps another. It is not a market of vicious competition, but rather of a shared goal." (IDI 5, Poland)

Source: Author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

The figure illustrating the statements of brewery representatives (Figure 4.8.) clearly demonstrates that collabs and other forms of joint production, marketing, and

educational initiatives served not only as instruments of organizational and product innovation but also as spaces of environmental integration and the maintenance of a community of practice. These practices-ranging from collaborative brewing, sharing raw materials and infrastructure, supporting each other in times of crisis, and promoting partner ventures-constituted a multidimensional adaptive mechanism, embedded in values of trust, solidarity, and transparency.

As the interviews reveal, relational cooperation was not perceived as an optional supplement to competitive strategy, but as its fundamental component, deeply rooted in the everyday functioning of craft breweries. Cooperation acted as an organizational adhesive, enabling not only operational flexibility (resource exchange, logistical support, infrastructure sharing) but also a meaning-making institution, through which values, identity, and ethos were articulated.

"Trust is an essential component of successful and efficient teamwork ... and trust is particularly vital in the process of knowledge management." – Koohang, Paliszkiewicz & Gołuchowski (2017), Industrial Management & Data Systems

Sobotkiewicz notes that organisational effectiveness depends on how firms configure market-facing functions so that relationship-building supports strategic coordination, not only sales outcomes. In networked environments, relational ties become a practical infrastructure for distribution and legitimacy, especially where formal market access is costly or restricted. This supports the thesis argument that relational cooperation in craft brewing is not an "extra" practice but a strategic mechanism that substitutes for resource-intensive marketing systems (Sobotkiewicz, 2010).

Many IDI`s underlined that collabs, resource-sharing, mutual recommendations, and joint market presence were not opportunistic reactions but systemic responses to conditions of resource scarcity and limited economies of scale. Trust constitutes a necessary condition for effective knowledge sharing, while its absence leads to the blockage of knowledge flows and constrains organisational adaptive capacity (Paliszkiewicz, 2013, pp. 39–42). Cooperation created a learning environment, strengthened inter-firm relations, and fostered the long-term sustainability of the industry's ecosystem.

"Collabs are not just about making a beer together-they are about exchanging experiences, promoting beer culture. For us, this is a value in itself." (IDI 6, Poland)

This quote highlights the axiological dimension of cooperation-not as a sales tactic, but as a community-oriented practice.

“We brewed beers with other breweries, and we plan more collabs. We are open-not to competition, but to collective growth.” (IDI 7, Poland)

Here, the IDI juxtaposes two logics: rivalry versus cooperative development, with the latter framed as a vehicle for collective learning.

“Joint beers with other breweries bring exchange of experiences, fresh perspectives, creativity without barriers. We have already made dozens-with Polish and foreign partners. For us, brewing is not competition, but collective culture.” (IDI 10, Poland)

This testimony illustrates collaboration as a space of knowledge transfer and cultural exchange.

“For us, collabs are much more than just two logos on a can. Above all, they are encounters of people, brewing philosophies, cultures, approaches to work and taste. Joint brewing is treated as a truly creative process. Often it simply begins with a conversation-sometimes over a beer, sometimes at a festival-and then it turns out that we share sensitivities, or on the contrary, we differ radically, which can be equally inspiring.” (IDI 12, Poland)

Here, the semantics of encounter emerges, resonating with Wenger’s (1998) concept of communities of practice, where learning occurs through contact and participation rather than instruction.

“Joint beers, exchange of experiences, sharing equipment. Sometimes at our place, sometimes at theirs. We also cooperate with contract breweries-for them it is production capacity, for us it is better utilization. Win-win.” (IDI 2, Poland)

This reflects the practical and economic dimension of cooperation as resource rationalization, not through rivalry but through networked sharing.

“Collabs are our trademark. We collaborate with Funky Fluid, Maltgarden, Zichovec, Bakunin, among others. Each such cooperation means knowledge exchange and promotion.” (IDI 11, Poland)

Here, cooperation becomes a form of relational and cultural capital, building brand recognition while enabling the transfer of knowledge.

“We do 2-3 collabs a year. Not for profit, but for relationships. It is a way to exchange experiences and integrate the community. There is plenty of healthy competition in the industry, though I also see practices I consider unethical-such as selling the same beer under different brands. For me, that is cheating the customer.” (IDI 4, Poland)

This statement underscores the normative function of cooperation-as a space of ethical practice and resistance to the instrumentalization of craft.

“Yes, we cooperate, though we do not disclose details. There is a spirit of solidarity in the industry-when necessary, one helps another. This is not a market of predatory competition, but of common goals.” (IDI 5, Poland)

Here, solidarity emerges not as rhetoric but as a social practice of everyday operations.

In Ukraine, cooperation was not only about efficiency but also about survival under extreme conditions:

“We actively cooperate with other breweries. This gives us opportunities to share experience, learn from each other, and provide mutual support. We also work with local enterprises, buy raw materials from local suppliers, and organize joint events.” (IDI 9, Ukraine)

“We collaborate with other Lviv breweries and often organize joint tasting evenings, which allow us to interact and exchange experiences. Such cooperation helps increase the popularity of craft beer in our region.” (IDI 5, Ukraine)

“Last year with a young brewer from Vinnytsia we brewed an experimental wheat ale with Cascade hops grown in the south.” (IDI 2, Ukraine)

“We had no hops, no labels, no people. But we had a network. That saved us more than supplies.” (IDI, Ukraine)

“When we organize an event in our taproom, we invite a friendly brewery. They do the same. We share customers, not compete for them.” (IDI 3, Ukraine)

These statements confirm that relational cooperation was a cross-sectoral, local, and resilient mechanism, supporting knowledge-sharing, resource circulation, and survival. In times of crisis, the relational network became not a metaphor but a real asset, often more valuable than material infrastructure.

The significance of relational cooperation also finds clear support in the quantitative material, strengthening its analytical weight as a structurally embedded practice. As many as 88.6% of IDI declared regular cooperation with other actors in the industry, at both local and international levels. This means that nearly nine out of ten breweries operated within relational networks that extended beyond their own production and constituted a stable element of their business models.

Furthermore, 62.9% reported having engaged in at least one collaborative brewing project (collab) in the past two years. Joint brewing, recipe-sharing, and experimentation

within collective ventures not only confirm the cultural significance of cooperation but also highlight its dynamic, developmental, and creative character. Such a high proportion of active collaborations indicates that cooperation was not an episodic exception but a dominant pattern of action, inscribed in the ethos of craft entrepreneurship. Learning organisations develop the capacity for reflection on their own practices and for continuous improvement through learning from experience (Paliszkiewicz, 2016, pp. 67–70).

As a result, axial coding revealed that entrepreneurship in the craft brewery sector is not a mechanical sum of discrete strategic decisions but a dynamically emerging relational process, embedded in everyday practices. The various elements of action-ranging from production and recipe experimentation, through narrative brand communication, to distribution channels and networks of cooperation-form a coherent, though heterogeneous, meaning-making structure. These practices do not function in isolation but co-constitute a system of mutual interdependencies, in which innovativeness, identity, quality, locality, and relationality are not supplements to strategy but its constitutive components.

As the interview respondents' statements illustrate, operational decisions always carry more than an economic dimension:

"Taste is a voice-people drink and immediately comment, and that is feedback for us." (IDI 6, Poland)

"For us, beer is not a commodity, it is a story about our village." (IDI 8, Ukraine)

Such voices confirm that in the practices of the breweries studied, "taste is a voice" and "beer is a story"-meaning that every production decision embodies not only market value but also cultural, emotional, and communal significance.

While some of these cooperative practices were visible in material forms-collaboration beers, joint events, shared equipment-others operated through less tangible channels, such as trust, moral support, collective identity and shared commitments to craftsmanship. As interview respondents repeatedly noted, cooperation was not something "done occasionally"; it was the normal mode of operation in a sector shaped by small scale, resource scarcity and overlapping challenges.

To capture the dynamics of this category, relational cooperation was reconstructed as a process, following the grounded-theory logic of conditions → actions → consequences. Table 4.8 summarises this structure.

Table 4.8. Relational cooperation as a process in craft microbreweries

Triggers	Actions	Results	Influencing conditions
Resource scarcity; small-scale production limits	Sharing ingredients, equipment, infrastructure	Increased operational flexibility	Limited economies of scale; mutual dependence
Desire for learning and creative exchange	Collaborative brewing (collabs), joint experiments	New knowledge, creative renewal	Trust networks; cultural openness
Ethical norms of solidarity and community	Supporting partners during crises; offering help	Strengthened moral legitimacy	Shared craft ethos; peer expectations
Festivals, events, and professional encounters	Joint tastings, educational initiatives, co-promotions	Community-building, shared visibility	Density of local networks
Crisis conditions	Mutual aid, informal emergency networks	Survival capacity; resilience	Context of war and infrastructural instability

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

Across the interviews, relational cooperation emerged as a recurrent and deeply embedded dimension of craft entrepreneurship. Analytic memos indicate that cooperation was consistently activated by a combination of structural constraints and relational imperatives rather than by formal strategic calculation. Shortages of raw materials or packaging, limited production capacity inherent to small breweries, and overlapping supply dependencies created practical conditions in which cooperation became necessary. At the same time, brewers articulated strong moral obligations to support peers, alongside creative impulses that arose from contact with others. Face-to-face encounters at festivals, taprooms, and informal gatherings repeatedly functioned as catalysts for collaboration. In the Ukrainian cases, these dynamics were further intensified by wartime disruptions, where cooperation was framed as essential for survival. Importantly, brewers did not describe these triggers as exceptional events but as conditions woven into the everyday reality of craft brewing.

Breweries engaged in a wide repertoire of cooperative practices that extended far beyond formal partnerships. These included exchanging yeast, hops, or malt when deliveries failed; lending kegs, fermenters, or cold-storage space; and jointly brewing collaboration beers. Knowledge-sharing was pervasive, encompassing recipes, technical advice, supplier recommendations, and personal contacts. Breweries co-organised festivals, lectures, and taproom events, jointly promoted each other's products, and participated in collective sensory sessions that functioned as informal peer-review mechanisms. Many interviewees emphasised the spontaneous and conversational nature

of these practices, often describing collaboration as emerging organically from interaction rather than from deliberate planning. Cooperation was thus enacted as a situated, relational practice embedded in everyday craft life.

The outcomes of relational cooperation manifested across multiple, interconnected levels. Operationally, cooperation stabilised production by mitigating shortages and capacity constraints. Creatively, it generated new ideas, refined techniques, and introduced fresh perspectives that individual breweries could not have developed in isolation. Relationally, repeated collaboration strengthened trust networks and gave rise to long-term partnerships. Symbolically, participation in cooperative practices conferred recognition as a legitimate and committed member of the craft field. Strategically, joint releases and shared events expanded visibility and enabled access to overlapping audiences. In the Ukrainian context, cooperation took on an additional survival-related dimension, as networks of mutual support functioned as lifelines under conditions of infrastructural collapse and uncertainty. Across cases, cooperation shaped not only action but identity: breweries understood themselves as part of a collective craft culture rather than as isolated competitors.

Further analysis reveals that relational cooperation was sustained by a set of enabling conditions intrinsic to the craft brewing field. The small-scale nature of production and dense interdependencies within supply chains fostered mutual reliance. The cultural ethos of craft-emphasising honesty, openness, and mutual respect-provided a normative foundation for cooperation, while trust accumulated through years of informal interaction reinforced expectations of reciprocity. The density of festival and taproom encounters created repeated opportunities for face-to-face engagement, strengthening social bonds. In Ukraine, extraordinary wartime pressures amplified these dynamics, intensifying solidarity and reducing the salience of short-term self-interest. Under these conditions, cooperation persisted even in the absence of immediate or quantifiable benefits.

At the outset of analysis, cooperation appeared as a familiar and almost taken-for-granted feature of the craft scene, visible in collaboration beers, shared events, and social media exchanges. However, as coding progressed, it became evident that cooperation played a far more foundational role. It was not merely an outward-facing activity but an internal organising logic that structured how breweries functioned, learned, and survived. Analytic memos repeatedly noted the relational language used by brewers-“we,” “together,” “our circle,” “our people”-and the emotional tone with which cooperation

was described. These accounts signalled that cooperation carried moral weight and was experienced as an obligation rather than as a calculated choice.

Comparative analysis highlighted contextual variation in the functions of cooperation. In Poland, collaboration was often oriented toward creativity, experimentation, and cultural exchange. In Ukraine, it was frequently oriented toward ensuring continuity and survival under extreme conditions. Despite these differences, the underlying mechanism remained consistent: conditions of small scale and uncertainty generated mutual dependence, which stabilised into shared norms of trust and reciprocity. Over time, cooperation became institutionalised as part of the craft ethos-expected, valued, and reinforced through everyday practice.

By the stage of selective coding, analytic memos converged on a clear insight: relational cooperation is not ancillary to entrepreneurship in craft brewing; it constitutes its connective tissue. It underpins innovation, stabilises quality, shapes identity, facilitates local embeddedness, and generates resilience. Cooperation emerges simultaneously as a practice and as a worldview-an embedded way of organising economic activity in a sector where collective strength outweighs individual competition. At this level of analysis, theoretical saturation was achieved: additional data did not introduce new dimensions of meaning but consistently confirmed the existing configuration.

Taken together, the five categories identified in the study perform not only an analytical function-organising empirical material-but also an interpretive one, revealing how entrepreneurs operating under conditions of resource scarcity and uncertainty construct the meaning of their activity. They disclose craft entrepreneurship as a relational practice grounded in experience, identity, community, and experimentation. This understanding resonates strongly with the literature on embedded entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011) and relational entrepreneurship (Anderson, Dodd and Jack, 2012), which conceptualise economic action as inseparable from its social and cultural contexts. From this perspective, entrepreneurship is not merely a sequence of economic decisions, but a dynamic arena in which market presence, operational boundaries, and cultural meanings are continuously negotiated. With all five categories theoretically saturated, the analysis now turns to their integration within the core process of becoming competitive.

4.4. Becoming competitive as the core theory of embedded strategies

The process of selective coding constituted the culminating stage of the qualitative data analysis. Its aim was not classification per se, but rather the integration and in-depth

interpretation of meanings revealed during the earlier phases of open and axial coding. In line with constructivist grounded theory, the task of the researcher is not to "discover" an objective truth, but to co-construct theoretical interpretations that remain grounded in participants' experiences, language, and social worlds. The researcher thus becomes not only a recipient of data, but also a co-creator of a conceptual frame that is anchored in lived practice and reflexively aware of its own interpretive status (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 130-136).

The use of grounded theory as a research strategy corresponds with Szarucki's view that theory-building in management sciences should emerge from systematic engagement with empirical material rather than from deductive testing of predefined models. He underlines that in exploratory research, concepts and categories should be developed iteratively through constant comparison and theoretical sampling. Such an approach enables the researcher to preserve openness to unexpected patterns and relationships, which is particularly important when analysing entrepreneurial behaviour in evolving institutional and market environments. This methodological stance reinforces the legitimacy of grounded theory as an appropriate framework for studying emergent strategic practices (Lisiński & Szarucki, 2020/2021).

In this study, selective coding did not begin with the question "Which variable best predicts outcomes?", but with a grounded-theory question: "What is the main process being worked through here, across cases and contexts?". Repeated cycles of constant comparison between the five axial categories - experimental innovation, brand uniqueness, quality as ethos, local embeddedness, and relational cooperation - analytic memos, and whole-interview readings led to a recurrent insight: the breweries were not simply "innovating", "branding" or "cooperating" as separate activities. Rather, they were using these practices to become and remain competitive under conditions of uncertainty, small scale, and strong social embeddedness.

The identification of the core theory proceeded in several steps, consistent with constructivist grounded theory:

1. Re-reading full cases, not just fragments. After open and axial coding, whole interviews were re-read as "analytic narratives" rather than as isolated coded fragments. This step is central in Charmaz's approach: codes and categories must be re-situated within the broader storyline of each case. In these narrative re-readings, a recurring pattern emerged: interviewees described how they navigate competitive

pressures not through formal planning, but through a constellation of practices rooted in experimentation, values, locality and relationships.

2. Constant comparison of axial categories. The axial categories were systematically compared with one another and with the data using questions such as:

- What does experimental innovation accomplish in the long run?

- What is brand uniqueness "for"?

- What does local embeddedness enable in terms of survival, recognition, and demand?

- How does relational cooperation change the breweries' position in the market and field?

In each case, the analytic answer pointed in the same direction: these practices collectively shape the breweries' competitive existence - their ability to stand out, to endure, and to build loyal demand despite resource constraints and volatile contexts.

3. Memo-writing as a site of integration. Analytic memos became the place where the five categories were repeatedly assembled into larger processual configurations. Early memos still treated the categories as parallel "dimensions" of craft entrepreneurship. Later memos, however, consistently noted that brewers spoke about innovation, quality, locality and cooperation in one breath, especially when narrating how they "manage to keep going", "stay visible", "keep people coming back", or "survive in war". This led to the interpretive shift from "five dimensions" to a single, integrating process.

4. Testing alternative focal categories. During selective coding, several possible candidates for a core category were considered, such as embedded innovation, craft identity work, or relational embeddedness. Each had explanatory power, but none could integrate all empirical patterns as effectively as "becoming competitive":

a) Embedded innovation captured the centrality of experimentation, but could not sufficiently account for the moral, local and cooperative dimensions.
b) Craft identity work illuminated expressive and narrative practices, but did not fully capture the economic and survival-oriented aspects.
c) Relational embeddedness explained locality and cooperation, yet risked underplaying innovation and branding.

By contrast, "becoming competitive":

a) integrated all five categories,
b) captured both economic and meaning-making dimensions,

c) and reflected the language IDI research participants themselves used when they spoke about “strategy”, “survival”, “standing out”, or “not losing ourselves in the process.”

5. Asking the grounded-theory “fitting” questions. Following Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2006), the emerging core category was evaluated against key questions:

1. Does it fit the data across cases?
2. Does it work to explain the main variations in action?
3. Is it relevant to participants’ concerns?
4. Does it have sufficient abstraction to link different situations and contexts?

The answer was consistently positive in relation to becoming competitive. Whether brewers spoke about launching 70-80 new beers annually, refusing to release a beer they would not drink themselves, organizing local festivals, or sharing hops and equipment with other breweries, their stories ultimately concerned how they maintain a viable and meaningful market presence under demanding conditions.

On this basis, “Becoming competitive through embedded strategies” was identified as the core theory: a concept that articulates how the five axial categories coalesce into a single, dynamic process that structures the strategic life of craft breweries.

4.4.1. Theoretical saturation: concept and empirical check

In grounded theory, theoretical saturation does not mean that “no new data exists,” but that additional data no longer change the conceptual structure of categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 61-62). Saturation is reached when:

a) New interviews do not add new properties or dimensions to a category;
b) They mainly confirm and deepen already established meanings;
c) Theoretical relationships between categories are stable and recurrent across diverse cases;
d) Negative or deviant cases refine the boundaries of categories rather than undermining them.

In this study, 27 in-depth interviews were conducted, with the last five interviews used explicitly as a saturation test. By this stage, the five main categories derived from axial coding - experimental innovation, brand uniqueness, quality as ethos, local embeddedness, and relational cooperation - had already been identified and elaborated in memos.

During analysis of the final interviews:

a) No new category emerged that would require re-structuring the analytic framework.
b) No entirely new dimension of meaning appeared within the five categories.
c) Instead, new material provided additional examples, nuances, and confirmations of existing properties (e.g. yet another form of anti-branding, another case of local festival engagement, another collaboration used as survival mechanism in wartime).

Table 4.9 synthesises this assessment. For each category, it presents:

1. the number of cases (N=27) in which it appeared,
2. illustrative quotations,
3. and an explicit judgment of saturation (full vs. high saturation).

Table 4.9. Degree of theoretical saturation of core categories

Category	Number of cases (N=27)	Example quotations	Saturation status
Experimental innovation	26	"We introduced … 70-80 completely new beers per year" (IDI 3, Poland) "We brew with sour plums, with nuts, with tea." (IDI 7, Ukraine)	Full saturation - later interviews confirmed the frequency, rhythmicity, and sensory nature of innovation without adding new dimensions.
Brand uniqueness	21	"It wasn't about being pretty - it was about being ours." (IDI 5, Poland) "It is our protest against uniformity." (IDI 9, Ukraine)	High saturation - new examples appeared (e.g., anti-branding), but these reinforced rather than modified the category structure.
Quality as ethos	22	"Every recipe must pass our own test first." (IDI 8, Poland) "I am responsible for every bottle. It's like a signature." (IDI 3, Ukraine)	Full saturation - repeated emphasis on moral responsibility, sensory engagement, and personal accountability.
Local embeddedness	24	"I know every customer; we know who comes back." (IDI 2, Poland) "We integrate local color into our marketing." (IDI 7, Ukraine)	Full saturation - final interviews replicated the same three core dimensions: history, culture, and community ties.
Relational cooperation	19	"Collaborations are not just joint beers - they are about sharing experiences and promoting beer culture." (IDI 14, Poland) "We cooperate with other breweries in Lviv." (IDI 6, Ukraine)	High saturation - cooperation appeared consistently as mutual support, learning, and solidarity; no new properties emerged.

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

For instance:

a) Experimental innovation appeared in 26 of 27 interviews, with subsequent data confirming the rhythmic, high-intensity, sensory character of innovation without adding new structural dimensions.

b) Quality as ethos reached full saturation, with recurring narratives of moral responsibility and collective sensory testing.
c) Local embeddedness also showed full saturation: the final interviews repeated the same configuration of locality (history, community, culture) without introducing new forms.
d) Brand uniqueness and relational cooperation achieved high saturation: new examples emerged (e.g. anti-branding strategies, specific cross-border collabs), but they fit within and strengthened the already established conceptual scaffolding.
e) From a constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2006), saturation was assessed not only quantitatively ("how many interviews mention X?"), but also qualitatively:
f) Were there still analytic "holes" in how a category was defined?
g) Did new data force significant redefinition, or merely thicken existing interpretations?
h) Were interconnections between categories consistently confirmed, including in more complex or crisis-shaped cases (such as Ukrainian breweries under wartime conditions)?

The answer was that the five categories were theoretically saturated: they were conceptually dense, empirically well-anchored, and their internal properties and relations to other categories were repeatedly confirmed. Under these conditions, further data collection was unlikely to fundamentally change the core theory, although it might have provided additional empirical illustrations.

4.4.2. Why "becoming competitive" qualifies as a core category

Within grounded theory, a core category is understood as a concept that integrates other analytical categories, accounts for the greatest variation in the data, demonstrates high explanatory reach across cases and contexts, and captures what is most central to participants' concerns (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006).

The category becoming competitive fulfils these criteria by operating as an integrative process through which the five axial categories-experimental innovation, brand uniqueness, quality as ethos, local embeddedness, and relational cooperation-collectively explain how craft breweries generate, sustain, and reproduce competitiveness. Each category represents a distinct yet interdependent pathway: innovation enables differentiation and dynamism; brand uniqueness translates practices

into symbolic market presence; quality as ethos stabilises trust and reputation; local embeddedness secures legitimacy and loyal demand through place-based relations; and relational cooperation extends organisational capacity through networks of reciprocity and shared learning.

None of these categories alone is sufficient to explain their strategic functioning; together, they form a constellation through which competitiveness is enacted.

1. Explanatory power across contexts. The same core process - becoming competitive through embedded strategies - appears in:
    a) Polish breweries operating in relatively stable yet saturated markets;
    b) Ukrainian breweries functioning under conditions of war, infrastructural disruption, and heightened uncertainty.

While the weight of individual categories differs (e.g. resilience and solidarity are more pronounced in Ukraine, commercial scaling and festival cooperation in Poland), the underlying logic remains constant: competitiveness is achieved through an embedded mix of innovation, quality, identity, locality and cooperation.

a) Alignment with participants' own concerns and language. When interview participants talked about "strategy," they rarely referred to plans, KPIs or models. Instead, they spoke about:
    a. "surviving," "keeping people coming back,"
    b. "not chasing fashion, but staying honest,"
    c. "building a brand from Baltic to Tatras without losing authenticity,"
    d. "reacting in war,"
    e. "brew honest beer, cooperate with local farmers, and not chase fashion."

These formulations indicate that their primary concern is not formal strategy, but remaining competitively viable without sacrificing values, locality, and craft integrity. The core category directly reflects this concern.

"The standard process of strategic logistics planning and management is usually periodical and the chance of cooperation with changes in the environment of the company is missing." – Starostka-Patyk & Grabara (2008), Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica.

2. Processual and abstract character. "Becoming competitive" is formulated as a process, not a static state. It allows for:
    a) variation over time (e.g. phases of rapid growth vs. crisis),
    b) comparison across cases (different configurations of the five categories),

c) and potential transferability to other embedded, craft-based sectors.

At the same time, it remains grounded in the empirical detail of brewing practices, local events, collaborations, recipes, and daily interactions.

These features justify treating "becoming competitive through "embedded strategies" as the core theory of this study: a concept that condenses the main findings, integrates lower-level categories, and provides a robust explanatory lens on entrepreneurial action in the craft brewing sector.

The analysis also shows that the core process of becoming competitive is fundamentally at odds with classical, plan-based strategy models (Porter, 1985; Mintzberg, 1994).

Interview participants consistently rejected the logic of ex ante planning in favour of action embedded in the present, shaped by ongoing interactions and contextual tensions. Statements such as:

"Strategy? We are at war, not in a corporation. We react." (IDI 6, Ukraine)

"We do not conduct market analyses. Our mission is to brew honest, characterful beer." (IDI 4, Poland)

"We are building the brand as a platform for collaborations and creativity." (IDI 13, Ukraine)

indicate that strategy is lived and embodied, not written and implemented.

Secondary data - for example, The Brewers of Europe (2023), which shows that over 80% of European microbreweries do not use formal planning strategies - confirm that the absence of formalisation is not a deficit, but a conscious and structurally consistent pattern. In this light, the core theory conceptualises competitiveness not as a function of planning quality, but as the emergent outcome of embedded practices.

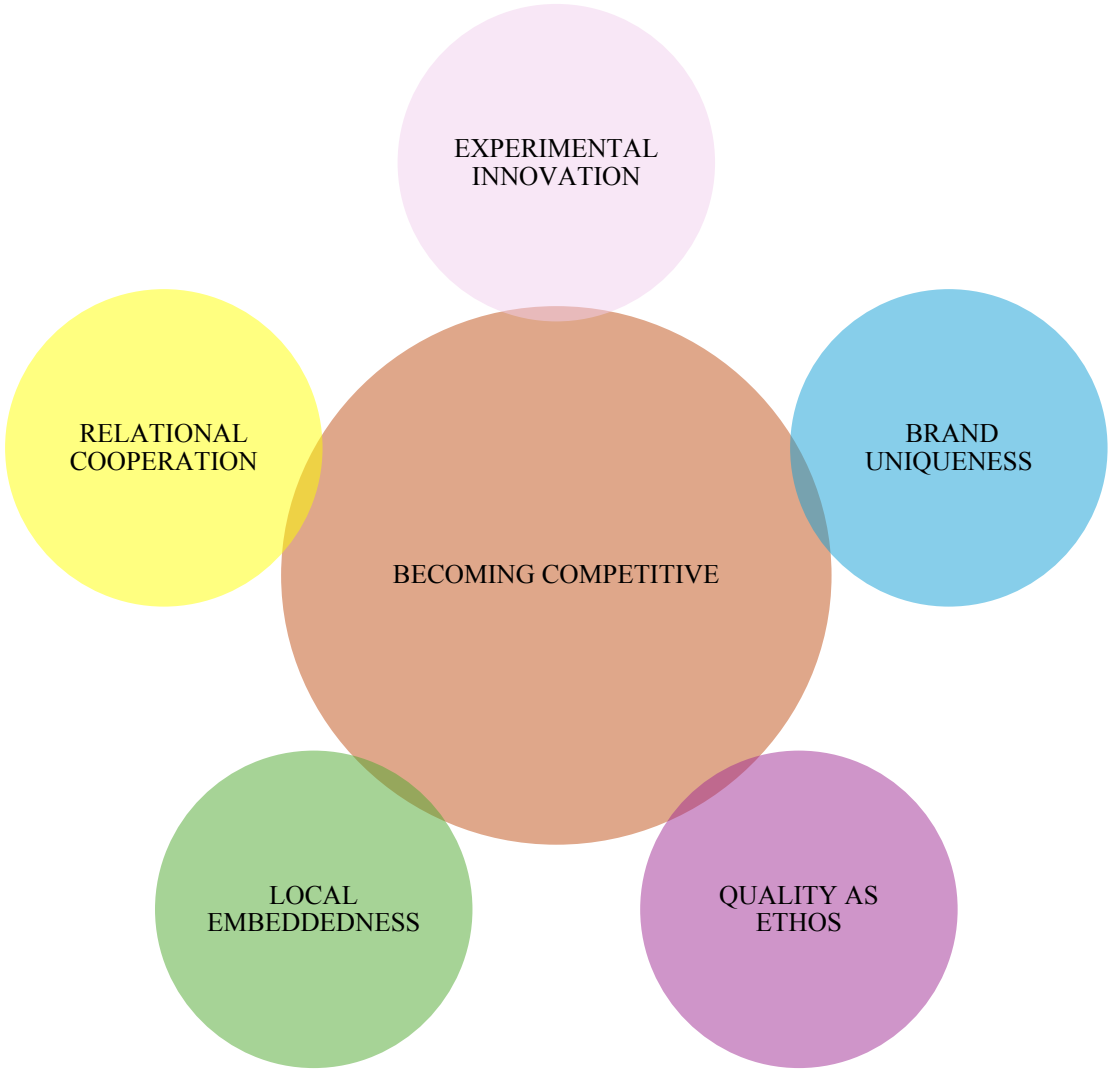
"Becoming competitive" thus denotes a process in which breweries:

a) respond to changing conditions through situated experimentation,
b) stabilise recognition and reputation through quality as ethos,
c) root themselves in place and community,
d) and extend their capacity and resilience through relational cooperation.

The integration of these elements - visualised in the constellation model of embedded competitiveness (Figure 4.9) - reveals that no single dimension is sufficient on its own. pressures. Reid (2017, pp. 8-11) conceptualised craft breweries as hybrid organisations operating at the intersection of cultural production and economic activity. Their strategies must therefore balance creative expression, community engagement, and

financial sustainability, resulting in complex and often contradictory strategic logics that cannot be reduced to conventional economic models.

Figure 4.9. Constellation model of embedded competitiveness derived from selective coding



Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

The constellation model synthesises the grounded-theory insight that competitiveness in microbreweries does not derive from any single practice or resource, but from the interdependence of multiple embedded processes. Selective coding revealed that experimental innovation provides rhythmic renewal and creative differentiation, while brand uniqueness translates these practices into recognisable symbolic forms. Quality as ethos stabilises trust and reinforces moral legitimacy, local embeddedness anchors the brewery in relational and cultural contexts, and relational cooperation extends capacity, knowledge and resilience through networked support. The model thus depicts competitiveness as an emergent, situated and relational accomplishment-a continuous

process of “becoming” enacted through everyday experimentation, embodied craft values, community ties and cooperative practices. It visualises how the five saturated categories collectively form the underlying logic of action in the sector, demonstrating why becoming competitive functions as the core theoretical category integrating the entire data structure.

In this sense, becoming competitive emerges as a constitutive process of entrepreneurial identity in micro-scale, craft-based contexts: dynamic, informal, and deeply embedded in place, relationships, and values. It provides the conceptual foundation for the theoretical model developed in the subsequent chapter, where the mechanisms of embedded craft entrepreneurship are formalised in a broader theoretical framework.

4.5. Barriers as structures of meaning and action

Across the empirical material, barriers emerged not as external disruptions but as constitutive components of the entrepreneurial environment, fundamentally shaping how craft brewery owners in Poland and Ukraine think, act, and interpret their circumstances. Within the logic of the constellation model developed in this dissertation, barriers operate as contextual anchors that activate, constrain, and intensify the five core mechanisms of embedded craft strategising: experimental innovation, uniqueness, quality-as-ethos, local embeddedness, and relational cooperation.

In line with constructivist grounded theory, barriers appear as interpretive structures through which entrepreneurs understand their realities. IDI brewers recurrently described constraints not simply as managerial challenges but as identity-producing experiences. Financial fragility, institutional ambiguity, and infrastructural instability become embedded in narratives of authenticity, resilience, and craft ethos. For many entrepreneurs, “struggling well” becomes a signifier of commitment, skill, and moral legitimacy within the craft field.

This finding challenges classical assumptions in strategic management that position barriers as external forces to be avoided or mitigated. Instead, the breweries in this study treat constraints as symbolic resources that define their place within the industry and reinforce distinctions from large-scale, efficiency-driven competitors. Barriers thus contribute to the ongoing construction of what “craft” means as a cultural, relational, and economic practice.

Barriers also perform a generative function: they catalyse adaptive, situated responses that shape the dynamics of entrepreneurial action. The six categories identified empirically-financial, institutional, infrastructural, economic, distributional, and communicative barriers-operate as mechanisms that activate specific forms of strategising.

Table 4.10. Barriers as generative mechanism

Financial instability	enforces disciplined pragmatism, short planning horizons, and incremental rather than expansive growth logics.
Institutional voids	compel entrepreneurs to engage in institutional bricolage, building procedural and administrative knowledge collectively when formal systems lack coherence.
Infrastructural fragility,	most acute in Ukraine, fosters embodied resilience and flexible scheduling, embedding contingency into daily operations.
Economic pressures	push breweries toward cost-sensitive innovation, resource sharing, and micro-level bricolage.
Distributional barriers	deepen relational embeddedness, making personal networks, trust, and long-term partnerships central to market access.
Communicative restrictions.	stimulate storytelling, cultural anchoring, and indirect brand strategies that rely on identity rather than direct promotion

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

In each of these domains, barriers are not merely obstacles to be overcome. They produce specific patterns of behaviour, prompting entrepreneurs to organise, experiment, and maintain their ventures through situated creativity.

1. Financial barriers

Financial constraints were among the most universal and frequently cited barriers. For both Polish and Ukrainian interview participants, issues of capital, liquidity, and cashflow formed a constant backdrop to entrepreneurial life. In Poland, owners emphasized the difficulty of sustaining operations without economies of scale. As one IDI stated: "At the very end it always turns out that cashflow is the most important thing. Everything else can be fixed, but if cashflow is bad, it ends in disaster" (IDI 5, Poland).

Another pointed directly to structural limitations: “You need either financial backing or outstanding marketing skills… making good beer alone is no longer enough” (IDI 4, Poland).

These accounts illustrate a shift from passion-driven narratives to more rationalized, financially constrained logics of action. Research participants repeatedly highlighted the absence of a safety net: “If you don’t have a financial cushion, one bad month is enough to fall behind on payments” (IDI 7, Poland); “Banks don’t take us seriously-loans for breweries practically don’t exist” (IDI 2, Poland).

Such voices reflect structural inequality: microbreweries remain excluded from credit instruments and supplier discounts that larger producers take for granted.

In Ukraine, financial barriers were narrated in even more existential terms, shaped by wartime uncertainty. As interviewees explained:

“We cannot build large stocks. It’s money, but also the risk that something will go wrong” (IDI 2, Ukraine); “Each batch must sell quickly, because the next one we may brew under completely different conditions” (IDI 7, Ukraine);“Planning beyond two weeks is unrealistic” (IDI 8, Ukraine). In extreme cases, financial and infrastructural constraints overlapped: “If we have ingredients and power, we brew-otherwise we wait” (IDI 6, Ukraine).

The European Brewers Association (2023, pp. 7-10) recorded a 60% average energy cost increase between 2021-2023 and a 35% rise in glass prices. Margins in Polish microbreweries declined by 15% (Polish Craft Brewers Association, 2023, pp. 4-6). In Ukraine, 72% of breweries cited energy and raw material costs as primary survival barriers (Ukrainian Craft Brewers Association, 2023). Financial fragility thus emerges as both an economic condition and a symbolic marker of entrepreneurial identity, framing owners as actors constantly negotiating survival.

2. Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers were equally significant. In Poland, brewers described bureaucratic inefficiencies and, more fundamentally, the absence of institutional frameworks for new ventures in emergent industries. As they recalled: “When I started, I was one of the first breweries, so there was no know-how, and no one to ask how to get approval” (IDI 3, Poland); “We waited three months for a paper from the office; it was just one signature” (IDI 8, Poland); “Even the accountant didn’t know how to book the first invoices” (IDI 6, Poland).

These experiences align with the concept of institutional voids (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994, pp. 648-650), where entrepreneurs must navigate underdeveloped regulatory environments and often generate institutional knowledge themselves. Similar dynamics are documented in artisanal industries such as winemaking and cheesemaking (Duarte Alonso, 2011, pp. 129-133). In such settings, entrepreneurs engage in institutional bricolage (DiMaggio, 1992, pp. 118-121), improvising solutions and even educating officials.

In Ukraine, institutional barriers were compounded by wartime governance instability:

“We settle documents in weeks, but it all depends on the situation” (IDI 8, Ukraine); “A certificate could take a month-no one wanted to take responsibility” (IDI 3, Ukraine). Empirical data confirm these accounts: after 2022, 71% of Ukrainian firms described administrative procedures as “delayed or unpredictable” (Ukrainian Business Index, 2023).

Institutional barriers therefore highlight the co-constitutive relationship between entrepreneurs and state structures in transitional and crisis economies.

3. Infrastructural barriers

Infrastructural limitations presented another significant domain of constraint. In Poland, interviewees pointed to the immaturity of logistics services for craft-scale products:

“There were days when the courier didn’t pick up goods at all because the van was full” (IDI 4, Poland); “I did the first shipments myself, driving 300 km one way” (IDI 7, Poland). Damages during transport were common due to lack of industry experience: “Bottles often broke because companies had no experience with craft beer” (IDI 2, Poland).

In Ukraine, infrastructural fragility was magnified by war: “We brew on water from our source. But when there is no power-we stop” (IDI 2, Ukraine); “Generators save us, but they are expensive and slower” (IDI 6, Ukraine).According to the International Energy Agency (2023, pp. 15-17), 40% of Ukrainian businesses experienced weekly power outages in 2022.

These narratives demonstrate how infrastructural improvisation-self-distribution, generator use, flexible scheduling-becomes part of entrepreneurial identity and resilience.

4. Economic barriers

Rising production costs formed a distinct barrier category. Polish study participants emphasized inflationary pressures: “Glass prices went up 40% last year” (IDI 6, Poland); “Cardboard costs twice as much as three years ago” (IDI 2, Poland). In Ukraine, economic fragility intersected with currency volatility and import dependence: “Hops and malt come through Poland. It’s longer, more expensive, with duties” (IDI 5, Ukraine).

Eurostat (2023, pp. 19-22) recorded a 35% glass price increase and 45% rise in energy costs in Poland. The KSE Institute (2023) reported a 60% increase in the cost of imported malt in Ukraine.

Such pressures push entrepreneurs toward bricolage strategies-negotiating prices, sharing resources, minimizing costs (Smallbone and Welter, 2001, pp. 193-196).

5. Distributional barriers

Distribution was a particularly acute challenge. In Poland, dependence on the HoReCa sector created structural vulnerability: “Ninety percent of sales go to gastronomy. When gastronomy struggles, we struggle too” (IDI 7, Poland). Entry into supermarket chains was described as impossible due to requirements beyond the capabilities of microbreweries.

In Ukraine, distribution barriers reflected wartime collapse of tourism and relocation of urban populations: “Our customers left. Tourists are gone” (IDI 1, Ukraine). This compelled breweries to shift toward direct and online sales (Ukrainian Craft Brewers Association, 2023).

6. Communicative barriers

Communicative barriers illustrate the entanglement of cultural and regulatory constraints. In Poland, strict advertising prohibitions forced breweries into indirect storytelling strategies: “We cannot promote beer directly, so we talk about the history and the people behind it” (IDI 2, Poland).

In Ukraine, communication barriers were intensified by infrastructural fragility: “Because of blackouts we couldn’t send updated offers to clients in time-orders just disappeared” (IDI 5, Ukraine).

Sobotkiewicz’s distinction between marketing understood as a narrow instrument and marketing understood as an organisational mode of coordination is particularly relevant in contexts where direct promotion is restricted. When formal advertising channels are constrained, strategic communication must rely on organisational coherence-product quality signals, relational reputation, and consistent market presence. Under such

conditions, marketing becomes less about direct persuasion and more about structuring how value is made visible through channels, relationships, and trust mechanisms (Sobotkiewicz, 2007; 2019).

A shared barrier in both contexts was consumer misunderstanding of craft value: "People ask why our beer costs twice as much. We must explain it's a different product" (IDI 8, Poland).

The constellation model developed in this study (Figure 4.9) conceptualises entrepreneurial strategising as a process of becoming competitive through a dynamic interplay of constraints, meanings, and situated practices. Barriers occupy a central position in this process. They shape the form that each of the five strategic pillars takes:

1. Experimental innovation intensifies because material conditions force constant improvisation.
2. Uniqueness becomes a survival mechanism rather than a branding choice.
3. Quality-as-ethos becomes a shield against market volatility and an ethical anchor in uncertain environments.
4. Local embeddedness strengthens because wider markets remain unstable or inaccessible.
5. Relational cooperation expands as formal systems fail to provide reliable support.

In this sense, barriers are not "background conditions" but active forces that sculpt the trajectory of strategic action. They operate simultaneously as antecedents, mediators, and consequences of entrepreneurial practice. Without barriers, the distinct form of embedded craft strategising observed in this study would not emerge.

This interpretation positions barriers as productive constraints, aligning with scholarship on embedded, effectual, and situated entrepreneurship. The study contributes to this literature by showing that, in craft brewing, barriers help to:

a) define field boundaries and symbolic distinctions,
b) generate shared practices and informal institutions,
c) reinforce community-based knowledge structures,
d) and stabilise expectations around what counts as "good" craft entrepreneurship.

Thus, barriers are integral to the social, cultural, and relational fabric of the craft brewery sector. They simultaneously limit action and expand the repertoire of legitimate practices, producing the specific pattern of entrepreneurial strategising revealed through this grounded theory.

CHAPTER 5.
ENTREPRENEURIAL STRATEGIES IN MICRO-SCALE CONTEXTS AND THE MEANING-MAKING EMBEDDEDNESS OF ACTION

This chapter develops an interpretive and analytical account of the empirical findings, focusing on entrepreneurial strategies in the craft brewing sector in Poland and Ukraine. The point of departure for this discussion is the assumption that strategies are not predesigned, static models implemented from above, but instead emerge as dynamic, relational, and embedded practices-negotiated by entrepreneurs within the constraints of local environments, social relations, and culturally anchored meaning frameworks. This perspective is consistent with the constructivist paradigm of grounded theory, in which strategy is understood as an enacted process rather than a formalized plan (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 10-13; 130-136).

The study was conducted in line with this constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), following a three-stage coding process-open, axial, and selective coding-and drawing on 27 in-depth interviews with owners of microbreweries, complemented by social media data and documentary sources. The iterative, comparative, and relational character of the analytic procedure made it possible to identify a central theoretical concept and to develop a nuanced conceptualization of how research participants understood and enacted their entrepreneurial practices.

The discussion section plays a pivotal role in the overall structure of this dissertation. It serves as the analytical space in which the empirical findings are brought into dialogue with the existing literature, interpreted through relevant theoretical lenses, and critically examined in terms of their explanatory scope, limitations, and implications. Moreover, this chapter proposes a theoretical model synthesizing the key categories generated during the research process. This model provides a conceptual foundation for future scholarly inquiry and may also inform practical initiatives aimed at strengthening local entrepreneurship in contexts of scarcity, fragmentation, and cultural specificity.

The qualitative analysis identified six major meaning-making categories that together constitute the core theory of embedded strategies of becoming competitive. Competitiveness is therefore conceptualized not as a fixed outcome or a set of

standardized procedures, but as an emergent, relationally constituted process grounded in local contexts and resource environments. The six categories forming this theoretical model are as follows:

1. Experimental innovation - understood not as a rare or exceptional event but as a rhythmic, sensory, routinized, and adaptive practice embedded in everyday production.

2. Uniqueness - expressed through aesthetics, narrativity, irony, and conscious distancing from mainstream market conventions.

3. Quality as ethos - conceptualized as a relational obligation, a sensory practice, and a moral framework that structures trust-building (sennett, 2008, pp. 20-27; 241-245).

4. Local embeddedness - perceived not as a marketing device but as a lived environment of action, a source of identity, and a reservoir of symbolic and practical resources (jack and anderson, 2002, pp. 469-472; welter, 2011, pp. 167-171).

5. Relational cooperation - operating as a practice of collaboration, mutual assistance, resource sharing, and collective value creation.

6. Barriers as structures of action - interpreted not solely as constraints but as meaning-making mechanisms and potential catalysts of alternative entrepreneurial pathways.

In the subsections that follow, each of these categories is discussed in relation to the existing scholarly literature, contextual specificities, and their role in the process of becoming competitive for microbreweries operating under conditions of scarcity, institutional ambiguity, instability, and strong local anchoring. The goal of the discussion is not only to position the empirical results within broader debates on entrepreneurship, innovation, and embeddedness but also to demonstrate the theoretical and practical implications of understanding strategy as an emergent, culturally grounded, and relational process.

5.1. Rejection of classical models and embedded entrepreneurship: interpretation in the light of situated theories

The results of the empirical research clearly indicate that the entrepreneurial strategies employed by the owners of craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine significantly diverge from the classical models of strategic management that have been foundational in organizational theory since the 1980s. These models-most notably Porter's Five Forces

framework (Porter, 1985, pp. 3-33), Mintzberg's typologies of strategies (Mintzberg, 1994), and SWOT analysis-assume that enterprises operate within predictable, relatively stable market environments that can be diagnosed and modeled for the purpose of maximizing competitive advantage.

Reid (2016, pp. 95-97) ultimately framed craft brewery strategy as a geographically situated practice, emerging from the interaction of material infrastructure, regulatory context, cultural meaning, and everyday entrepreneurial action. This perspective challenges universal strategy models and supports context-sensitive, practice-based analysis.

In Porter's perspective, the firm is expected to evaluate its environment through the prism of five key market forces: the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers, the threat of substitutes, the risk of new entrants, and the intensity of competition within the sector. The purpose of such analysis is to guide the choice of one of three generic strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, or niche focus (Porter, 1985, pp. 3-33). Yet within the microbreweries analysed, one finds no signs of such calculative or positional approaches. The owners do not construct strategies on the basis of market data, do not systematically monitor competitors, do not conduct SWOT analyses, and do not implement the textbook tools of strategic management such as benchmarking, BCG matrices, or growth models. The empirical findings of this study can be interpreted within broader theories of social and economic transformation. Piotr Sztompka (2004) conceptualises social change as a process of becoming rather than linear progression. From this perspective, craft brewery strategising emerges as a dynamic response to historical ruptures, institutional shifts and evolving cultural expectations.

Instead, their strategies emerge from the fabric of local everyday life-from rituals, emotions, embodied practices, and social relations. The language of strategy assumes a sensorial and intuitive, rather than technocratic, form. Decisions are made through taste, smell, conversations with customers, or the observation of reactions during local events-not on the basis of ROI analytics or comparative tables.

"In environments marked by institutional uncertainty and dynamic change, strategic action shifts away from predictive planning toward adaptive and participatory processes. ... Under such conditions, organizations rely on continuous learning and real-time adjustment rather than fixed long-term strategies." (Lenart-Gansiniec & Sułkowski (2020)).

As one study participant put it:

“We don’t analyse the market through the lens of academic theories. We follow trends, but we don’t copy them-we filter them through our brand. People say our beers have a certain vibe. And that’s the greatest compliment for us.” (IDI 6, Poland)

Another owner stressed the importance of continuous innovation:

“We constantly experiment with innovative beer styles, introducing new ingredients and brewing techniques to meet the expectations of contemporary consumers.” (IDI 8, Poland)

A similar orientation concerned quality and local presence:

“We don’t analyse competitors’ actions. I focus on maintaining quality, expanding the portfolio, and developing our presence in gastronomy.” (IDI 2, Poland)

In Ukraine, interviewees also emphasized experimentation and creativity:

“Our main goal is to create beer that combines traditional recipes with modern technologies. We aim not only to achieve quality, but also to promote the culture of brewing, surprising with new flavors and variations.” (IDI 2, Ukraine)

“We emphasize natural ingredients and experimentation. The spirit of ‘garage brewing’ still motivates us to search for new formats.” (IDI 5, Ukraine)

These statements show that even when entrepreneurs use data analysis, they do so in a logic entirely different from that of classical models. Data are treated as tools to support dialogue with consumers, not as a foundation for long-term strategic positioning:

“We analyse orders, surveys, and sales by type. For example, in 2022 we noticed that summer customers were tired of heavy beer styles. In response, we launched light fruit ales. In 2023, they accounted for 21% of seasonal orders. The priority is to listen to the client, but to preserve our style.” (IDI 3, Ukraine)

“We are oriented toward young people, the creative class. Our Instagram community is very active-15,000 followers, consistently high engagement. We launch contests, crowdsource ideas, and organize premieres at events.” (IDI 12, Ukraine)

At the same time, micro-enterprises adapt to market changes and global trends, but they do so through practices rooted in locality:

“The market is changing: there is demand for ‘clean’ styles, non-alcoholic options, ecological solutions. We adapt: we implement recycling, work with local suppliers, and experiment with new styles.” (IDI 1, Ukraine)

Sobotkiewicz’s conceptualisation of marketing as organisational coordination reinforces the dissertation’s argument that strategy in micro-scale enterprises is enacted through practice rather than through formal planning. In craft contexts, where resources

are limited and markets are unstable, the ability to structure market knowledge, relationship maintenance, and value signalling becomes a strategic capability (Sobotkiewicz, 2007).

Such statements unequivocally suggest that micro-scale strategies emerge from context-they are the product of emergence and adaptation, rather than the implementation of strategic plans. Decisions are immersive and relational-made in response to local tensions, customer needs, the seasonality of ingredients, the availability of time, and team capacities. In this sense, entrepreneurship is not enacted "for the market" in the sense of Porter or Mintzberg, but "for the people"-for the community with which the entrepreneur maintains both emotional and physical relations.

Similar phenomena have been observed in other micro-scale sectors and creative industries. Sarah Luckman (2015) analysing artisanal micro-enterprises in design and crafts, points to the centrality of daily practices, personal commitment, and the aesthetic-emotional bond with the product as the basis for building market value and brand identity. Likewise, Penco and Castaldo (2020) in their studies of local gastronomy and micro-restaurants, emphasize that micro-scale strategies emerge primarily from relationships with the local community, not from the implementation of formal strategic plans. These observations are fully consistent with the findings of the research on craft breweries.

In the analysed cases, strategic decisions take on an emergent and relational character-made in response to community needs, the rhythms of local life, personal beliefs, and the sensory and emotional experience of the product. These strategies do not project growth and expansion in the classical sense but instead aim to consolidate meaningful presence and rootedness in the local environment. Strategy here does not function as a managerial project but as a situated practice-analogous to what Daniel Hjorth (2013) described in the context of "socio-aesthetic entrepreneurship," where the meaning of action is constructed through affective, relational, and spatial practices rather than through economic indicators.

Such an approach can be interpreted as an expression of a local epistemology of action, in which knowledge is not the result of analytical modelling but rather of embodied, sensory, and situational ways of understanding the world. Strategy here takes the form of phronesis-practical wisdom emerging from concrete situations and ethical engagement.

From the perspective of embeddedness theory, this mode of action is not deficient in comparison to classical models of management, but rather represents an alternative

paradigm. As Jack and Anderson (2002, pp. 467-471) observe, "embedded entrepreneurship is less a set of decisions taken by an individual than a relational process whose meaning arises in a social context." Strategy is thus not an ex ante plan but an ex post outcome of action within a specific space and time.

The empirical data illustrate this logic very well. Interview participants' own formulations described their activities as rituals, daily habits, and embodied practices:

"In addition to our core line we regularly launch seasonal styles, for example with sea buckthorn or ginger. At Christmas 2023, a limited spiced beer sold 700 bottles in a week." (Ukraine, IDI 10)

"We have classic styles, but we love to experiment. We often release seasonal novelties that reflect trends or interesting ideas." (Ukraine, IDI 8)

"In our innovative brewery we are developing a line of non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beers with beetroot, carrot, or currant. These are solutions that no one in Poland has yet attempted." (Poland, IDI 4)

Such practices are both operational and symbolic. Recurrent rituals (e.g., seasonal premieres, tastings) constitute community, sustain local loyalty, and reinforce the sense-making bond with the brand.

In this context, the strategies of microbreweries can also be interpreted through the lens of situated entrepreneurship, a concept developed by Steyaert and Katz (2004, pp. 179-196). According to this approach, entrepreneurship is not a set of universal managerial competences but a locally embedded social practice, which acquires meaning only in relation to place, time, and lived experiences. Strategy does not function here as a planning document, but emerges in the course of action as a performative and embodied process.

Steyaert and Katz (2004, pp. 179-196) call for a shift of perspective from the level of "organizational rationality" to the level of everyday practices and narratives. Craft breweries aptly illustrate this shift: strategies arise in rituals, stories, tastings, and daily interactions that shape relationships with customers. The entrepreneur is not a technical manager, but a participant in the local social dramaturgy-an actor embedded in the rhythms of place, cultural memory, and emotional affects.

As a result, the embodied and ritual nature of strategic activities reveals an innovative paradigm of entrepreneurship-not based on forecasting and domination, but on presence, sensitivity, and relational attentiveness. It is precisely from these elements that the meaning of strategy emerges: not as a planning document, but as a process of co-

creating value and identity in the local context (Shotter, 2006, pp. 588-592; Steyaert, 2007; Hjorth et al., 2009).

In turn, the theory of effectuation, formulated by Saras Sarasvathy (2001, pp. 243-263), provides an important interpretive tool for understanding the logic of action of craft brewers in the studied cases. Unlike the causal model (causation), which assumes rational planning and the achievement of predefined goals through available resources, the effectual approach begins with the question: "What do I have?" and only then moves to: "What can I do with it?" (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 245-250; Read et al., 2009).

From this perspective, entrepreneurship does not consist in realizing a previously defined growth strategy, but in creatively transforming available means in response to changing contextual conditions (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 245-250; Read et al., 2009). Three elements are central here: resource availability, goal flexibility, and co-creation of value with others.

This logic of action was clearly present within participants' accounts: brewers did not plan activities on the basis of market data, sales forecasts, or growth assumptions. On the contrary-their activities were grounded in the immediate use of available resources such as local ingredients (hops, water, yeast), personal brewing skills, spontaneously created networks of cooperation (with farmers, shops, gastronomy), as well as emotional and situational knowledge of customers.

As Sarasvathy (2001, pp. 252-258) notes, the effectual entrepreneur acts on the principle of "controlling the future through influence over current resources," rather than predicting that future through environmental analysis. In this perspective, uncertainty is not an obstacle but the natural environment of action-and success depends not on predictive ability but on flexibility, readiness to improvise, and sensitivity to context. One IDI participant summarized it succinctly: "Instead of Excel, we have clients and their opinions." (IDI 8, Poland)

This aphoristic statement captures the essence of effectual reasoning: it is not data analysis, but sensory and embodied experience that becomes the foundation for decision-making.

In the studied cases, what Sarasvathy terms affordable loss-the willingness to act on the basis of what can potentially be lost rather than estimates of maximum profit-was also frequently observed. Brewers repeatedly emphasized that production decisions were made without guarantees of success, often "as a trial," oriented toward interaction with the client and without fear of risk:

"We release a new beer to see how customers will react. If it doesn't work out-it's problematic, but at least we learn something." (IDI 5, Poland)

Another important feature of the effectual approach is co-creation of value within relational networks, which is vividly reflected in the collaborative brewing initiatives described by research participants, joint events with customers, and the creation of brands in cooperation with artists and local activists. These practices were not treated as promotional activities but as an integral part of daily operations, rooted in the sense of being useful and present "here and now."

For these reasons, the effectual approach appears particularly well-suited to describe micro-scale entrepreneurship under conditions of uncertainty and limited resources. It allows us to capture not the "absence of strategy," but an alternative logic of action, in which strategy is the outcome of action rather than its starting point. The entrepreneurship of brewers thus turns out to be a relational, embodied, and situational process-exactly as Sarasvathy describes it: "the future is not discovered-it is constructed" (Sarasvathy, 2001, p. 252).

A strongly recurring category of entrepreneurial strategies in the studied breweries was product innovation-understood not as the result of systematic research and development (R&D), but as the outcome of experimental brewing practices based on intuition, available ingredients, and creativity. Entrepreneurs reported that experiments with ingredients, fermentation techniques, and beer styles were not the exception but the daily modus operandi. One IDI respondent indicated that his brewery releases on average 70-80 innovative labels per year, each differing in hop profile, fermentation time, or added ingredients:

"Every batch is different. Sometimes we change only one ingredient, but that is already something new. Customers value the fact that we are curious and unrepeatable." (IDI 6, Poland)

Such an approach can be interpreted through the lens of constrained creativity theory (Baker and Nelson, 2005, pp. 329-366; Lampel et al., 2014), which posits that a lack of resources does not paralyze innovativeness but stimulates entrepreneurial bricolage-acting with "what is at hand" to create new value (Baker and Nelson, 2005, pp. 332-345). Instead of striving for standardization and repeatability-typical of scalability logics-brewers deliberately invest in diversity and one-off uniqueness, which reinforces their distinctiveness in the crowded craft beer market.

From a niche-market perspective, such actions serve a dual function: on the one hand, they attract advanced consumers ("craft beer geeks") seeking novelty, limited series, and experimental styles; on the other hand, they act as a mechanism for building brand identity as innovative, authentic, and independent. In the literature on interpretive entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 2011), innovation under uncertainty is understood not as a means of expansion, but as a way of maintaining the narrative of meaningful action-particularly important in sectors grounded in values, emotions, and passion.

Importantly, product innovation is not the result of planning strategies but of emergent action based on embodied knowledge, intuition, and local sensitivity. Brewers rarely use the language of "innovative product lines"-they more often speak of "inspirations," "the mood of customers," or "the need for change":

"We have classic styles, but we like to experiment. We often make seasonal novelties that reflect trends or interesting inspirations." (IDI 8, Ukraine)

Such practices also align with the concept of affective innovation-understood as an expression of emotional engagement in the product and the creative process (Vesalainen and Pihkala, 2006). Unlike market-financial innovation, affective innovation is relational, situational, and symbolic, and its goal is not margin optimization but the creation of a shared experience with the consumer.

One of the most frequently recurring themes in the interview participants' narratives was an uncompromising orientation toward quality. Regardless of the scale of operations, geographic location, or stage of development, craft brewery owners consistently emphasized that product quality is not a marketing add-on but the foundation of their strategy. Importantly, this quality was not defined in technocratic terms-compliance with production norms or laboratory parameters-but as an ethical, emotional, and relational value, deeply rooted in personal commitment, customer trust, and responsibility toward the community.

Such an understanding of quality finds support in the literature on the entrepreneurial ethos (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997, pp. 18-21), which stresses that the key dimension of strategy is not solely economic advantage but fidelity to principles of action and moral identity. In this sense, quality becomes a normative and cultural category-a manifestation of respect for the consumer, honesty toward oneself, and care for the meaningfulness of created products.

As one of the owners noted: "For us, quality is the most important thing. We prefer to make less, but in such a way that the customer is satisfied." (IDI 3, Poland)

From the perspective of interpretive entrepreneurship, quality functions as a marker of organizational identity around which the narrative of meaningful action is constructed (Johannisson, 2011). It is precisely through quality-understood as everyday practice rather than a standard-that microbreweries differentiate themselves from mass producers, building competitiveness not through scale but through the depth of their relationship with the consumer.

In turn, in the light of embedded entrepreneurship, quality assumes a communal and trust-based dimension (Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 469-472). Its guarantor is not a certification system or institutional market, but local reputation and continuity of relationships. As Welter and Gartner (2016, pp. 15-18) emphasize, in peripheral entrepreneurship quality becomes a "currency of trust"-the foundation of an informal contract between entrepreneur and client that replaces systems of control and formal agreements.

Reference can also be made to the concept of product authenticity (Beverland, 2005, pp. 1003-1029), according to which consumers of artisanal products seek not only sensory quality but also transparency of process, ethical conduct of the producer, and narrative consistency. In this context, quality not only "tastes" but also "means"-it becomes a carrier of cultural, identity, and emotional values. It is performative and ritualized, manifesting itself in production practices, in relationships with customers, and in the aesthetics and symbolism of the brand.

Thus, the quality-oriented strategy in the analysed cases is not in opposition to competitive strategy but constitutes its very foundation under conditions of micro-scale, uncertainty, and limited resources. It is quality-rooted in values, emotions, and relationships-that enables breweries to stand out, build loyalty, and create lasting competitive advantage, in line with a processual understanding of becoming competitive.

The findings of the research reveal a coherent image of an alternative model of action, which rejects the fundamental assumptions of classical strategic management. The owners of microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine do not rely on abstract efficiency indicators or universal growth models; instead, they act in ways deeply embedded in the local context, relationships, and values.

Rather than applying generic planning strategies (Porter, 1985, pp. 3-33) or formalized adaptive models (Mintzberg, 1994), the analysed enterprises employ a set of situational, emergent, and relational practices that align with alternative theoretical approaches: situated entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Katz, 2004, pp. 179-196), embedded

entrepreneurship (Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 467-472), and effectual entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 243-263). Each of these frameworks captures a different aspect of the practices studied-embodiment of action, its rooting in community structures, and adaptation to uncertainty through creative use of available resources.

All three perspectives-situated, embedded, and effectual-clearly indicate that entrepreneurship in the analysed cases is not merely an economic activity but a sense-making practice-a response to local needs, tensions, and opportunities. The meaning of strategy does not stem from profit optimization, but from relationships with place, community, and the self. Understood in this way, situated entrepreneurship is action "from within the lifeworld" (Steyaert, 2007), rather than "from outside the market." In this view, strategy ceases to be a formal planning tool and instead becomes a form of participation-a process of constructing meanings, relationships, and identities within the local cultural and emotional universe.

To operationalise the conceptual argument developed in this section, Table 5.1 synthesises the five entrepreneurial strategies that crystallised from the grounded theory analysis of Polish and Ukrainian craft breweries. The table does not merely list themes; rather, it represents a theoretical condensation of how entrepreneurs construct and enact strategy in practice. By juxtaposing the theoretical foundations (Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Baker and Nelson, 2005; Beverland, 2005; Sarasvathy, 2001; Granovetter, 1985) with empirical quotations, the table makes visible the multi-layered nature of strategy-as-practice in this field. Each strategy captures a distinct mode of entrepreneurial sensemaking and action, while simultaneously revealing the socio-cultural, material and relational conditions in which breweries operate.

The table below serves as an analytical bridge between abstract theorisation and situated empirical realities. For instance, local embeddedness emerges not merely as a commercial tactic but as a form of situated entrepreneurship, whereby production, identity and market positioning become inseparable from local histories, neighbourhoods, and community expectations. Similarly, experimental innovation is not framed as R&D in the classical managerial sense but as a pattern of constrained creativity (Baker and Nelson, 2005), in which brewers experiment under limited resources, drawing on bricolage, improvisation and trend sensitivity. In contrast to traditional strategic models, quality as ethos illustrates how entrepreneurs construct moral and relational commitments around product excellence-an ethos cultivated as much through authenticity and consistency as through technical mastery.

Furthermore, emergent strategy, grounded in Mintzberg (1994) and effectuation logics (Sarasvathy, 2001), highlights how decision-making unfolds intuitively and adaptively, often without formal planning or long-term roadmaps. This resonates strongly with the empirical material, in which interviewees describe brewing decisions as fluid, situational and responsive to relational cues. Finally, relational cooperation reflects the embedded nature of entrepreneurial action in dense social networks, where collaborations, joint releases, and community events act both as market mechanisms and as social practices that reinforce identity, reciprocity and belonging.

Table 5.1. Entrepreneurial strategies in craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine

Strategy	**Author**	**Practical meaning/ Theoretical grounding**	**Selected empirical quotations**
Local embeddedness	Steyaert and Katz (2004); Welter (2011)	Situated entrepreneurship - action embedded in local social and cultural context.	"At least one-third of our sales now take place locally…" (IDI 4, Poland) "We are inspired by local history and culture, which is visible in the names of our beers and in events referencing regional traditions." (IDI 8, Poland)
Experimental innovation	Baker and Nelson (2005); Lampel et al. (2014)	Constrained creativity - experimentation and adaptation under limited resources.	"We brew dozens of new beers every year, constantly trying out different hops, fruits or spices. Variety keeps us and our customers engaged." (IDI 12, Poland) "We have classic styles, but we like to experiment. We often release seasonal novelties that reflect trends or interesting ideas." (IDI 8, Ukraine)
Quality as ethos	Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus (1997); Beverland (2005)	Entrepreneurial ethos - quality as relational and moral foundation, not merely a technical standard.	"The most important things are product quality and fairly quick adaptation to new trends." (IDI 4, Poland) "We emphasize natural ingredients and continuous experimentation." (IDI 5, Ukraine)
Emergent strategy	Mintzberg (1994); Sarasvathy (2001)	Strategy as emergent - decisions made intuitively in response to situations and relationships.	"We don't have a line, we don't have fixed labels. We don't even have a plan. If we have something to say-we brew it." (IDI 13, Ukraine) "We constantly show that beer is something more, but at the same time it should be an addition to time with friends." (IDI 4, Poland)
Relational cooperation	Granovetter (1985); Jack and Anderson (2002)	Embedded entrepreneurship - cooperation and rootedness in social networks.	"We brew beers with other breweries. Joint premieres and sales are normal practice for us." (IDI 12, Poland) "We regularly organize tastings and events, and

Strategy	Author	Practical meaning/ Theoretical grounding	Selected empirical quotations
			cooperate with tourist groups in Lviv." (IDI 10, Ukraine)

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

The strategies mapped in Table 5.1 reveal that entrepreneurship in craft breweries is not primarily oriented toward competitive optimisation or market positioning in the classical sense. Instead, it is shaped by embeddedness, experimentation, relationality and emergent action, forming what this dissertation conceptualises as a pattern of embedded craft entrepreneurship. By integrating theoretical perspectives with grounded empirical evidence, the table becomes a cornerstone for understanding how craft brewery strategies are collectively produced, socially situated, and dynamically enacted within the Polish and Ukrainian contexts.

From the perspective of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the empirical analysis shows that the entrepreneurial strategies employed by microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine are not ex ante designed structures but emergent structures of meaning-constructed in actu, in direct response to local tensions, constraints, and opportunities. In this sense, strategy does not function as a formal action plan but as a processual "becoming competitive," embedded in daily interactions, emotions, rituals, and community.

Juxtaposing classical models (Porter, 1985, pp. 3-33; Mintzberg, 1994; SWOT analysis) with the practices of craft breweries reveals fundamental discrepancies. Whereas traditional models rest on planning, analytical, and positional structures, the actions of the entrepreneurs studied are emergent, embodied, and affective, guided by experience, senses, intuition, and relational presence.

Instead of competition for market share, resource optimization, or expansion, interviewees speak of proximity to the client, fidelity to values, authenticity of action, and trust as the currency of quality. In their narratives, strategy does not derive from SWOT analysis or benchmarking, but emerges from the rituals of the shared table, shifting weather, the moods of customers, or the relational resonance of place.

In this context, three theoretical approaches-embedded entrepreneurship (Jack and Anderson, 2002, pp. 467-472), situated entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Katz, 2004, pp. 179-196), and effectual entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy, 2001, pp. 243-263)-offer complementary interpretive frameworks that capture the dynamics of this "becoming competitive":

1. Embedded entrepreneurship highlights the socio-cultural rootedness of strategies-as forms of action growing out of local narratives, norms, and bonds.
2. Situated entrepreneurship emphasizes the embodied, sensory, and ritual character of action-visible in the micro-practices of daily presence and sensory production.
3. Effectual entrepreneurship underscores creative adaptation to uncertainty and action based on available resources, relationships, and readiness to learn by doing.

Thus, from the perspective of grounded theory, becoming competitive does not mean executing a pre-designed plan or battling for market position. It instead signifies the emergence of meaning, identity, and relational value within a local, dynamic context of action. Microbreweries do not function as classical managerial organizations, but as micro-institutions of meaning-making-embedded in emotions, community rhythms, trust, and ethically understood quality. Strategy in this sense is negotiated daily, in the rhythms of place and people, and competitiveness takes the form of affective presence rather than domination.

5.2. Divergence in entrepreneurial strategies in Poland and Ukraine

The cross-country comparison between Poland and Ukraine reveals two distinct worlds of entrepreneurial becoming, each shaped by its own textures of stability, uncertainty, possibility and constraint. Although Polish and Ukrainian craft breweries share the same foundational ethos-authenticity, experimentation, locality and a commitment to quality-the lived contexts in which these values are enacted diverge so profoundly that they generate different strategic universes. The entrepreneurs may speak similar craft languages, but they speak them from different historical, institutional and emotional landscapes.

Szarucki stresses that management research conducted in specific institutional and cultural contexts should not aim at universal generalisation but at analytical understanding of situated phenomena. He argues that explanatory value lies in revealing mechanisms and patterns that are meaningful within a given context, even if their applicability is limited in scope. This position aligns with the comparative design of the present study, which examines entrepreneurial strategies within the craft brewing sector in Poland and Ukraine. By focusing on contextually embedded practices rather than abstract regularities, the research contributes to theory by clarifying how strategic action

is shaped by local conditions, institutional arrangements and relational networks (Szarucki, 2009; Lisiński & Szarucki, 2020/2021).

In Poland, strategic action unfolds within an environment that, despite competitive pressure, remains fundamentally predictable. In Ukraine, strategic action is forged amidst disruption, institutional fragility and wartime precarity. As a result, practices that appear similar at the surface level-such as innovation, cooperation or locality-acquire markedly different meanings, functions and emotional intensities when interpreted through the lens of IDI brewers narratives.

To capture these patterned contrasts, Table 5.2 synthesises the grounded-theory analysis into a comparative interpretive model. Rather than reducing differences to static categories, the table highlights two distinct regimes of embedded craft entrepreneurship:

a) a stability-based regime characteristic of Polish breweries, rooted in planned trajectories, market responsiveness and structured cooperation, and
b) a precarity-based regime characteristic of Ukrainian breweries, marked by improvisation, solidarity networks, cultural resilience and effectual reasoning.

These regimes do not represent fixed archetypes but evolving, contextually activated constellations of practices. The table serves as a conceptual map that makes these divergences visible and analytically graspable.

Table 5.2. Interpretive model of divergent strategic regimes

Strategic Dimension	Poland (Stability-Based Embedded Entrepreneurship)	Ukraine (Precarity-Based Embedded Entrepreneurship)
Institutional Context	Predictable regulation EU frameworks Stable logistics → Strategy as planning	Volatile institutions Wartime disruptions Infrastructural fragility → Strategy as reaction
Innovation Logic	Controlled experimentation Trend responsiveness Deliberate differentiation → Innovation = competitiveness	Improvisation and substitution Resource-driven creativity Innovation as resilience → Innovation = survival
Local Embeddedness	Market anchor Provenance as differentiation Community-based sales → Locality = brand advantage	Cultural identity and defiance Place as symbolic continuity Locality as moral practice → Locality = cultural resilience
Cooperation	Strategic partnerships Co-brewing and co-marketing Network-based positioning → Cooperation = expansion	Mutual aid networks Shared equipment/logistics Collective survival → Cooperation = solidarity
Quality Ethos	Professional craft standard Reputation and consumer	Moral stance and dignity High quality as identity

Strategic Dimension	Poland (Stability-Based Embedded Entrepreneurship)	Ukraine (Precarity-Based Embedded Entrepreneurship)
	trust → Quality = competitiveness	→ Quality = resistance
Financial Logic	• Cash-flow discipline • Incremental scaling • Market-calibrated pragmatism	• Short-term adaptation • Loss-taking for continuity • Survival logic dominates
Overall Strategic Regime	• Causal reasoning • Planned trajectories • Stability-based embeddedness	• Effectual reasoning • Improvised trajectories • Crisis-based embeddedness

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

The comparative model presented in Table 5.2 reveals that Polish and Ukrainian craft breweries inhabit two structurally different strategic worlds, even though they operate within the same industry and mobilise similar craft values. The contrast is not merely institutional or economic; it is experiential, emotional and epistemic. Interview participants from the two countries interpret their environments through distinct logics of possibility-logics that shape how strategy is imagined, enacted and justified in everyday practice.

In Poland, entrepreneurs narrate their work in relation to a world that is structured, oriented toward the future, and institutionally legible. Strategic action unfolds within a horizon where planning is meaningful and where long-term decisions remain intelligible. Stability-despite its imperfections-functions as a source of strategic imagination. Entrepreneurs speak confidently about next seasons, future investments, consumer trends and planned innovation cycles. Their stories express the assumption that time moves predictably forward, and that craft entrepreneurship is a project unfolding along that timeline.

In Ukraine, by contrast, entrepreneurs inhabit a world profoundly shaped by disruption, precarity and permanent uncertainty. Here, strategy is not a blueprint but a posture-an embodied readiness to adapt, redirect and make do. Planning dissolves under the weight of wartime interruptions; forecasting becomes speculative; the future appears as a series of contingent possibilities rather than an ordered path. In this context, strategy emerges as reactive, situated and emotionally charged, reflecting the volatility of institutional, infrastructural and social conditions. Ukrainian interview participants frequently describe decision-making as a sequence of improvisations, where resourcefulness is not an option but a survival imperative.

These divergent strategic regimes illustrate a central thesis of grounded theory: context does not merely influence action-it co-produces the very meaning of action. Practices such as innovation, cooperation, locality or quality may appear structurally similar across countries, but their underlying logics differ so fundamentally that they become distinct phenomena when interpreted through lived experience.

What follows is an in-depth interpretive reconstruction of how these strategic dimensions unfold within the two contrasting worlds.

1. Strategy as a "child" of context: stability vs. precarity

The narratives of Polish IDIs reveal that strategy is understood as a deliberate, future-oriented practice. Even under competitive pressure, they operate within a system that offers procedural clarity and logistical reliability. The Polish craft sector - 326 breweries by 2022, steady growth of taprooms, expanding festivals-forms a predictable ecosystem in which strategic agency can be exercised with confidence. Respondents speak of "planning the next brewing calendar," "shaping long-term customer engagement," and "preparing for seasonal peaks." These statements reflect a strategic logic rooted in causal reasoning, where outcomes can be shaped through structured decisions.

Ukrainian brewery owners, however, describe strategy as contingent, improvised and situational. Their decision-making processes unfold under constraints so pervasive that strategy becomes an ongoing negotiation with unpredictability. Electricity outages, disrupted supply lines, the relocation of customers, military mobilisation and infrastructural fragility all pull entrepreneurs into short temporal cycles. Respondents repeatedly emphasise the impossibility of long-term planning: "We plan two weeks ahead at most," "We decide when we have electricity," "Strategy is reacting to what happens today."

This confirms the emergence of a precarity-based strategic logic, aligned with effectual reasoning: entrepreneurs start from available means rather than desired ends. While Polish strategy thrives on structural predictability, Ukrainian strategy is born out of contextual turbulence.

2. Innovation as two different energies: deliberate differentiation vs. adaptive improvisation.

In both countries, innovation is a core mechanism of craft identity-but its meaning and energy diverge dramatically.

Polish breweries operate in a consumer environment where novelty is a competitive resource. Innovation is intentional, controlled and market-responsive. Brewers actively monitor European trends, attend festivals, explore new hop varieties, and experiment with styles to attract customers. Innovation here is a way to differentiate in a crowded market and sustain relevance. It is embedded within routine processes and long-term brand narratives.

In Ukraine, innovation arises from necessity rather than strategy. The unpredictability of supply chains, ingredient shortages and infrastructural failures forces brewers into constant adaptation. New recipes emerge because certain hops are unavailable; distribution changes because roads are unsafe; production schedules shift because electricity is unreliable. Innovation becomes a form of creative resilience, a way to transform scarcity into possibility.

Thus, while Polish innovation aims at market distinction, Ukrainian innovation aims at continuity of practice.

3. Local embeddedness: market anchor vs. cultural resilience

Locality is cherished by craft brewers in both countries, yet its performative function diverges.

Polish breweries use locality to cultivate customer loyalty and differentiate their products. The popularity of regional festivals, provenance-based branding and local distribution networks reinforce the market value of being “local”. Locality strengthens competitiveness and supports incremental growth.

For Ukrainian brewers, locality becomes a narrative of endurance, a connection to place that remains unbroken despite war. Local symbols, cultural references and historical motifs anchor breweries within a broader struggle for identity preservation. Locality transforms from a marketing tool into a moral statement-a way of claiming presence and meaning in a disrupted world.

4. Cooperation: strategic networking vs. solidarity infrastructure

Cooperation is central to craft culture globally, but its lived meaning differs across contexts.

Collaborations, co-brewings and shared events help breweries expand their audience and refine their market positioning. Cooperation functions as a strategic accelerator, enabling knowledge exchange and brand strengthening. Pachura (2012, pp. 55-59) emphasised that inter-organisational collaboration functions as an adaptive

mechanism in complex environments, enabling small firms to share risk, compensate for resource limitations and maintain strategic flexibility.

In Ukraine, cooperation becomes a solidarity mechanism. Breweries share generators, coordinate shipments, assist with raw materials, host each other's displaced staff. These networks form an informal infrastructure of survival, not expansion. Cooperation here is characterised by urgency, reciprocity and deep emotional significance.

5. Quality ethos: competitive standard vs. existential identity

Quality is a sacred category for brewers, yet its meaning once again diverges.

It supports competitiveness: consistent flavour, clean production, professional control of variables. Polish brewers discuss quality in technical and managerial terms. In Ukraine, maintaining high quality during war becomes an act of dignity and resistance. It signifies commitment to craft even when the world around collapses. Quality is not just operational-it is existential, a form of cultural and personal integrity.

6. Financial logic: incremental pragmatism vs. survival calculus

Although margins have tightened (energy +60%; glass +35%), Polish breweries describe financial logic as disciplined and calculative, oriented toward gradual scaling and sustained operations.

Ukrainian breweries face extreme volatility: electricity outages, unpredictable demand, sudden cost shocks, and labour disruptions. Financial strategy becomes a series of adaptive micro-decisions, often involving loss-taking to maintain continuity. Survival becomes a financial logic in itself.

The comparative analysis reveals that Polish and Ukrainian craft breweries inhabit two strategic universes:

a) Poland exemplifies stability-based embedded entrepreneurship: strategic action rooted in predictability, deliberate innovation, structured cooperation and incremental growth.
b) Ukraine embodies precarity-based embedded entrepreneurship: strategy forged through improvisation, solidarity networks, cultural resilience and adaptive pragmatism.

These findings reinforce the core grounded-theory insight that strategy is not an abstract managerial construct but a culturally situated, relationally produced, and contextually emergent practice. The same categories-innovation, quality, cooperation, locality, financial logic-become different mechanisms when lived within different worlds.

5.3. The model of embedded craft entrepreneurship (ECE)

The empirical analyses conducted in this study reveal a consistent and striking pattern: entrepreneurial strategies in craft brewing cannot be adequately captured by the conceptual instruments of classical strategic management. Across both Poland and Ukraine, brewery owners navigate environments characterized by volatility, resource scarcity, institutional ambiguity, and culturally saturated relational networks. Within such conditions, the underlying assumptions embedded in traditional models-predictability, calculability, and the availability of stable resources-simply do not hold. What emerges instead is a form of entrepreneurship that is deeply situated, relational, and meaning-laden. Strategic action takes shape not through formal planning or competitive positioning frameworks, but through embodied practice, contextual interpretation, and networks of trust.

This divergence is not accidental. Microbreweries operate at a scale that renders many corporate strategy tools obsolete. Their survival depends on continuous adaptation, improvisation, and emotional investment, rather than on forecasting or formal analysis. In this regard, the findings resonate with established critiques of rationalist strategy (Mintzberg, 1994) and align closely with practice-based perspectives on entrepreneurial action. Strategic effectiveness depends on the coherence of the organisational process system rather than on individual managerial decisions (Starostka-Patyk, 2018, pp. 52–55). Yet the empirical material also pushes these theories further by highlighting how, for craft brewers, strategy is not only emergent-it is inseparable from identity, community, and cultural expression. Reid (2018, pp. 70-73) conceptualised craft brewing regions as interconnected ecosystems in which breweries, suppliers, regulators, and consumers co-evolve. Lenart-Gansiniec and Sułkowski (2020, pp. 327–329) argued that participatory and relational mechanisms mediate value creation processes, reinforcing interpretations of strategy as embedded learning rather than linear planning. Strategic behaviour is shaped by shared norms, spatial proximity, and institutional arrangements, reinforcing the idea that strategy is collectively produced rather than individually designed.

To synthesise these empirical and theoretical insights, the study introduces the **Model of Embedded Craft Entrepreneurship (ECE)**, which captures the five analytically saturated pillars structuring entrepreneurial action in the craft brewing sector. The model translates the grounded categories-authenticity, local embeddedness, experimental innovation, relational cooperation and financial pragmatism-into an integrated conceptual architecture that reflects how strategy emerges through situated,

relational and context-dependent practices rather than through prescriptive managerial planning. This architecture is visualised in Figure 5.1, which presents the ECE model as an interdependent system of pillars anchored in the broader socio-cultural and institutional environment. The figure functions not as a decorative illustration but as an analytical condensation of the grounded theory: it demonstrates how each pillar operates as a distinct, theoretically meaningful dimension of entrepreneurial practice, while simultaneously contributing to a shared strategic logic that is historically situated, culturally mediated and organisationally enacted. Organisational order is maintained through ongoing interaction among actors holding different perspectives and interests. As noted by Gębarowski (2017, pp. 72–76), stability within organisations emerges from temporary alignments achieved through continuous negotiation rather than from permanent consensus. Strategic management systems therefore provide a framework within which sensemaking and coordination are sustained over time.

Figure 5.1. The embedded craft entrepreneurship (ECE) model

Source: author's elaboration based on qualitative interviews.

Authenticity as moral and relational foundation

Authenticity functions as the normative core of craft entrepreneurship. Respondents consistently framed their actions through a moral lens: beer was treated as a personal signature, an ethical responsibility, and a marker of dignity. Decisions such as

releasing a new batch, collaborating with partners, or altering recipes were not evaluated solely through economic metrics; they were evaluated through principles of honesty, integrity, and fidelity to one's craft.

Brewers repeatedly described moments in which financial logic conflicted with authentic practice, yet authenticity routinely prevailed. This indicates that authenticity is not a decorative brand element but a constitutive force shaping how entrepreneurs understand themselves and how they wish to be recognised. In this sense, authenticity resembles symbolic capital in Bourdieu's framework, as it confers legitimacy and recognition beyond economic value (Bourdieu, 1986), while operating in a more intimate and practice-bound manner. It binds the brewer to the product, the product to the community, and the community to shared values. Organisational culture shapes the ways in which knowledge is created, interpreted, and utilised through shared norms, values, and behavioural patterns (Paliszkiewicz, 2019, pp. 60–63).

Authenticity also serves as a boundary mechanism distinguishing "real craft" from mass-market imitation. Brewers expressed strong aversion toward breweries that used craft aesthetics without embodying craft ethos. Such condemnation underscores that authenticity is both a personal ethic and a professional identity marker within the field.

Local embeddedness as anchor and social infrastructure

Locality emerged not as a marketing device but as an existential grounding. For many breweries, place was not a backdrop of activity but a co-producing agent: a source of ingredients, cultural symbols, collective histories, and relational ties. The brewery was portrayed as embedded in the rhythms of its village, district, or city-shaping and shaped by local life.

Entrepreneurs described locality through sensory and narrative language, invoking dialects, landscapes, marine winds, mountain paths, neighbourhood stories, and regional festivities. This form of embeddedness extends beyond Granovetter's notion of social embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985), approaching a deeper cultural embeddedness in which place, identity, and meaning are intertwined in everyday entrepreneurial practice (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

Yet locality also presents constraints. A geographically limited radius of distribution restricts reach and scalability. Dependence on local suppliers exposes breweries to disruptions. For Ukrainian breweries, wartime destruction of logistics and regional depopulation intensified these vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, these constraints were often reframed by respondents as sources of strength. Local embeddedness

generated trust, loyalty, and cultural legitimacy that could not be replicated through expansion.

This dual character-anchoring and constraining-reveals locality as both an economic and existential condition. It structures what breweries can do materially, but also shapes how they understand their mission and contribution.

Experimental innovation as everyday practice

Innovation in craft brewing bore little resemblance to innovation in managerial theory. Rather than being a planned, investment-driven or R&D-oriented process, innovation manifested as a daily ritual of experimentation: testing adjuncts, adjusting recipes, creating seasonal series, or responding to spontaneous sensory inspiration.

Interviewees repeatedly used metaphors of rhythm, breathing, and emotion when discussing innovation. Innovation was described not as a means to compete but as an internal necessity, a mode of staying alive creatively and professionally. This aligns closely with the concept of bricolage, understood as recombining available resources to address emerging opportunities (Baker and Nelson, 2005), and with effectual logic, in which entrepreneurial action begins with what is at hand rather than with predetermined goals (Sarasvathy, 2001).

Innovation functioned simultaneously as expression, exploration, and differentiation, providing not only a means of market positioning but also a way of sustaining meaning in work, engaging the team, and constructing a narrative around the brand. While this narrative dimension is often marginalised in mainstream entrepreneurship theory, it emerged in this study as central: for many brewers, each new beer was framed as a message, a gesture, or a story (cf. Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001).

At the same time, innovation was bounded by financial constraints, as producing numerous premieres annually entails cost and risk. Breweries navigated this tension through small-batch production, collaboration, and pragmatic compromise, illustrating that innovation in craft brewing is neither romantic nor chaotic but takes the form of disciplined improvisation.

Relational cooperation as cultural norm

Among all pillars, relational cooperation perhaps most directly challenges mainstream assumptions of competitive strategy. Craft breweries routinely collaborate-even with direct competitors. These collaborations include joint brewing, equipment sharing, recipe exchange, co-hosting events, and mutual promotion.

This cooperative ethos cannot be explained solely by resource scarcity, although scarcity is clearly a major driver, nor can it be understood exclusively through the lens of coopetition theory (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996). The empirical evidence indicates that cooperation plays a deeper role: it sustains a community of practice, generates shared identity, and reinforces collective resilience (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

In Poland, cooperation fostered cultural experimentation and shared learning, whereas in Ukraine collaboration became a vital mechanism of survival under wartime conditions. When electricity failed, supply chains collapsed, or staff left for military service, breweries relied on one another more than on institutions or markets. Such relational networks function as informal infrastructures-flexible, trust-based, and emotionally grounded-carrying information, resources, labour, and moral support across organisational boundaries.

In this sense, relational cooperation is not ancillary to strategy but constitutes the social field in which strategy becomes possible at all.

Financial pragmatism as silent regulator

While authenticity, locality, innovation, and cooperation shape the expressive and relational dimensions of craft entrepreneurship, financial pragmatism operates as the quiet regulator. It governs what is feasible, what must be postponed, and what risks cannot be taken. Breweries in both countries face constrained liquidity, limited access to financing, and instability in supply chains. These conditions create a logic of short-term adaptation rather than long-term optimization.

However, financial pragmatism does not negate the other pillars; it modulates them. It tempers innovation by limiting batch sizes and costly experimentation, shapes locality by constraining distribution, intensifies cooperation by making resource-sharing attractive, and reinforces authenticity by preventing forms of expansion that would compromise core values.

Financial pragmatism thus operates as a systemic counterweight that keeps the more expressive pillars grounded in everyday reality. Strategy emerges from the ongoing tension between aspiration and constraint rather than from a stable or detached assessment of market opportunities.

Cross-country divergence: stability vs. precarity

Although the five pillars appeared in both national contexts, their functions diverged significantly. In Poland, where institutional infrastructures are relatively stable, the pillars supported strategies of differentiation, cultural positioning, and measured

growth. Polish breweries could invest in narrative identity, aesthetics, and long-term brand building because their operational environment was predictable enough to sustain such commitments.

In Ukraine, the same pillars served as mechanisms of resilience. Innovation became a tool for coping with shortages. Cooperation became a survival network. Local embeddedness strengthened community solidarity under crisis. Authenticity took on patriotic and moral significance. Financial pragmatism became the rule rather than the exception.

Thus, the ECE model is not merely descriptive; it reveals how structural conditions shape the meaning and function of entrepreneurial practices. The pillars are universal in form but context-dependent in expression.

While grounded in craft brewing, the dynamics captured by the ECE model resonate with patterns in other craft-based and artisanal sectors. Gastronomy, artisan food production, boutique design, cultural micro-enterprises, and creative studios share similar grammars of action: authenticity as currency, locality as identity, experimentation as ethos, collaboration as norm, and pragmatism as structural reality.

The model therefore contributes to entrepreneurship theory by offering an alternative to rationalist frameworks. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as a process of opportunity recognition and resource orchestration, the ECE model conceptualizes entrepreneurial action as emergent from practice, relationship, and meaning. It demonstrates that small enterprises are not miniature corporations; they are micro-institutions of culture and community.

In doing so, the model intersects with several strands of theory:

a) *embedded entrepreneurship (Granovetter; Jack and Anderson)*
b) *effectual logic (Sarasvathy)*
c) *situated approaches (Anderson and Gaddefors)*
d) *communities of practice (Lave and Wenger)*
e) *sociologies of craft (Sennett)*
f) *symbolic interactionist perspectives on meaning-making*

Yet it contributes a novel synthesis by showing how these theoretical lenses converge within concrete empirical practices.

As a conclusion, the findings dismantle the notion that strategy in small enterprises is a simplified version of corporate strategy. Instead, craft breweries enact strategy as an ongoing negotiation with context, resources, identity, and community.

Their actions are grounded not in prediction but in responsiveness; not in abstraction but in embodied experience; not in competition but in connection.

Strategy in this field is not a document or plan. It is an evolving pattern of meaning expressed through material practices: brewing, tasting, collaborating, naming, designing labels, engaging with neighbours, sourcing from local farms, participating in festivals, or adapting to crises. These actions generate coherence and direction without requiring formalization. They reveal entrepreneurship as a culturally situated practice-lived, relational, and emotionally charged.

By articulating this logic, the ECE model helps explain how microbreweries navigate uncertainty and how they construct entrepreneurial worlds that are viable not because they replicate managerial rationality, but because they mobilize alternative economies of meaning. These economies draw strength from authenticity, community, culture, creativity, and adaptive pragmatism.

The discussion therefore positions craft entrepreneurship as a distinctive form of economic action in which cultural, social, and emotional dimensions are not peripheral-they are central. Strategic action emerges from this interplay. Craft breweries survive not through scale, prediction, or analytic tools, but through the cultivation of relationships, local narratives, shared values, and sensorial creativity.

This alternative model of entrepreneurship does not deny the importance of financial discipline or operational competence. Rather, it integrates them into a broader ecosystem shaped by identity, locality, and meaning. It shows that strategic advantage in craft sectors arises not from market power but from embeddedness in cultural and relational life.

5.4. Verification of research aims and hypotheses

This dissertation demonstrates that entrepreneurial strategising in the craft beer industry does not follow a linear, rational, or formally designed trajectory. Instead, it emerges as a practice-based, emergent, and contextually embedded process rooted in the everyday life of small breweries. Empirical evidence shows that entrepreneurs in this sector rarely rely on formalised strategic plans, forecasts, or managerial roadmaps. Strategy is constructed through continuous action: embodied craft knowledge, iterative experimentation, daily problem-solving, ongoing interaction with consumers and partners, and context-sensitive responses to emerging challenges. In this sense, strategy

is not a document or a predefined sequence of decisions but a living process that is enacted, negotiated, and adapted in real time.

This mode of strategising enables microbreweries to strengthen their embeddedness within local communities, reinforce their identity as craft-oriented enterprises, and develop competitive capabilities grounded in authenticity, relational trust, innovation, and cooperation. These capabilities allow breweries to navigate market volatility, institutional ambiguity, and material constraints more effectively than formal planning approaches. At the same time, this form of strategising entails persistent challenges, including limited access to financing, infrastructural vulnerability, unstable supply chains, and regulatory complexity. In the Ukrainian context, these constraints are intensified by wartime conditions such as electricity shortages, logistical disruption, staff mobilisation or loss, emotional pressure, and pervasive uncertainty. Despite these pressures, breweries continue to operate, demonstrating a strong capacity for resilience, improvisation, and collective solidarity.

The findings indicate that practice-based entrepreneurship is likely to become increasingly relevant in sectors where locality, craftsmanship, material engagement, sustainability, and cultural values play a growing role in shaping consumer preferences. In such contexts, small, locally rooted enterprises evolve from peripheral producers into actors that actively shape community identity, contribute to regional economies, and enrich local cultural ecosystems.

The main aim of this dissertation was to reconstruct and theoretically interpret the emergent forms of entrepreneurial strategising practiced by craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine, understood as situated, relational and dynamically negotiated practices. This aim has been fully achieved through the application of constructivist grounded theory, which enabled the development of a theoretical explanation grounded directly in empirical material rather than imposed a priori conceptual frameworks. The analysis demonstrates that strategising in craft microbreweries is enacted through everyday practices, relational engagements, and adaptive responses to contextual constraints, thereby confirming the appropriateness of the chosen epistemological and methodological approach for addressing the research objective.

The achievement of the main aim is substantiated by the systematic fulfilment of all specific aims of the study.

First, the aim of identifying and analysing dominant modes of entrepreneurial action in craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine was achieved through the reconstruction of strategising as a practice-based process rooted in experimentation, improvisation, continuous engagement with consumers, and pragmatic responses to material and organisational limitations. The findings show that entrepreneurial action is embedded in routine activities such as brewing, recipe development, sensory evaluation, and interaction with local communities, rather than articulated through formal plans or abstract strategic models.

Second, the aim of examining innovation as a rhythmic, embodied, and identity-forming practice was achieved by demonstrating that innovation functions simultaneously as creative expression, exploration, and differentiation. Empirical analysis revealed that innovation is sustained through embodied skills, sensory knowledge, and cyclical experimentation, and that it plays a central role in maintaining meaning in work, organisational cohesion, and brand narrative, rather than serving solely as a market-oriented instrument.

Third, the aim of analysing the role of locality, relationality, and socio-cultural embeddedness in shaping strategic practices was fulfilled by showing how place-based identity, community ties, and networks of trust influence decision-making in both relatively stable institutional environments, as observed in Poland, and crisis-conditioned contexts, as exemplified by Ukraine. The findings confirm that embeddedness operates not only as a contextual condition but as an active, practice-based force shaping legitimacy, demand, and strategic orientation.

Fourth, the aim of interpreting contextual barriers as generative forces rather than merely as obstacles was achieved by demonstrating how constraints related to resource scarcity, infrastructural disruption, and uncertainty catalyse improvisation, cooperation, bricolage, and resilience. In particular, the analysis shows that crisis conditions-most visibly in the Ukrainian context-intensify relational cooperation and adaptive problem-solving, thereby generating new strategic capacities rather than simply limiting entrepreneurial action.

Finally, the aim of synthesising these insights into a grounded theoretical model was achieved through the development of the Embedded Craft Entrepreneurship (ECE) Model. This model integrates the core empirical categories-authenticity, innovation, locality, cooperation, and adaptive pragmatism-into a coherent explanation of how craft microbreweries achieve and sustain competitiveness. The ECE Model demonstrates that

competitiveness emerges from the dynamic interplay of expressive and constraining forces and from the continuous negotiation between aspiration and limitation, rather than from linear planning or stable assessments of market opportunities.

The research enabled the verification of the principal sensitising hypothesis:

Entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is a practice-based, emergent and contextually embedded process that cannot be adequately explained by classical, plan-based models of strategic management.

To deepen this inquiry, five specific sensitising hypotheses were formulated. Their verification is summarised below.

H1: Entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is predominantly practice-based rather than plan-based, emerging from relational and embodied engagement rather than formal analysis.

This hypothesis was unequivocally confirmed. Research participants described strategy not as a written plan but as something that happens-emerging from hands-on engagement, experimentation, conversations, sensory evaluations and relational negotiations. Rather than analysing markets, they "read" context through action.

H2: Innovation in craft breweries manifests as a continuous, experimental and identity-producing practice, rather than as a conventional market-oriented differentiation tool.

Innovation manifested as a continuous, experimental and often emotionally charged practice embedded in the craft ethos. Rather than serving as a calculated differentiator, innovation was experienced as a source of meaning, creativity and identity. Brewers repeatedly emphasised that innovation "cannot stop," because it sustains personal motivation and reinforces the brewery's character.

H3: Locality performs different strategic functions across contexts-primarily symbolic and identity-related in Poland, and adaptive and survival-oriented in Ukraine.

Locality played highly divergent roles across contexts. In Poland, locality was used symbolically-to differentiate brands, attract consumers, and cultivate emotional authenticity. In Ukraine, locality served essential survival functions, offering access to informal networks, community support and non-market infrastructures that compensated for wartime disruptions. Thus, locality becomes not only an identity marker but also a strategic safety net.

H4: Contextual barriers-such as financial constraints, institutional voids and infrastructural vulnerabilities-actively shape entrepreneurial practices by generating new forms of improvisation, collaboration and resilience.

This hypothesis was strongly supported. Financial constraints, institutional voids, regulatory ambiguity, infrastructural fragility and war-related disruptions did not merely hinder entrepreneurial activity; they shaped it. Entrepreneurs responded creatively by sharing equipment, exchanging knowledge, forming cooperative alliances and improvising new solutions. Constraints therefore acted as triggers of creativity and cooperation.

H5: Competitiveness in craft microbreweries arises from the integration of relational, cultural and material practices rather than from classical strategic positioning.

The findings confirmed that competitive advantage in craft breweries does not arise from analytical positioning or scale. Instead, it emerges from authenticity, relational trust, cultural narratives, product quality, collaborative networks and the ability to maintain meaning-driven practices. These elements form the backbone of strategic distinctiveness.

In conclusion, this dissertation shows that entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries is best understood as a practice-based, emergent, and contextually embedded process rather than as a product of formal planning or analytical positioning. By grounding the analysis in the everyday actions, relationships, and constraints experienced by brewery owners in Poland and Ukraine, the study demonstrates how competitiveness is constructed through the ongoing integration of authenticity, innovation, locality, cooperation, and adaptive pragmatism. The verification of all sensitising hypotheses and the development of the Embedded Craft Entrepreneurship (ECE) Model confirm that strategy in craft-based enterprises emerges through lived practice, negotiation, and resilience under uncertainty. As such, the dissertation provides both a robust theoretical contribution and a grounded framework for understanding entrepreneurial action in craft and creative sectors operating beyond the assumptions of classical strategic management.

Conclusions

The present dissertation set out to reconstruct and theoretically interpret emergent forms of entrepreneurial strategising practiced by craft microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine. This objective was pursued through the application of constructivist grounded theory, which enabled the systematic generation of conceptual categories directly from empirical material rather than through the verification of predefined theoretical models. As a result, the study offers a context-sensitive and empirically grounded explanation of strategic action in small craft enterprises operating under conditions of uncertainty, resource constraints, and institutional instability.

The central conclusion of the dissertation is that entrepreneurial strategising in craft microbreweries cannot be adequately understood through classical, plan-based, and rationalist models of strategic management. Instead, strategising emerges as a practice-based, dynamic, and contextually embedded process, constituted through everyday activities, relational engagements, and ongoing adaptation to material and institutional conditions. Strategy is not articulated primarily in the form of formal documents, analytical frameworks, or long-term plans. Rather, it is enacted through continuous action, including brewing practices, experimentation, sensory evaluation, interaction with consumers, cooperation with peers, and pragmatic responses to emerging challenges.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that this practice-based mode of strategising should not be interpreted as a deficit or as an incomplete version of formal strategy. On the contrary, it represents a coherent and effective mode of entrepreneurial action, particularly well suited to the structural conditions under which craft microbreweries operate. In the Polish context, characterised by relative institutional stability and market saturation, this form of strategising enables differentiation, identity construction, and sustained engagement with consumers. In the Ukrainian context, shaped by infrastructural disruption, institutional fragility, and wartime conditions, it becomes a mechanism of survival, resilience, and collective endurance. Despite these contextual differences, the underlying strategic logic remains consistent across both cases: competitiveness emerges through the integration of authenticity, innovation, locality, cooperation, and adaptive pragmatism.

From a theoretical perspective, the dissertation contributes to several interrelated strands of scholarship. Within the strategy-as-practice perspective, it provides empirical support for the understanding of strategy as an emergent pattern of socially situated

practices rather than as a deliberate and formalised managerial process. In the field of entrepreneurship studies, the research foregrounds the significance of sensory, embodied, and experiential knowledge, as well as relational networks and meaning-making processes, which remain underrepresented in dominant market-oriented and opportunity-centric models. Furthermore, the dissertation deepens the concept of embedded entrepreneurship by demonstrating that locality, culture, and material conditions function not merely as contextual background variables but as active forces shaping entrepreneurial action and strategic orientation. Finally, by analysing entrepreneurial activity under conditions of war and extreme instability, the study contributes to the growing body of research on crisis entrepreneurship, offering empirically grounded insights into adaptive behaviour, informal coordination, and resilience in situations of systemic disruption.

These theoretical contributions are synthesised in the Embedded Craft Entrepreneurship (ECE) Model developed in the dissertation. The model constitutes a substantive grounded theory in the sense proposed by grounded theory methodology: a middle-range conceptual explanation derived from empirical material and applicable to a specific field of activity. While the ECE Model is rooted in the craft brewing sector, its analytical logic may be transferred to other craft-based and creative industries characterised by strong local embeddedness, limited resources, and high contextual uncertainty. The model demonstrates that strategic action emerges from the continuous negotiation between expressive dimensions (such as creativity, identity, and authenticity) and constraining conditions (such as financial scarcity, infrastructural limitations, and regulatory pressures), rather than from linear planning or predictive control.

The dissertation also yields important practical implications. For entrepreneurs, the findings highlight the strategic importance of continuous experimentation, cooperation, and resource sharing, as well as the cultivation of authenticity and sustained engagement with local communities. The results suggest that maintaining a balance between creative aspiration and pragmatic constraint constitutes a key competence in craft-based entrepreneurship. For industry organisations and support institutions, the study indicates the value of fostering collaboration networks, peer-based learning, and knowledge exchange platforms, rather than focusing exclusively on growth acceleration or standardised managerial solutions. For policymakers, particularly in the Ukrainian context, the findings underline the need for targeted support measures addressing logistics, energy security, infrastructure, access to financing, and post-war reconstruction.

Craft microbreweries emerge not only as economic entities but also as carriers of cultural heritage, local identity, and social cohesion.

At the same time, the dissertation acknowledges its limitations. As a qualitative study grounded in specific socio-historical contexts, it does not aim at statistical generalisation. The findings reflect the conditions of post-socialist economic transformation, European integration, and, in the case of Ukraine, full-scale war. These contextual limitations, however, also point to promising directions for further research. Future studies could include comparative analyses in other European or non-European contexts, longitudinal research tracing the evolution of entrepreneurial practices over time, consumer-oriented studies focusing on perceptions of authenticity and locality, cross-sector comparisons with other craft industries, and mixed-method approaches combining qualitative insights with quantitative data.

In conclusion, the dissertation demonstrates that meaningful and effective strategy can be constructed through lived experience, everyday practice, and local engagement, even under conditions of profound uncertainty and disruption. Craft microbreweries illustrate that entrepreneurship is not solely an economic or managerial activity but a deeply cultural, relational, and human process. The strategic practices observed in this study suggest that alternative models of entrepreneurial action-rooted in embeddedness, cooperation, and adaptive creativity-may offer valuable insights not only for craft industries but also for small enterprises more broadly as they navigate an increasingly unstable and unpredictable economic environment.

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Figure 2.5. Timeline of craft beer field formation in Poland (1990-2024)

Figure 2.6. Craft beer venue operating in a historic urban building in Ukraine during wartime conditions

Figure 2.7. Timeline of craft beer field formation in Ukraine (1991-2024)

Figure 3.1. Three-lane grounded theory process model

Figure 3.2. Coding hierarchy: from raw data to core category

Figure 3.3. Triadic relationship between theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity

Figure 3.4. Micro-cycle of theoretical sampling and saturation

Figure 4.1. Interpretive flow of open coding (Constructivist Grounded Theory)

Figure 4.2. Horizontal flow figure: In Vivo → Meaning axes → Axial categories

Figure 4.3. Frequency of core analytical categories among the surveyed craft breweries (N = 27)

Figure 4.4. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Experimental innovation"

Figure 4.5. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Brand Uniqueness"

Figure 4.6. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Quality as an Ethos"

Figure 4.7. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Local embeddedness"

Figure 4.8. Interview participants' statements reflecting the category "Relational cooperation

Figure 4.9. Constellation model of embedded competitiveness derived from selective coding

Figure 5.1. The Embedded Craft Entrepreneurship (ECE) Model

Appendix A. Interview questionnaire

Research Title: Entrepreneurial Strategising in Craft Microbreweries in Poland and Ukraine

Methodology: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Purpose:

This interview aims to collect rich empirical data concerning the strategic practices, meanings, routines, and relational mechanisms employed by craft brewery founders. The questionnaire is designed to support theoretical sampling and elicit open-ended, reflective narratives consistent with grounded theory procedures.

Section I. General Information

Name and Surname:

Position in the Brewery:

Brewery Name:

Location:

Years of Operation:

Legal and organisational form of the brewery:

Number of employees / family involvement (if applicable):

Section II. Motivation and Business Background

What led you into the craft brewery industry?

What was the initial motivation or driving force behind establishing the brewery?

Is your brewery a family-owned enterprise? If yes, what roles do family members play?

What were the main challenges you encountered during the establishment phase?

Section III. Entrepreneurial Strategy in Practice

In your experience, what does “entrepreneurial strategy” mean within craft brewing?

How do you set strategic goals and decide on priorities for your brewery?

How do you assess opportunities and competitive positioning in your market?

Which factors most strongly influence your strategic decisions?

Section IV. Market Positioning and Differentiation

What makes your brewery distinct compared with others?

What strategies do you employ to differentiate your products?

Have you implemented any innovative marketing or branding tactics?

How do you respond to changing consumer trends or market shifts?

Section V. Innovation and Product Development

How does your brewery approach innovation?

Could you describe recent examples of innovative products or practices?

What role do experimentation, trial batches or collaboration play in innovation?

How do you foster creativity within your team?

Section VI. Social and Cultural Embeddedness

How does the local community influence the development of your brewery?

In what ways do you integrate cultural, traditional or local elements into production or branding?

How do changing social trends (e.g., lifestyle, identity, tourism) affect your entrepreneurial strategy?

Section VII. Distribution, Market Channels and Cooperation

Through which distribution channels do you sell your beer?

How do you decide which channels to prioritise?

Do you collaborate with other breweries or local businesses?

How do such collaborations support your brewery's development?

Section VIII. Online Presence and Digital Marketing

How do you use social media to communicate with customers?

Have you run any digital marketing campaigns? What were the results?

Do you analyse digital data (e.g., engagement, customer profiles)? How do you use it?

Section IX. External Influences and Institutional Context

What external trends have most influenced your brewery in recent years?

Have regulatory changes affected your strategic decisions?

How do you navigate institutional challenges (e.g., taxation, inspections, import rules, wartime disruptions in Ukraine)?

Section X. Evaluation of Strategy and Future Outlook

How do you measure the success of your strategies?

How has your approach to strategising evolved over time?

What future plans or strategic directions do you foresee for your brewery?

Section XI. Final Reflections

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding entrepreneurial strategies in craft brewing?

What advice would you offer to new entrants in the craft brewing sector?