

ABSTRACT

The aim of the doctoral dissertation is to reconstruct and theoretically interpret the emergent forms of entrepreneurial strategizing practiced by craft breweries in Poland and Ukraine, understood as situational, relational, and dynamically negotiated practices occurring in the course of everyday organizational activity. In this study, strategy is not conceptualized as a formalized plan of action but rather as a process emerging from interactions, decisions, and adaptations undertaken under conditions of limited resources, market uncertainty, and diverse institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

The dissertation is situated within the research stream of strategy-as-practice, embedded entrepreneurship, and the effectual approach, adopting a processual and constructivist perspective. The research problem focuses on identifying the mechanisms through which owners of microbreweries construct, negotiate, and reconfigure strategic activities in the course of ongoing organizational practices and network relations. It is assumed that in the craft brewery sector strategizing has an emergent character, and its shape results from continuous negotiations between entrepreneurial aspirations, financial constraints, institutional pressures, and market expectations.

The research is qualitative and comparative in nature. The methodology of constructivist grounded theory was applied, enabling theoretical categories to be derived directly from empirical material. The research material consists of in-depth interviews with owners and co-owners of 27 craft breweries operating in Poland and Ukraine. Case selection was theoretical and purposive, and the research process was iterative, using the constant comparative method. The analysis involved open, axial, and selective coding conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved and the core category describing the strategizing process was identified.

As a result of the analysis, five interrelated dimensions of entrepreneurial strategizing in the examined sector were reconstructed:

1. **Experimental innovation** - manifested in the continuous testing of new product and technological configurations as a practice that maintains market visibility and enables adaptation to changing consumer trends.
2. **Brand uniqueness and authenticity narrative** - constructed through references to the craft ethos, local identity, and differentiation from mass production, functioning as a symbolic resource in relations with customers and partners.
3. **Quality as an ethos of action** - functioning as a normative decision-making framework and a source of organizational legitimacy under conditions of increasing competition.

4. **Local embeddedness** - realized through the concentration of distribution, relations with local gastronomy, and the construction of a community dimension of the brand; serving both as an economic resource and an element of organizational identity.

5. **Relational cooperation** - encompassing inter-brewery collaboration and network-based exchange of resources, enabling risk reduction and co-creation of value.

The analysis of the relationships between these dimensions indicates that entrepreneurial strategizing in microbreweries is dynamically negotiated. Strategic activities emerge through feedback loops between product experimentation, market interactions, financial constraints, and regulatory pressure. Strategies do not function as stable constructions but rather as reconfigurable sets of practices adapted to changing environmental conditions, including systemic events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, and geopolitical conflicts).

The comparative dimension of the study demonstrates that differences between Poland and Ukraine concern primarily the level of institutional stability, the perception of risk, and the availability of financial resources. Under conditions of increased uncertainty, strategies adopted by Ukrainian breweries tend to be more flexible and relationally oriented. At the same time, in both contexts practices based on adaptability, pragmatism, and incremental reconfiguration of activities dominate.

The theoretical contribution of the dissertation lies in deepening the understanding of strategy-as-practice at the micro-organizational level and in conceptualizing entrepreneurial strategizing as a process that is situationally and relationally embedded. The dissertation develops the concept of “**emergent situational strategizing**”, integrating the strategy-as-practice perspective with the concept of embedded entrepreneurship and the effectuation approach. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the usefulness of constructivist grounded theory in comparative research on small organizations operating under conditions of uncertainty.

In the applied dimension, the study identifies factors supporting the durability and resilience of microbreweries, particularly the importance of diversification of distribution channels, financial discipline, building network relationships, and continuous product experimentation as adaptive mechanisms.

Keywords: craft entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial strategy, craft breweries, grounded theory, uncertainty, local embeddedness, strategic practices.