The situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to develop a contextualised understanding of entrepreneurship by exploring the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement. Defined as the subjective meaning attached to entrepreneurial engagement that is actively constructed based on on-going lived experiences of, and within, contexts, examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement leaves aside ‘universal’ theories when exploring a novel or poorly understood phenomenon and instead develops understanding from the bottom-up. I put forward three theoretical approaches that support the goal of situating meanings of entrepreneurial engagement in different contexts: entrepreneurial imagination, identity, and emotion. In addition, creative approaches designed to uncover situated meaning and its construction in context are also presented.

Paper 1 explores how individuals in a centrally planned economy respond to strict government regulations on private entrepreneurial activities through imagining. The study examines the prospective entrepreneurial engagement of university students in North Korea and generates a novel framework that identifies and elaborates various types of narratives for envisioning entrepreneurial engagement. In this way we demonstrate how entrepreneurial engagement can still be considered possible and desirable despite the constraints that presumably pertain within a centrally planned economy.

Paper 2 examines how impoverished women entrepreneurs negotiate, reproduce, and/or challenge local sociocultural norms surrounding gender and entrepreneurship through identity construction. The study examines the self-narratives and identity construction of self-employed women in poor patriarchal communities in Indonesia, showing how gendered expectations can be both enabling and constraining in local contexts. We thereby challenge the assumption that entrepreneurship presents impoverished women with the most promising employment opportunity.

Paper 3 introduces a novel research method for uncovering the emotional experiences of entrepreneurs through visualising. The paper introduces colour and the colour timeline approach as tools with which to reveal the hidden or silenced voices of entrepreneurs. This paper advances the literature's methodological toolbox by creatively advancing contextualised entrepreneurship research.

Altogether, by examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement through entrepreneurial imagination, identity, and emotion, this dissertation offers theoretical and methodological pathways for developing context-sensitive understandings of entrepreneurship. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to the development of entrepreneurship as a rich, diverse, and inclusive field of study.

Keywords entrepreneurship, contextualisation, situated meanings

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Porvoo, 10 April 2023
Bernadetta Aloina Ginting-Szczesny
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This doctoral dissertation consists of a summary and the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their respective numerals:


The essays: clarification to the authors’ responsibilities

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| **Essay 1:** Envisioning entrepreneurial engagement in North Korea | **Ewald Kibler:** research idea and design; theoretical framing and literature review; initial analysis and discussion of findings; overall research narrative and presentation.  
**Bernadetta A. Ginting-Szczesny:** theoretical framing and literature review; data analysis and discussion of findings; overall research narrative and presentation.  
**Eero Vaara:** theoretical framing and literature review; initial analysis and discussion of findings; quality of the research narrative.  
**Jukka-Pekka Heikkilä:** expertise in the North Korean context; data collection; discussion of results in light of the North Korean context. |
| **Essay 2:** Identity pivots in entrepreneurial self-narratives: How women entrepreneurs construct identity within poor patrarchal communities | **Bernadetta A. Ginting-Szczesny:** research idea and design; theoretical framing and literature review; data collection; data analysis and discussion of findings; overall research narrative and presentation.  
**Ewald Kibler:** theoretical framing and literature review; initial analysis and discussion of findings; overall research narrative and presentation. |
| **Essay 3:** Giving colour to emotions in entrepreneurship | **Bernadetta A. Ginting-Szczesny:** sole author. |
1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has become a global phenomenon. While the modern use of the term initially referred to Silicon Valley’s highly innovative business ventures (Audretsch, 2021), entrepreneurship is now widely used to describe various activities undertaken by different individuals, in different forms, and in different contexts across the world. Public discourse on entrepreneurship varies greatly, ranging from the activities of microentrepreneurs to multinational companies, solo entrepreneurs to entrepreneurial teams, and profit-making ventures to socially-driven enterprises. Entrepreneurial activities are also argued to exist beyond formal work activities, thus moving entrepreneurship into the domain of everyday life (Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017).

Although the wide usage of the notions ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘entrepreneur’ has provoked much debate over the definition of these terms (Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009; Jones & Spicer, 2009), it stands to reason that entrepreneurship is inherently diverse and heterogeneous. Nevertheless, much of this diversity has been ignored in the entrepreneurship literature, as mainstream theories tend to assume homogeneity (Aldrich, 2009). By positioning the US/European model of entrepreneurship that builds on Western economic and cultural assumptions as the norm (Bruton, Zahra, & Cai, 2018; Welter et al., 2017), these ‘general’ theories often lack applicability and relevance for explaining entrepreneurial engagement in the vast majority of the ‘rest of the world’ (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2018). Differences and variations from the mainstream form of entrepreneurship are indeed acknowledged, yet these are often considered outliers. This leads to a narrow understanding of entrepreneurship that ‘others’ differences, thereby downplaying the diversity that makes entrepreneurship rich and intriguing.

In response to this, recently scholars have increasingly sought to decentralise entrepreneurship scholarship and problematise the assumptions that inform mainstream theorising. Contextualisation, in particular, has generated important new insights that expands, modifies, and/or refutes existing theories based on studies of, and set within, non-mainstream entrepreneurial contexts (Baker & Welter, 2020; Hjorth, Jones, & Gartner, 2008). In this way contextualisation propels entrepreneurship research away from its traditional focus on examining and understanding a select few to include the many. Furthermore, contextualised entrepreneurship research has shown that contexts are not static but are in fact constructed: identical contextual factors can be perceived differently by individuals, thus generating different entrepreneurial processes and
outcomes (Powell & Baker, 2014; Welter, Baker, & Wirsching, 2019). It follows that contexts are complex, dynamic, and continuously evolving; and they play a crucial role in developing a richer understanding of entrepreneurship and its diverse forms.

In light of the subjectivity and complexity of contexts, entrepreneurship scholars stand to benefit greatly from developing an understanding of contexts based on how local entrepreneurial actors themselves perceive and respond to the contexts within which they are situated. As Chalmers and Shaw (2017) have importantly pointed out, in order to understand situated entrepreneurial engagement more clearly, we need to ask ourselves whose understanding informs the foundations of our theories so as to enable us to identify which aspects of contexts are pertinent to entrepreneurial engagement. Researchers often approach a situation or phenomenon armed with pre-existing assumptions on what may or may not matter, which are grounded in theories developed in settings that differ from those at hand. Such an approach may well serve to expand existing theories, yet we risk missing out on discovering new and unique explanations or opportunities for theorising should our focus lie on applying extant theory to explain a novel situation or phenomenon. Instead, in the interest of developing a contextualised understanding of entrepreneurship that embraces diversity, entrepreneurship research needs to build on local ways of thinking and doing in diverse settings.

In this dissertation, I focus on the notion of the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement to develop context-sensitive understandings based on local perceptions and views. Here, the emphasis lies on the subjective meaning constructed by individuals around entrepreneurial engagement based on their lived experiences of, and within, contexts. Instead of applying ‘universal’ theoretical frameworks and assumptions, the examination of the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement supports bottom-up theorising that prioritises local views and perspectives so as to explain questions or phenomena within their unique contexts (Bruton, Zahra, Van de Ven, & Hitt, 2022; Van de Ven, Meyer, & Jing, 2018). Such an approach encourages scholars to view, consider, and analyse diverse forms of entrepreneurship and its underlying processes that have remained largely invisible and ignored in mainstream entrepreneurship literature. By examining how entrepreneurs construct meaning around entrepreneurial engagement, we can discover which contexts matter and how they relate to entrepreneurship. This applies not only to approaching a new or unfamiliar context – even when entering into contexts that are more familiar, the examination of situated meanings can shed light on unexplored ways of doing or perceiving.

Specifically here, I put forward three theoretical approaches that serve to aid in examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement in different contexts. While the literature on these three approaches is already well established, the focus of this dissertation lies on how utilising each theoretical lens for examining entrepreneurial engagement based on local perspectives can promote a better understanding of the situated meanings that are constructed of,
and within, contexts, thus shedding light on the interplay between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial contexts. The first theoretical lens is that of entrepreneurial imagination, which has been suggested as forming the starting point of entrepreneurial engagement (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Gartner, 2007), as entrepreneurs envision the future and their action within that future, which they then realise through entrepreneurial behaviour. These imaginations are embedded within contexts, and examining how entrepreneurs construct situated meanings through imagination can shed light on that which they consider feasible and desirable in a given local context (Förster, Liberman, & Shapira, 2009). The second theoretical lens is entrepreneurial identity, which has been argued to be crucial for understanding entrepreneurs’ ways of thinking and doing (Mmbaga, Mathias, Williams, & Cardon, 2020; Radu-Lefebvre, Lefebvre, Crosina, & Hytti, 2021). As in the case of imagination, the question of ‘who I am’ as an entrepreneur is similarly situated within contexts, as it is shaped by what is considered to be appropriate and desirable by others. Examining how individuals construct a sense of self in relation to their contexts can help us understand what is important for the construction of the self as ‘an entrepreneur’. The final theoretical lens highlighted in this dissertation is that of entrepreneurial emotion. Entrepreneurship is a highly emotional journey and, hence, entrepreneurs respond to the various aspects of the entrepreneurial process through their emotions (De Cock, Denoo, & Clarysse, 2020). As emotions can motivate or discourage entrepreneurs in terms of taking action (Doern & Goss, 2013), examining the interplay between entrepreneurial contexts and emotion can enable us to gain a better understanding of the contexts that are important enough to trigger a subjective emotional response, as well as why this may occur.

1.1. Research objectives

The present dissertation offers pathways for developing context-sensitive understanding grounded in the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement constructed by local entrepreneurial actors. More specifically, this dissertation aims to address the following question: How can we better examine and understand the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement in different contexts?

The dissertation consists of empirical work based on data sets collected in various underexplored sociocultural contexts with the aim of demonstrating how the examination of entrepreneurial imagination, identity, and emotion generates deeper insights and more nuanced understandings of the contextual foundations of entrepreneurship. Exploring how local entrepreneurial actors construct contexts and frame relevant issues can be a challenging endeavour, for inner meaning-making processes are difficult to uncover and communicate, especially when these have long been hidden or silenced (Höllerer et al., 2019). Hence, in addition to proposing theoretical lenses that allow us to examine situated meanings, in this dissertation I also introduce creative approaches that can be undertaken to uncover situated meaning and its construction in given
contexts. Table 1 provides an overview of the research papers that contribute to this goal.

Paper 1 seeks to explore how (prospective) entrepreneurs in the underexplored context of centrally planned economies construct situated meaning through *imagining*. It focuses on the prospective entrepreneurial narratives (Beckert & Bronk, 2018; Boje, 2001; Sools, 2020) of North Korean university students and develops a new understanding of how individuals situated under ‘extreme’ institutional constraints on private entrepreneurial activities envision their future entrepreneurial engagement. Through our analysis, we generate a novel framework that identifies and elaborates various types of narrative that envision entrepreneurial engagement, thereby also demonstrating that entrepreneurial engagement is still considered possible and desirable despite the constraints that pertain within a centrally planned economy.

Paper 2 examines how impoverished women entrepreneurs negotiate, reproduce, and/or challenge local sociocultural norms surrounding gender and entrepreneurship through *identity construction*. This study builds on a narrative approach and focuses on self-narratives (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) of women who are small business owners in rural patriarchal communities in Indonesia. The analysis explores the various self-narratives developed by these women entrepreneurs around their entrepreneurial engagement within the patriarchal community, and discusses how these self-narratives have provided them with space to negotiate local sociocultural norms surrounding entrepreneurship and womanhood. Our results show how local gendered expectations can be both enabling and constraining, and we challenge the assumption that entrepreneurship presents the most promising employment opportunity for impoverished women.

Paper 3 introduces a novel research method for studying *emotion* in different entrepreneurial contexts. Emotions are rich and complex, making them difficult to identify accurately and express through words alone (Cardon, Foo, Shepherd, & Wiklund, 2012; Fineman, 2004). The paper introduces colour and the colour timeline approach as modes of inquiry by which to enhance research participants’ ability to make sense of their past and present lived experiences, and to capture their own perceptions of their emotions. This paper expands the methodological toolbox available to us by creatively advancing contextualised entrepreneurship research.

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1.2. Structure

This essay-based dissertation consists of two parts. Part I contains the introductory chapters \((\kappa)\) of this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I provide the theoretical grounding of this dissertation and offer an overview of contextualised entrepreneurship research, introduce the notion of a situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement, and explore key approaches for examining situated meanings. Chapter 3 contains a summary of the research conducted for this dissertation, including brief summaries of the research designs, methodologies, and findings of each paper. In Chapter 4, I discuss the findings and conclusions of the three papers in relation to the main research question of the dissertation, as well as discussing the overall theoretical and practical contributions of this dissertation.

Part II contains the three papers that are part of this dissertation. The papers are presented in the format of research articles.
2. Theoretical background

2.1. Contextualising entrepreneurship research

Context, which refers to “circumstances, conditions, situations, or environments that are external to the respective phenomenon” (Welter, 2011, p. 167), has increasingly become an important dimension in entrepreneurship research. There is growing recognition of the significance of situating entrepreneurial engagement within its business (e.g., industry, market), social (e.g., networks, family), spatial (e.g., countries, communities), institutional (e.g., culture, political system), or temporal and historical contexts to develop deeper understanding, as contexts can both enable entrepreneurial engagement by providing opportunities, yet also constrain it by setting boundaries (Hjorth et al., 2008; Welter, 2011). For instance, the lack of strong formal institutions can create high risks and uncertainty, yet can also stimulate more creativity among entrepreneurs (Puffer, McCarthy, & Boisot, 2010). Similarly, local sociocultural norms that define traditional gender roles within a community can help explain why women entrepreneurs in a particular context are often involved in a traditionally feminized home-based business (Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw, & Marlow, 2015). Thus, context is crucial for understanding the emergence of entrepreneurial engagement and how this process unfolds.

Context has not always played a central role in entrepreneurship research, which early on had a narrow contextual focus and could arguably be considered to have been decontextualised. Early entrepreneurship theories were developed by scholars in the U.S. and Europe and based on Western cultural and economic assumptions. This shaped initial conceptions of entrepreneurship as a wealth-seeking activity conducted by white men through high-growth and high-innovation ventures in Western contexts (Ahl, 2002, 2006). As this conception has continued to predominate in entrepreneurship scholarship, this has become the standard point of departure in exploring the who, where, how, and why in ‘general’ entrepreneurship theories. Thus, the role of contexts has been taken for granted and, hence, homogeneity among entrepreneurial actors has been assumed. Despite critique levelled at this ‘Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship’, this has largely remained the normative template for entrepreneurship to this day (Audretsch, 2021; Welter et al., 2017).

In recent years, more attempts have been made to detach entrepreneurship theories from this mainstream model of entrepreneurship. A stream of scholars
has sought to expand and even challenge old conceptions by recontextualising entrepreneurship, and Welter and colleagues (2019) identify three general waves of how such contextualisation has evolved over the years. The first of these waves focused on the variety of the what, how, and why of entrepreneurial engagement, specifically examining which contexts matter for entrepreneurship, how contexts influence entrepreneurship, and why it is important to contextualise entrepreneurship. The assumption of homogeneity that predominates in mainstream entrepreneurship literature is challenged, for instance, by examining entrepreneurs who are not male (Klyver, Nielsen, & Evald, 2013) or who primarily seek to create social value instead of wealth (Korsgaard & Anderson, 2011). Thus, the focus lies on finding, explaining, and understanding variations and differences, as well as identifying and classifying the contexts that matter for entrepreneurship. By doing so, the first wave of contextualisation expands (and clarifies) the scope or variety of contexts in entrepreneurship scholarship.

The second wave of contextualising entrepreneurship is more centred on the nature of contexts, particularly on how contexts are perceived and understood in entrepreneurship research. As opposed to the first wave, where the notion of context was more passive as it was chiefly regarded as a static variable, or something that exists ‘out there’ and independent of the entrepreneur, scholars now argued that contexts are, in fact, constructed and enacted by individuals. New studies presented instances where similar contextual conditions (e.g., constraints, opportunities) could lead to different responses from entrepreneurial actors, different forms of entrepreneurship, and/or different entrepreneurial outcomes (e.g., Baker & Nelson, 2005; Powell & Baker, 2014). Because contexts are constructed by individuals, the agency of entrepreneurial actors enjoys greater emphasis as they are neither perceived as passive victims nor under the absolute control of contexts. This also widened the way in which entrepreneurial contexts were studied, as more interest was generated for the processes through which entrepreneurs construct and enact context through behaviours, talking, and further modes such as pictures and images.

While the first two waves aimed to decentralise entrepreneurship research by challenging the predominant assumptions on context (i.e., by diversifying contexts and reframing contexts), the third and most recent wave has been more focused on questioning the normative model of entrepreneurship itself. This is achieved by embracing the diversity of entrepreneurial forms and pointing towards the everydayness and mundanity of entrepreneurial activities, which can only be understood in context. For instance, Pahnke and Welter (2019) challenges the mainstream Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship by discussing the German entrepreneurship model, the *Mittelstand*, which is suggested to be antithetical to the mainstream model. Lehmann and colleagues (2019) similarly examined ‘hidden champions’ in rural areas instead of the well-researched ‘unicorns’. By exploring alternative, everyday forms of entrepreneuring, entrepreneurship is no longer seen as an activity that is limited to a narrow, formal domain. Meanwhile, the importance of context is perceived as a given, and it plays a ‘naturally’ crucial role in explaining entrepreneurial diversity.
In light of the three approaches to context, this dissertation seeks to challenge the predominant model of entrepreneurship and embrace entrepreneurial diversity by examining how entrepreneurial actors construct contexts (Wave 2) beyond the formal definition of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial engagement (Wave 3). Inspired by Gieryn (2000), I argue that contexts are “interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (p. 465). In other words, individuals construct meanings of their contexts based on how contexts are lived and experienced. A wide range of external factors affect any particular phenomenon, yet not all have a constraining or enabling effect. In order for a context to be relevant, it needs to be experienced and given meaning. Taking a start-up accelerator site (that is, a spatial context) as an example, we identify a physicality that consists of objects, colour, and design. However, the start-up accelerator site is also experienced and interpreted by those who interact with it, thus imbuing the site with meaning. The same site can be interpreted differently by different individuals, thereby creating a diversity of meanings that can be contested.

Furthermore, context is also where entrepreneurial engagement is situated, constructed, and experienced. As the construction of meaning is informed by context, such as cultural prescriptions, social expectations, and individual experiences within the context (Johns, 2006), the meanings assigned to entrepreneurship are also continuously (re)constructed in relation to how contexts are experienced and understood. Hence, in line with the studies in Wave 3, this dissertation also argues that the mainstream model of entrepreneurial engagement is not universal but that different forms and understandings of entrepreneurial engagement exist that emerge in different contexts.

In sum, this dissertation argues that there is an interplay between entrepreneurial engagement and context, and that both are continuously (re)constructed in relation to each other (see Figure 1). To understand entrepreneurial diversity in different contexts more clearly, there is thus a need to examine how entrepreneurial engagement and contexts are experienced by local entrepreneurial actors. For this purpose, I now turn to discussing the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement as the main lens of this dissertation.

Figure 1. Interplay between entrepreneurial engagement and context
2.2. Situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement

The predominance of Western-based theoretical values and foundations in entrepreneurship theories and research has garnered much attention in recent years (Bruton et al., 2018; Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2018; Peredo & McLean, 2013). Scholars have highlighted how theories developed in Western contexts become the norm and serve as the point of reference for our observations. Research has tended to adopt a top-down approach, where existing entrepreneurship theories are applied to explain local phenomena despite contextual differences, although this has been criticised as it can lead to misinterpretation, the lack of new perspectives, or the impression that one form of entrepreneurial engagement is more superior/inferior than those that emerged elsewhere. By taking China as an example, Bruton and colleagues (2018) have shown how a bottom-up approach can lead to novel ways of understanding entrepreneurship: unlike the U.S. model of entrepreneurship, in which individuals are the key actors in the entrepreneurial process, in China the government plays a more integral and active role. Furthermore, innovation in China is not only limited to the development of new technology (as it is in the U.S. model) but also includes the purchase of new technology developed by others. Relying on theories based on Western values and assumptions to explain entrepreneurship in China can therefore lead to misinterpretations (e.g., by labelling them as less innovative because they innovate differently), or the invisibility of alternate ways of being. Instead, it is necessary to acknowledge the unique and distinctive features of the context at hand, which may differ greatly from the predominant Western model of entrepreneurship.

In order to develop a better understanding of the unique contextual factors that are important for entrepreneurial engagement, it becomes necessary to examine how local entrepreneurial actors experience their contexts and construct situated meanings. According to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), meaning is the output once an individual has ‘made sense of’ a stimulus, be it an object, person, activity, or event. When an individual constructs the meaning of their entrepreneurial engagement, they interpret what the activity means to them or identify the role played by that activity in their life. This dissertation is particularly focused on situated meanings to emphasise the meanings that are constructed within a particular context. Examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement allows us not only to understand the meanings ascribed to entrepreneurial engagement by individuals, but also the meanings attached to the context (see Figure 1).

Inspired by Baker and Welter (2017, 2020) and the literature on space and place (Cartel, Kibler, & Dacin, 2022; Gieryn, 2000; Wright, Irving, Zafar, & Reay, 2022), I define the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement as the subjective meaning attached to entrepreneurial engagement that is actively constructed based on the on-going lived experiences of, and within, context.

This definition implies the existence of three characteristics of situated meanings. First, situated meanings are personal and subjective. Because individuals
are widely diverse in terms of, for example, educational background, age, gender, and culture, the meanings they attach to entrepreneurial engagement and contexts can vary significantly. Entrepreneurs have different experiences and construct different meanings around entrepreneurial engagement, which is why situated meanings can also be contested. However, it is likely that similarities pertain in the meanings constructed within particular sociocultural contexts or in the processes through which meanings are created (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

Second, situated meanings are *labile and flexible*. As meanings are constructed based on on-going experience, the situated meaning ascribed by individuals to entrepreneurial engagement and contexts can change over time. Unexpected events and strong emotional experiences, in particular, have been acknowledged to trigger the reconstruction of meanings (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013). This leads to the final characteristic of situated meanings, namely that of *temporal orientation*. An individual’s understanding of the present is informed by past experiences as well as their projections for the future (Cartel et al., 2022). Individuals tend to seek to maintain a sense of continuity and coherence across changing contexts (Brown et al., 2009), hence building on past experiences and constructed meanings in order to make sense of the present. Similarly, an individual’s projection for the future also shapes how the present is understood (Gartner, 2007).

This dissertation argues that examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement can lead to the development of context-sensitive understanding by approaching a particular situation and the actors involved within their unique contexts. Theorising is thus conducted in a bottom-up manner, as it is grounded in local perceptions and lived experiences, instead of the top-down tradition of applying extant theories to local contexts. This allows us to delve deeper into the ways in which local actors construct locally meaningful understandings of entrepreneurial engagement, as well as shedding light on the emergence (or absence) of entrepreneurial behaviour. In this way entrepreneurship research that examines situated meanings proffers a unique and nuanced understanding of different entrepreneurial contexts that have yet to be addressed by existing theories, or that have possibly been deemed irrelevant or uninteresting, thereby contributing to a richer and more inclusive understanding of entrepreneurship.

It goes without saying that the understandings developed through this approach could be seen as too context-specific, hence limiting its applicability across wider contexts. However, ‘general’ or ‘universal’ theories of entrepreneurship developed in mainstream Western contexts may well be similarly critiqued (Bruton et al., 2022). In the end, research and theory are both embedded within context; and therefore the crucial question at hand is the extent to which contexts are acknowledged or ignored in explaining specific phenomena.
2.3. Approaches to examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement

Following the theorisation above, this dissertation aims to provide pathways to examine more clearly the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement in different contexts. It seeks to decentralise entrepreneurship research and shift away from a top-down approach so as to develop bottom-up understandings based on context-specific meanings. However, exploring how entrepreneurial actors construct situated meanings is a challenging endeavour as the inner construction of meanings remains difficult to uncover and communicate, especially when it has long been hidden or silenced (Höllerer et al., 2019). With this in mind, this dissertation focuses on examining entrepreneurial engagement at the intersection of cognition, identification, and emotion, which has long been acknowledged to be important for understanding the origins of behaviour (Lench, Darbor, & Berg, 2013; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999). In the field of entrepreneurship, research into imagination, identification, and emotion has sought to understand how some individuals engage in entrepreneurial engagement while others do not, as well as the forms of entrepreneurial action they undertake (Brännback & Carsrud, 2017; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). The primary focus of this dissertation is on how these theoretical lenses can be adopted to shed light on the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement in different contexts. I now proceed to elaborate on each approach and describe how they can contribute to a contextualised understanding of entrepreneurship.

2.3.1. Entrepreneurial imagination

Imagination has been suggested to be the starting point of entrepreneurial engagement, the space “where it all begins” (Komporozos-Athanasiou & Fotaki, 2015, p. 321). Through imagination, entrepreneurs construct hypotheses of how the future might look, as well as their action in that imagined future (Gartner, 2007). The imagined future is continuously (re)constructed and modified throughout the entrepreneurial journey, thereby rendering the act of imagining as an on-going process. Imagination also becomes a springboard for action (Dimov, 2020) as it extends an entrepreneur’s understanding of the present with ‘as-if’ realities (O’Connor & Aardema, 2005) towards which their actions are oriented. Therefore, entrepreneurial engagement has been suggested to form the enactment of one’s entrepreneurial imagination (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Popp & Holt, 2013), and imagination has become a crucial element in understanding the earliest stages of venture creation (Chiles, Vultee, Gupta, Greening, & Tuggle, 2010; Cornelissen, 2013; Gartner, 2007).

An important characteristic of entrepreneurial imagination is that it is deeply embedded within contexts. The construction of imagination is not as free or boundless as in the case of fantasising, and it is shaped and framed by contextual cues (Haynie, Shepherd, Mosakowski, & Earley, 2010). For instance, Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) have theorised that the extent of the contextual legitimacy of a particular type of imagined entrepreneurial act shapes the way in which individuals envision and rationalise their entrepreneurial behaviour.
Meanwhile, changes in the local context push individuals to respond by modifying their imagined action (Earley, Connolly, & Ekegren, 1989; Shepherd, McMullen, & Jennings, 2007). Against this backdrop, this dissertation suggests that examining entrepreneurial imagination can generate important insights for understanding the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement in a particular context. Through the construction of entrepreneurial imagination, entrepreneurs take into account their lived experiences of, and within, contexts in order to make sense of that which is feasible and desirable (Förster et al., 2009). Examining imagination can therefore shed light on the type of contexts deemed by local actors to be important for their future entrepreneurial engagement, the meanings they attach to both their contexts and future engagement, and how these contexts constrain and/or provide opportunities for their action.

2.3.2. Entrepreneurial identity

Identity is the answer to the question of ‘who am I?’. Defined as “subjective knowledge, meanings, and experiences that are self-defining” (Ramarajan, 2014, p. 593), scholars have argued that identity is especially important for understanding entrepreneurs as it can generate insights into motivation, behaviour, and emotions (Mmbaga et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021), thereby shedding light on the process that individuals undergo while engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Identity has also been suggested as an essential component for gaining legitimacy and developing ties with others (Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Phillips, Tracey, & Karra, 2013). Identity research by entrepreneurship scholars has burgeoned, resulting in a multifaceted, complex, and often disjointed understanding of identity. Nevertheless, despite growing interest, the focus on identity studies in entrepreneurship has remained surprisingly narrow and scholars have largely examined the identity of individuals who fit into predominant, mainstream understandings of ‘the entrepreneur’, that is, focusing on the identity construction of business founders or owners in developed economies with ventures that are high in growth, technology, and innovation. The calls for a more inclusive form of entrepreneurship research notwithstanding, such studies remain sparse in the field of entrepreneurial identity (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

The construction of identity is complex, as the meaning attached to the self is based on how individuals understand themselves and their roles in society (McAdams, 1988, 1993). Because individuals may have multiple social roles (e.g., daughter, friend, entrepreneur), identities too are multiple; and these identities can contest, or enhance, each other. Identities are organised hierarchically based on the importance and centrality of a particular identity to the individual (Ramarajan, 2014); the most salient identity in a given situation then depends on the contexts in which the individual is situated, with individuals often drawing on and negotiating multiple contextual prescriptions, including competing ones. Through identity construction an individual creates a sense of self that is coherent, meaningful, and purposeful (McAdams, 1988, 1993; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Like imagination, examining identity can, therefore, help
us discover the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement. For instance, adopting entrepreneurial identity as a lens can help us uncover the definitions of ‘an entrepreneur’ or ‘entrepreneurship’ that are relevant within a particular context, as well as how local entrepreneurial actors create coherence and continuity in the midst of multiple, competing social expectations (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Shantz, Kistruck, & Zietsma, 2018). In sum, this dissertation suggests that examining entrepreneurial identity allows us to uncover the distinctive situated meanings constructed by entrepreneurs that shape their thoughts and actions within the local context.

2.3.3. Entrepreneurial emotion

Entrepreneurship is a highly emotional journey. The significant levels of uncertainty and risk provoked by entrepreneurial engagement make it likely for entrepreneurs to experience strong emotions, which can oscillate between intense ups and downs (De Cock et al., 2020). Numerous scholars have examined how the affective state of entrepreneurs plays a role at various stages of entrepreneurial processes (Delgado García, Puente, & Mazagatos, 2015). Doern and Goss (2013), for instance, found that emotion can motivate, even as it serves as a barrier for entrepreneurial action. Specific emotions, such as passion (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009), happiness (Hahn, Frese, Binnewies, & Schmitt, 2012), stress (Prottas & Thompson, 2006), and grief (Shepherd, 2009) have also received much attention in entrepreneurship research. The centrality of emotion in the entrepreneurial process causes it to play an important role in understanding the nature and forms of entrepreneurial engagement.

Contexts actively affect the shaping and eliciting of emotional reactions (Griffiths & Scarantino, 2008). In general, emotion can be understood as a subjective reaction to, or an evaluation of, an object, person, or event (Kelly & Barsade, 2001; Lewis, 2000). Scholars have increasingly recognised that emotions are intrinsically social because they are “typically elicited, expressed, regulated, perceived, interpreted, and responded to in social settings” (van Kleef, Cheshin, Fischer, & Schneider, 2016, p. 4). Following this, the dissertation suggests that emotion is, in fact, a reaction based on individually constructed situated meanings. Examining emotion therefore sheds light on how entrepreneurial engagement is understood in relation to the context in which it is embedded. More specifically, studying entrepreneurial emotion can point to contexts that are considered by local actors as important for engaging in entrepreneurship.
3. Summary of papers

In this section I provide brief summaries of the three papers that constitute this dissertation. The full research papers are attached in Part II of this dissertation.

3.1. Philosophical underpinnings

This dissertation is underpinned by an ontological and epistemological assumption that builds on social constructionism. Ontology is concerned with the question of ‘what exists in the world?’. In line with social constructionism, this dissertation positions objects and phenomena not as purely physical and material entities that self-evidently exist ‘out there’, but as being actively constructed through interactions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). In particular, this dissertation builds on the assumption that entrepreneurial engagement and contexts are constructed by individual actors through their interactions with others within a particular space.

Meanwhile, epistemology answers the questions of ‘what is knowledge?’ and ‘how can we know about it?’. The epistemological position of social constructionism is reflected in how the data have been collected and analysed for this dissertation, which relies chiefly on narrative methods and analysis as a tool to examine and analyse participants’ (construction of) experiences and meanings. Scholars have increasingly recognised the role of narratives in making sense of experiences or events (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008; Czarniawska, 2004; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Through narratives individuals can interpret (past) events and actions (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), allowing them to create and (re-)negotiate the meanings ascribed to their experience (Bruner, 1991). Narratives are dynamic, dialogically constructed (Bakhtin, 1981), and can undergo change over time – in other words, they are not a ‘final product’ created by individuals. Shaped by contexts and the power relations embedded therein (Tamboukou, 2008), narratives are ways for participants actively to construct and express their subjective meanings and understandings of the local contexts. Through the examination of narratives, particular attention is given in this dissertation to how meanings are situately constructed, the diversity of meanings, and the possible similarities or contradictions between meanings.
3.2. Research data and methodologies

This dissertation consists of two empirical studies (Paper 1 and Paper 2) that apply qualitative methods, as well as a Methods paper (Paper 3). Table 2 provides a summary of the methodological approaches adopted in each paper.

Table 2. Methodological approach by research paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paper 1</th>
<th>Paper 2</th>
<th>Paper 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research aim</td>
<td>Develop new understandings of how entrepreneurial engagement is imagined in a planned economy and how this challenges, or reinforces, local discourse</td>
<td>Uncover how gender, entrepreneurial engagement, and local patriarchal norms are negotiated through self-narratives</td>
<td>Develop a visual methodology for examining entrepreneurial emotion and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research context</td>
<td>North Korean private university</td>
<td>Poor patriarchal communities in Indonesia</td>
<td>Poor patriarchal communities in Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source(s) and collection</td>
<td>215 prospective entrepreneurial narratives written by students, participant observation and informal conversations, and government and media documents (2012-2017)</td>
<td>31 interviews of self-employed women in three villages in Central Java, Indonesia</td>
<td>31 interviews of self-employed women in three villages in Central Java, Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis methods</td>
<td>4-step inductive narrative analysis informed by the prospective narrative approach (Beckert &amp; Bronk, 2018; Boje, 2001; Sools et al., 2015)</td>
<td>3-step inductive narrative analysis focused on identity construction</td>
<td>Analysis of participants’ reflections elicited by the colour timeline</td>
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Paper 1 adopts a prospective narrative approach (Beckert & Bronk, 2018; Boje, 2001; Sools, Tromp, & Mooren, 2015) to examine how future entrepreneurial engagement is imagined in a centrally planned economy. The study is situated in North Korea, a context in which private entrepreneurial activities are officially illegal (Lankov, 2015). One of the paper’s co-authors volunteered as a teacher at a North Korean University over six two-month periods, between 2012 and 2017. In light of the difficulty in gaining permission to conduct research in North Korea, this provided us with the rare opportunity to obtain an insider’s perspective. The main empirical data for this paper were 215 prospective entrepreneurial narratives written by North Korean university students. The students participated in the 11 courses taught by the co-author between 2012 and 2017. For their essay, students were asked to imagine their future entrepreneurial engagement in North Korea. They had the freedom to participate (or not) and were informed that the narratives would only be used for research purposes and that this would not affect their grades. All prospective narratives were written in
English. In addition, field diary entries based on participant observation and informal conversations, as well as government and media documents, were used to complement the analysis and provide a more in-depth understanding of the North Korean context.

The data were analysed through a 4-step inductive narrative analysis informed by the prospective narrative approach. In the first step of the analysis, we focused on the general topics and textual characteristics of the narratives, through which we identified variations in the narratives’ actor, motivation, goal, and actions taken to reach the goal. To gain a better understanding of how the future self is imagined, the second step of the analysis focused on the actor and other characters in each narrative. Following this, the third step focused on the expressions of personal values, goals, and motivations for future entrepreneurial engagement. Steps Two and Three revealed variations of individual- and collective-oriented narratives that were aimed at gaining either market recognition based on achievement, or higher social recognition within the local context. In the final step of the analysis, we situated our narrative analysis within the local context by comparing the narratives with local government and media documents. We found variations in the extent to which each narrative type aligns or deviates from the dominant local discourse. As a result of our analysis, we identified four distinct types of narratives of imagined entrepreneurial engagement in North Korea: economic patriotism, industrious collectivism, individualistic heroism, and personal dreamwork.

Paper 2 builds on the entrepreneurial identity literature (Mmbaga et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021) to examine how impoverished women entrepreneurs reflect on, and respond to, local patriarchal norms in the construction of their entrepreneurial selves. The study was conducted in three rural villages in Central Java, Indonesia. I interviewed 31 self-employed women who had prior experience as domestic workers (as maids, nannies, or caretakers for the elderly) in larger Indonesian cities or abroad. Participants were reached with the help of women-led cooperatives in the villages. During the interviews, which were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, participants were invited to share stories about their past and present work as an entrepreneur or other forms of employment. The interviews were minimally structured as they followed the stories that were being told, and only probing questions were posed (e.g., on motivation and the challenges experienced).

The data were analysed through a 3-step inductive narrative analysis. In a first step we conducted a descriptive round of coding that focused mainly on explicit and implicit expressions of identity construction, for each narrative of which we subsequently wrote a case summary. In the second step, we focused on how individuals create narrative plots or genres. This allowed us to identify how individuals provided a meaningful structure to their past and present experiences, as well as how they provided meaning to their selves and their entrepreneurial engagement within the patriarchal community. We identified four plots, which we labelled as tribulation, sacrifice, conversion, and self-actualisation. In the third step of the analysis, we explored how each narrative plot represents different ways of negotiating tensions between current entrepreneurial engagement
and local patriarchal norms. Here, we found that both past work and present entrepreneurial activities are crucial for individuals' identity (re)construction to comply with local patriarchal norms while still maintaining a sense of coherence and continuity. We label the process of strategically changing one’s identity to survive and grow as a woman entrepreneur within the local patriarchal community as ‘identity pivoting’. Four forms of identity pivoting were identified, each associated with different narrative plots: identity resigning (tribulation), identity realigning (sacrifice), identity reclaiming (conversion), and identity reforming (self-actualisation). To distinguish further between the types of identity pivoting, we also identified ‘grounding’ and ‘zooming’ as key narrative processes.

Paper 3 develops a visual method for examining emotion in entrepreneurial contexts. In light of the complexity of emotion, in this paper I utilise colour as a tool for uncovering, making sense of, and communicating emotion. Colour is used through the colour timeline approach, a novel approach that combines timeline interviewing (Adriansen, 2012; Mazzetti & Blenkinsopp, 2012) and colour selection activity (Jonauskaite, Althaus, Dael, Dan-Glauser, & Mohr, 2019). The colour timeline approach was used to supplement the data collection for Paper 2. Following the collection of narratives through the interview process mentioned above for Paper 2, a timeline was created together with each participant to serve as a visual summary of their stories. The timeline was divided into the different work periods, and each participant was then asked to recall the emotion they had experienced during each work period. Following this, I presented participants with 24 colours markers and invited them to select a colour to represent their emotion. Participants were assured that there was no right or wrong answer and that they could select any colour they believed would best represent their emotion. The timeline was subsequently coloured in by either the participant or the researcher. After colouring, each participant was asked why they felt a certain way and why that particular colour had been chosen. This process continued until the entire timeline was coloured.

As each colour could have different meanings for different individuals (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002), I refrained from analysing the meaning of each colour. Instead, the meanings were given by the participants themselves as they explained why they had selected a certain colour. Therefore, the analysis for Paper 3 focused more on summarising the insights generated through the use of colour and the colour timeline approach. Based on the reflections of the participants, I identified three themes regarding the use of colour and emotion: colour can give form to complex emotions, draw out significant emotional events, and provide space for holistic reflection.

3.3. Paper 1: Envisioning entrepreneurial engagement in North Korea

Mainstream management and entrepreneurship literature has focused mainly on activities in Western market-based economies. While research on transition or emerging economies is growing, ‘extreme’ centrally planned economies have so far remained neglected in entrepreneurship research. The first paper in this dissertation examines how (prospective) entrepreneurs envision their future
entrepreneurial engagement in the centrally planned economy of North Korea, which is considered to be the most rigid centrally planned economy in the world. Entrepreneurship is extremely constrained in the country as every economic activity must be in line with the interests of the state. In addition, individuals are allowed neither to own private property nor control the means of production, thus making private entrepreneurial activities illegal with a high risk of serious legal repercussions. Inspired by the prospective entrepreneurial narrative approach (Beckert & Bronk, 2018; Boje, 2001; Sools, Tromp, & Mooren, 2015), the paper seeks to examine how individuals construct situated meaning within the North Korean context and imagine their future entrepreneurial engagement in relation to this context. In particular, the study explores how people envision entrepreneurial engagement under the institutional uncertainties in an extreme context such as North Korea; and how their entrepreneurial narratives conform to the dominant institutional discourse or deviate from it.

Based on an inductive narrative analysis of prospective entrepreneurial narratives written by North Korean university students, four types of prospective entrepreneurial engagement emerge: economic patriotism, industrious collectivism, individualistic heroism, and personal dreamwork. These types differ based on the orientation of personal motivation (self-interest vs. collective interest) and goals (social vs. market recognition), as well as on how it aligns with (or deviates from) the dominant institutional discourse in North Korea. The findings suggest that despite the extreme constraints and uncertainty surrounding private entrepreneurial activities, entrepreneurial engagement was still considered feasible and desirable in North Korea. Further, the narratives reflect varying degrees of agency in resisting severe institutional pressures. Our study also sheds light on the various resources that North Koreans used to gain entrepreneurial legitimacy in their local context. In this way we highlight the embeddedness of imagination within context by illustrating how local contextual cues shape the ways in which future entrepreneurial engagement is framed and imagined.

Furthermore, we show how the act of imagining and narrating the future self as an entrepreneur within the local context helps to inform the development of the self ‘as’ an entrepreneur, as reflected in the various motivation and development goals. We therefore suggest that centrally planned economies could serve as a suitable context for examining grassroots movements towards market or institutional reform. In sum, these findings provide avenues for research on entrepreneurship in planned economies and research on prospective entrepreneurial narratives and imaginations in a number of ways.

3.4. Paper 2: Identity pivots in entrepreneurial self-narratives: How women entrepreneurs construct identity within poor patriarchal communities

Poor women entrepreneurs are faced with complex constraints often exacerbated by patriarchal norms that promote gendered subordination and dependence on men. Drawing on the entrepreneurial identity literature (Mmbaga et al.,
2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021), the second paper in this dissertation aims to develop an understanding of how women entrepreneurs perceive, negotiate, and potentially challenge local patriarchal norms in their identity construction. The paper addresses the following questions: How do women entrepreneurs in poor patriarchal communities construct meaning around entrepreneurial engagement? How do they negotiate the tensions between gender, entrepreneurial engagement, and local patriarchal norms in their self-narratives?

To answer the questions, we analysed the self-narratives of self-employed women in rural villages in Indonesia. Through an inductive narrative analysis, we identified four different plots that the participants used to construct meaning and manage the tension between their entrepreneurial engagement and local patriarchal norms, which we labelled as tribulation, sacrifice, conversion, and self-actualisation. The narrative plots reflect the different meanings that are attached to the entrepreneurs’ past and present working selves. The plots also contain the unique ways past identities are reconstructed as a response to the local gendered demands, in a process which we label as ‘identity pivoting’. Each narrative plot reflects its own form of identity pivoting: identity resigning, realigning, reclaiming, and reforming. These forms of identity pivoting vary depending on the level of importance assigned to the new identity (grounding) and the temporal scope of narrative resources used (zooming).

We offer three contributions through our study. First, we introduce identity pivoting as a key narrative strategy for managing the tensions between an entrepreneur’s sense of self and local patriarchal norms. We also show that the identity of entrepreneurs is often hybrid, consisting of elements that stem from not only their present entrepreneurial roles, but also their non-entrepreneurial roles and roles in the past. Second, our study reveals the different ways in which patriarchal norms are resisted, challenged, and/or reproduced through identity construction. Self-narratives allow our participants to produce and reproduce local gendered expectations, but they also reveal different levels of resistance when faced with similar sociocultural norms. Third, our study contributes to the discussion of the ‘false promise’ of entrepreneurship (Ahl & Marlow, 2019; Marlow, 2019), where entrepreneurship is suggested as universally beneficial. Rather, we develop a bottom-up understanding of entrepreneurship based on situated meanings that shows how entrepreneurship is not always preferred over wage-employment, as the latter can provide more economic and personal benefits for impoverished women.

3.5. Paper 3: Giving colour to emotions in entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is an emotional journey, and emotion has been considered important for understanding the entrepreneurial process. However, emotions are dynamic and complex, and extant methods for examining emotion tend to assume, first, that individuals know what it is they are feeling and, second, that they can accurately describe their emotions through words alone, thus ignoring the differences that pertain in terms of emotional awareness and verbal literacy (Cardon et al., 2012; Fineman, 2004). To address this limitation, scholars have
called for a multimodal form of inquiry that combines verbal and non-verbal modes. Unlike its verbal counterpart, non-verbal modes such as visuals can provide holistic and immediate information without being restricted by linguistic rules (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013). Combining interviews with activities such as drawing can therefore help achieve more complex sensemaking, meaning construction, and communication (Clarke & Holt, 2017; Clarke & Holt, 2019; Höllerer et al., 2019). In line with the multimodal approach to research, this paper develops a visual method that can help participants make sense of and express their emotions. Colour has long been considered to have an affective component (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002), but it has not yet been utilised as a research method. This paper utilises the affective component of colour to develop the colour timeline approach, which was used to support the interviewing of women entrepreneurs in rural villages in Indonesia (see also Paper 2).

Three insights were generated through the use of colour timelines. First, colour can be used to give form to complex emotions that might be difficult to describe when using words alone. There are no linguistic constraints in the selection of colour, and this makes colour and the colour timeline approach especially suitable for interaction with individuals with limited linguistic capabilities in terms of complex verbal expressions. Second, emotion can draw out significant emotional events. With the colour timeline approach, participants are invited to reflect more deeply when explaining why they select a particular colour to represent their emotion, thereby allowing them to give more detailed and in-depth explanations. Third, being able to see the timeline and the emotion represented in (different) colours provides individuals with space for holistic emotional reflection. Participants are able to compare different periods, emotions, and colours by engaging with the colour timeline, thus imparting a holistic view of their life story. In summary, this method expands the creative methodological toolbox for examining emotion in entrepreneurial contexts. It can develop a more nuanced understanding of emotion as well as expand the facets of emotions examined in entrepreneurship. In addition to emotion, the colour and colour timeline approach can also be used to examine other emotive processes, such as identity and sensemaking.
4. Discussion

4.1. Implications for theory

As the broad aim of this dissertation is to decentralise mainstream entrepreneurship literature through the examination of situated meanings in contexts, this section is structured based on the various streams of research that are challenged or expanded by the empirical findings. There are four themes that I discuss: the definition of entrepreneurship, the ideal (institutional) context for entrepreneurial engagement, the inherent meaning of entrepreneurship as universally good, and resistance through entrepreneurial engagement.

Definition of entrepreneurship. The extensive literature on entrepreneurship tends to position it as an exclusively economic phenomenon in market societies, with strong links to the creation of new organisations, wealth creation, innovation, and the pursuit of opportunities (Aldrich, 2005; Calás et al., 2009). For instance, Schumpeter (1965) defines entrepreneurship as the exploitation of market opportunity through technical and/or organisational innovation. Meanwhile, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) consider entrepreneurship to be “the study of sources of opportunities; the processes of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities; and the set of individuals who discover, evaluate, and exploit them” (p. 218). However, it has been increasingly argued that entrepreneurial behaviours could also emerge in non-venture settings, making it likely for entrepreneurship to become an everyday activity for everyone (van Gelderen, Wiklund, & McMullen, 2021). This dissertation highlights the everydayness of entrepreneurship by showing how individuals in different contexts act entrepreneurially beyond engaging in formal business activities. For example, Paper 1 shows how North Korean university students identify opportunities, based not only on market needs but also on ‘loopholes’ in the government’s discourse so as to build their future entrepreneurial engagement. This, in turn, highlights how the act of imagining allows (prospective) entrepreneurs to exercise their agency and become entrepreneurial in conditions of high institutional constraints.

Meanwhile, Paper 2 demonstrates how individuals display efforts in creating something new through their decision to become self-employed. While the low-income, low-growth home-based businesses might not fit into the general definition of an entrepreneurial venture, entrepreneurial engagement allows the participants to navigate local sociocultural norms creatively. This becomes evident in their identity construction, where they combine past and present work
experience in order to create a sense of self that is both positive as well as acceptable in the local context. This highlights how the construction of situated meanings of entrepreneurial engagement in itself provides space for individuals to be entrepreneurial, thus blurring the boundaries for defining entrepreneurship.

**Ideal (institutional) context for entrepreneurial engagement.** Western institutional contexts have become the standard ideal environment for entrepreneurship to emerge, while differences are often considered as shortcomings or deviations (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2018). This is evident from the use of notions such as ‘institutional void’ (Puffer et al., 2010), ‘holes’ (Yang, 2004), or ‘swamps’ (Olthaar, Dolsma, Lutz, & Noseleit, 2017) to describe institutional contexts that differ from Western standards. The high number of empirical studies undertaken in Western contexts that predominate in top-ranking journals in entrepreneurship and management further strengthen the impression that entrepreneurship in Western contexts is the norm.

This dissertation adds to this discussion by showing how entrepreneurial activity can emerge in a context that is generally assumed to be unsuitable for entrepreneurial engagement. For example, existing literature suggests that entrepreneurship requires a specific type of formal institution to flourish, such as having a competitive and free market (Bauernschuster, Falck, Gold, & Heblich, 2012; Schumpeter, 1912). Paper 1 challenges this idea by showing how prospective entrepreneurs in North Korea envision their future entrepreneurial engagement within a highly uncertain and unsupportive institutional setting. The findings show the different resources and strategies they use to build their entrepreneurial imagination, highlighting that entrepreneurial engagement in the unlikely setting of North Korea is still possible and desirable. Similarly, Paper 2 challenges the assumption that entrepreneurship is constrained by patriarchal norms (Tlaiss, 2013; Venkatesh, Shaw, Sykes, Wamba, & Macharia, 2017). Our findings show that women entrepreneurs in the villages we studied engaged in entrepreneurship because it aligns more with local gendered expectations than did their previous employments.

In this way this dissertation highlights the need to be open to examining diverse forms of entrepreneurship in diverse (institutional) contexts. A context that might be suitable for one form of entrepreneurial activity to emerge might not be suitable for another. Therefore, we need to be more cautious about positioning any particular institutional setting as superior/inferior to others, consequently moving away from the notion of ‘ideal’.

**Entrepreneurship as inherently good.** It has been increasingly recognised that entrepreneurship plays an important role in driving economic growth within low-income regions (Morton, Klugman, Hanmer, & Singer, 2014; World Bank, 2012). We have seen a proliferation of policies that focus on stimulating entrepreneurship in impoverished contexts by providing education, training, and advice so as to improve entrepreneurial and professional skills, or by
providing micro-loans (Foss, Henry, Ahl, & Mikalsen, 2019; Henry, Orser, Coleman, & Foss, 2017). Inherent in these approaches is the neoliberal assumption that individuals can overcome any hurdle and free themselves from poverty once they realise their entrepreneurial potential (H. Ahl & Marlow, 2019; Berglund, Ahl, Pettersson, & Tillmar, 2018; Fougère, Segercrantz, & Seeck, 2017). However, such views have been increasingly criticised for disregarding the way in which entrepreneurship is structurally and contextually embedded (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Obloj, 2008; Bruton et al., 2018; Welter, 2011).

Our examination of situated meanings in Paper 2 contributes to this discussion by showing how entrepreneurial engagement did not allow the women entrepreneurs in our study fully to break free of local patriarchal norms that limit their options for work. In fact, the reason they could engage in entrepreneurship instead of other forms of work is because entrepreneurial engagement is mostly in line with local gendered expectations—women could stay at home and still prioritise caring duties while running their business. The findings show how most of the participants would have preferred to engage in other forms of work outside of their village if not for their family responsibilities. This was also uncovered more deeply when discussing their emotions about entrepreneurship in light of their wider life stories (Paper 3). However, we also show other (mostly non-pecuniary) ways in which entrepreneurship provides benefits to these women, such as giving them a sense of ownership over their time and work.

In sum, this dissertation highlights the importance of situating and examining entrepreneurship in context in order to understand more clearly the benefits as well as disadvantages it delivers to those individuals it is expected to help. This calls for more context-sensitive approaches to entrepreneurship, where understanding is developed based on the lived experiences of local entrepreneurial actors.

**Resistance through entrepreneurial engagement.** While traditionally understood as an economic activity for wealth generation and growth, policymakers and development organisations have increasingly promoted entrepreneurship as an important means for stimulating social change. A similar shift is evident in the entrepreneurship literature, where there is growing consensus on the wider role that entrepreneurship can play for societies (Calás et al., 2009; Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, Jr., 2009). It has been argued that entrepreneurship is inherently emancipating, as it allows individuals to break free or break away from constraints perceived to exist within their environment. Thus, entrepreneurship offers much promise as a ‘pathway towards salvation’ (Farny, Frederiksen, Hannibal, & Jones, 2016), especially for individuals or groups who are vulnerable, marginalised, and highly constrained.

This dissertation shows how entrepreneurial engagement is a response to contexts, allowing individuals to negotiate, challenge, and potentially resist strong local demands. The responses themselves can only be fully understood once they are situated within their context. The findings in Paper 1, for instance, might seem common when viewed independently of context, such as the desire
to pursue one’s own personal dreams through entrepreneurial engagement (*entrepreneurial engagement as personal dreamwork*). However, situating the imagination within the context of North Korea shows how this type of imagination deviates from the locally predominant discourse and could, therefore, be understood as a form of resistance. Meanwhile, entrepreneurial engagement in a patriarchal community, which might seem to challenge the locally predominant discourse, is in fact found to be a way of complying with gendered expectations (Paper 2). However, despite general compliance, we still identify different degrees of resistance towards local sociocultural norms. This points towards the need to reframe the general definition of empowerment/emancipation, as agency can also derive from the ways in which individuals inhibit norms through entrepreneurial engagement.

4.2. Implications for practice

**Research method for researchers and practitioners.** This dissertation introduces a novel method that allows for more engaged research and dialogue. As emotion is central in both organisational and everyday lives, colour and the colour timeline approach can be used for gaining deeper understandings of situated meanings and subjective experiences during emotionally charged events (Paper 3). In the context of research, these methods can be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of specific emotions that are crucial to a particular process, or to examine the interplay between multiple, perhaps contradictory, emotions. In organisations, colour and the colour timeline approach can, for instance, be used as a method of inquiry following the restructuring of leadership, the adoption of a new policy, or other forms of organisational change. Colour can also provide potential benefits as an additional means for evaluating training provisions and interventions by creating space for engaged dialogue and enabling participants to provide enhanced feedback.

**Entrepreneurship (development) programmes.** Entrepreneurship has been increasingly promoted as a means for development. It is often driven by a replication of best practices (Fougère et al., 2017), thus ignoring both the embeddedness of entrepreneurship within contexts as well as the different meanings attached to it by individuals. This dissertation demonstrates the importance of understanding the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement within a particular context. Taking women entrepreneurship programmes for poverty alleviation as an example, it is particularly important to understand how women entrepreneurs in poor patriarchal communities perceive and negotiate entrepreneurship in light of local sociocultural norms. As suggested in Paper 2, the main barrier against women’s ability to earn income through work is neither the lack of entrepreneurial spirit nor opportunities (Marlow & McAdam, 2013), but instead household responsibilities based on the gendered division of labour. Therefore, the focus of development programmes should not be on making women ‘good enough’ for entrepreneurship, but rather on questioning whether entrepreneurship is truly ‘good’ for women and to which extent. Especially if the
aim is to empower women or challenge patriarchy, it must be ensured that the form of entrepreneurship that is being promoted will help women overcome gender constraints instead of strengthening them.

4.3. Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation is to provide insights into how we can better develop a contextualised understanding of entrepreneurship. The dissertation shows how examining the situated meaning of entrepreneurial engagement through imagination, identity, and emotion can help us more clearly understand the ways in which individuals make sense of their local entrepreneurial contexts and respond to these. This is important as it allows us to expand and, to some extent, challenge some of the assumptions that are taken for granted in the ‘general’ entrepreneurship literature. I hope that this dissertation inspires others to continue the study of the situated meanings of entrepreneurial engagement, thereby contributing to the development of entrepreneurship as a field of research that is more inclusive and embraces diversity more eagerly.
References


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