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School of Economics and Management

Identity Work of Social Entrepreneurs

The Way of Maintaining a Coherent Self-View

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Abstract

Title	Identity Work of Social Entrepreneurs - The Way of Maintaining a Coherent Self-view
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Keywords	Identity, Identity Work, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurial Identity
Purpose	To understand how social entrepreneurs manage to maintain a coherent self-view by successfully engaging in identity work.
Research Questions	How do social entrepreneurs maintain a coherent self-view? Sub questions: How do social entrepreneurs frame themselves? What tensions and struggles provoke doubt about their self-view? In what ways do they cope with such struggles?
Methodology	Following an interpretive and abductive approach, we crafted a qualitative research study. Our findings are based on our empirical material, gathered through conducting semi-structured interviews with seven social entrepreneurs.
Findings	Social entrepreneurs can maintain a coherent self-view by engaging successfully in identity work. They do this through a three-part circular process, which we named the 'Circle of Identity Work'. This process consists of a strong self-view, presented as identity outcomes; struggles that question this self-view and coping strategies with which they strengthen and maintain their initial identity outcomes.
Contributions	Our findings contribute to the undeveloped field of social entrepreneurial identity by applying the concept of identity work and, therefore, offering new perspectives and interpretations.

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Happy reading!

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1. Introduction

The term of ‘social entrepreneurship’ could be referred to as an oxymoron, as it is a combination of two terms that seem to contradict each other. When looking at entrepreneurship as the identification of a profitable opportunity, followed by the creation of a venture in order to exploit the identified opportunity, it becomes clear that the creation of financial value is in focus. If now the adjective ‘social’ is placed ahead of ‘entrepreneurship’, this whole meaning changes, and the creation of social value moves into the centre (Martin & Osberg, 2017).

This way of thinking about the term social entrepreneurship illustrates the special nature of this concept. Social entrepreneurship does the seemingly impossible and combines the social and economic dimension by creating social value through the application of economic principles (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2012). This setting raises the question about what implication this combination has for the individuals: How do social entrepreneurs dispose the marriage of this unlikely couple?

The special nature of social entrepreneurship and the question it raises concerning the individuals involved, is reflected in the increasing interest of society in social entrepreneurship (Martin & Osberg, 2007). This interest is also to be observed in academic research. A recent study conducted by Sassmannshausen and Volkmann (2018) shows how this interest has developed exponentially only in recent years. To counteract the perception of social entrepreneurship as a research fashion that could eventually disappear, they present empirical evidence that displays social entrepreneurship as a promising and durable research field. This research field deals with cause-oriented organizations that pursue social and sustainable interests, namely social start-ups (Thompson, Kiefer & York, 2011).

Within the overall research field of social entrepreneurship, a small group of researchers focuses on the aspect of the social entrepreneurial identity. This specific field intends to understand the people involved in social entrepreneurship and by that contribute to the overall field. Despite its relevant contributions, this specific field is situated in an embryonic state. Having observed both, a little amount and the demand of the research community for studies about social

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entrepreneurial identities, we started our research by conducting interviews with various social entrepreneurs, in which we asked about them and their entrepreneurial journey. These interviews provided us with an extensive understanding of ‘who they are’. Further, during the conversations, they clearly expressed the existence of tensions and struggles they were facing. Such observations led us to question how, despite having struggles, they kept their identities strong, from which our main research question derived: How do Social Entrepreneurs maintain a coherent self-view?

During the conversations, we saw how the social entrepreneurs engaged in identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001). This observation derived from the definition of identity work being the process of “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165) one’s self-view on a continuous basis. Therefore, the overall aim of this thesis is to understand how social entrepreneurs manage to maintain a coherent self-view by successfully engaging in identity work. With this aim, we intend to contribute to the research field of social entrepreneurial identity by applying the concept of identity work, analysing the components of their identity work and thus, offering new perspectives and interpretations.

In order to achieve this aim, we take a deep dive into previous literature, which builds the basis of our analysis. An overview of this theoretical basis, including literature about social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurial identity and identity work, is presented in Chapter 2. Following to this, we present the methodological theories that helped us conduct this entire study in Chapter 3. This chapter displays the ontological and epistemological grounding that prevails our research, which primarily consists of an interpretive and abductive approach. Continuing with Chapter 4, we present an extensive analysis of the empirical data obtained during the interviews. In particular, we elaborate on the different identity outcomes we identified, the doubts and struggles that occurred in connection to them and the coping strategies that were utilized by the social entrepreneurs to handle these doubts and struggles. Altogether, by elaborating on these different aspects, we illustrate how we interpret the interview data with regard to identity work. In the sequencing chapter, the findings obtained from the analysis section are discussed and embedded into the context of previous literature. Moreover, Chapter 5 serves as the setting for formulating the answer to the aforementioned research question. Finally, in Chapter 6 we conclude the findings of our research, illustrate their theoretical and

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practical implications, determine limitations and formulate recommendations for further research.

2. Theory

In the following chapter an overview of main concepts, relevant research fields and specific studies that are relevant for the research is provided. Firstly, the field of social entrepreneurship is defined and trends in the research field are identified. Secondly, the young research field of social entrepreneurial identity is explored, and missing aspects are identified. Finally, the main concept of identity work, which is used to analyse the identity of social entrepreneurs, is introduced, defined and explained. This theoretical background builds the basis for the analysis of the empirical data obtained in the interviews with the social entrepreneurs.

2.1 Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is a type of entrepreneurship that combines economic and social purposes (Nicholls ed., 2006). The concept as such exists already for a long time but has gained more and more public attention in recent years (Mair & Martí, 2006). The most significant factor that differentiates this kind of entrepreneurship from commercial entrepreneurship is, that the main focus lies on the creation of social value instead of the creation of personal and shareholder value (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Thompson, Kiefer & York, 2011). This definition is also supported by Martin and Osberg (2007) who emphasize the special nature of value creation associated with social entrepreneurship, that can not necessarily be measured with financial means but rather with the improvement of a societal problem. Looking at the individual key players of this field, social entrepreneurs are defined by Nicholls (ed. 2006, p.5) as people who “take workable models and adapt them for the benefit of people, communities, nations and the planet”.

Dacin, Dacin and Tracey (2011) provide an overview of the scope of research about social entrepreneurs. According to them, this field attracts growing academic interest, but still in an unfocused way. In particular, they criticise a dominant “heroic characterization” (p.1205) of social entrepreneurs in academic research and suggest an application of more critical

approaches. This view is supported by Dey and Steyaert (2016), who state that there are some critical but dominantly positive voices towards social entrepreneurship, and Eikenberry (2009) who demands the representation of a more balanced and critical academic view in this field. An example for the positive voice towards social entrepreneurship is Santos (2012), who sees the concept as an effective way to solve pressing global societal problems by adding a social and human dimension to the current economic system. In contrast to this, Chell, Spence, Perrini and Harris (2016) express a more critical voice and question the general ethicality of social entrepreneurship.

In the introduction, it already has been shown how the term ‘social entrepreneurship’ could be seen as an oxymoron, as it unites two aspects that seem to contradict each other on the first sight. This contradiction is also subject to research in the field of social entrepreneurship. Stevens, Moray & Bruneel (2015) elaborate on what possible tensions the combination of the two dimensions, social and economic, can cause for social entrepreneurs. According to them, the tension mainly occurs, because the two dimensions “compete for scarce organizational resources” (p. 1052). As a finding they identify a negative correlation between the social and economic mission of an organization, meaning the more social an organization acts, the less economic it is and vice versa. Resulting from this finding, they emphasize the important task of the social entrepreneur to balance both dimensions carefully. Stevens, Moray & Bruneel (2015) show how this tension can impact the organizational identity, but do not look at it on an individual identity level. In another study, Miller, Grimes, McMullen and Vogus (2012) highlight the potential conflict of the business and the social purpose from a motivational perspective and point out that this conflict could result in a “mission drift” (p.623), so a change from a social focus to an economic focus over the lifespan of a social enterprise. As the publishing dates tell, this tension has been subject to research only in recent years and remains to be studied in relation to the the individual identity of the social entrepreneurs.

In connection to the identified tension of social and economic purpose in social entrepreneurship, researchers suggest a shift in the education of social entrepreneurs. Pache and Chowdhury (2012) point out the importance of integrating the different underlying logics of social entrepreneurship into the education of students in the field of social entrepreneurship. They also emphasize the task of the educating institutions in this field to equip future social entrepreneurs with the ability and tools to cope with this tension. Smith and Woodworth (2012)

also determine the need for a change in the education of social entrepreneurs and complement the suggestions of Pache and Chowdhury (2012) with a focus on assisting the students in the process of identifying themselves with the idea of social entrepreneurship.

In general, the recognition and development of the research field of social entrepreneurship as its own, separate from other forms of entrepreneurship is emphasized and seen as a necessity in order to enrich the research on this topic (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011). Altogether, social entrepreneurship can be identified as a research field that is in an immature state, but has the potential to grow and increase its relevance (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Thompson, Kiefer & York, 2011). In particular, the importance of contributing to the research about social entrepreneurs as individuals is emphasized, in order to advance the knowledge about the specific traits of social entrepreneurs and the environment they operate in (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006).

2.2 Social entrepreneurial Identity

While contributing to the research field of social entrepreneurship, this study contributes in particular to the research field of social entrepreneurial identity. This research field consists of a small amount of studies dealing mainly with the sources of identity construction of social entrepreneurs and highlighting different aspects of identity. The following section will provide an overview about the aspects that have been studied and the aspects that require additional research.

Elfvig (2015) and Grimes (2010) both explore the construction of a collective identity of social entrepreneurs. Whilst Elving (2015) focuses on the construction of identity on an organizational level, Grimes (2010) focuses on the construction of a collective identity on the level of the social sector in general. Elving (2015) states that the social entrepreneurial identity consists of different layers and affects the organizational structure and processes to a large extent. Moreover, she emphasizes the importance of the company's social mission for the construction of the social entrepreneurial identity. Grimes (2010) puts emphasis on the socially constructed nature of identity and explores the collective identity construction by integrating sensemaking theory. Taken together, these studies support the notion that the mission of a social

entrepreneurial organization plays a crucial part in the collective identity construction of the members of these organizations.

A comparative approach to the topic of social entrepreneurial identity is applied by Yitshaki and Kropp (2016). They contrast the identity construction of social entrepreneurs with the identity construction of high-tech entrepreneurs. One of their findings is that passion is an important part of entrepreneurial identity construction in general. But according to them, what makes the identity construction of social entrepreneurs differ from other types of entrepreneurs, is the high level of devotion and enjoyment they connect with their project. Moreover, they point out that specific life-events and experiences that social entrepreneurs have, often function as initial motivation and guidance for them to start their social enterprise.

Another aspect of social entrepreneurial identity is studied by Lewis (2015), the concept of identity capital. A strong focus is also being put on the generational belonging of the young social entrepreneur, meaning to be innovative and representing the future. Jones, Latham & Betta (2008) apply the concept of narratives on the identity construction of social entrepreneurs and identify the factor of separating from, and finding similarities with others, as a strong part of this construction. They identify three main parts of the social entrepreneurial identity: “Me, Not-Me and Suppressed-Me” (p. 342).

There is one other study that studies the identity of social entrepreneurs, deploying Alvesson’s and Willmott’s concept of identity work. Driver (2017) analyses the identity work of social entrepreneurs from a psychoanalytic perspective. She explores the struggles that social entrepreneurs face in the “context of unconscious desire and fantasies” (p.716). She obtained the data by interviewing 61 social entrepreneurs from different areas of social entrepreneurship in an open form of interviewing to encourage narrative answers. In her analysis, Driver (2017) points out “disruption, ambiguities and tensions” (p.723) in the narratives of the social entrepreneurs. In particular, she translates them into the different components of the Lacanian concept, such as “how social entrepreneurs build identities around horrific and beatific fantasies, which both centre on struggle as a defining characteristic” (p.716). Driver (2017) emphasizes the complexity of social entrepreneurial identities and contributes an in-depths psychological analysis of the identity work of social entrepreneurs.

However, Driver (2017) fails to give a specific analysis of the conflicts social entrepreneurs experience in their identity work and in what ways they cope with these conflicts. Her analytical tool is the psycho-analysis approach, which provides an in-depth psychoanalytical picture of the social entrepreneurs but also limits the study to the psychological dimension. Different than that, the approach of this study will follow the suggestion of Brown (2015) to use identity work itself as an analytical tool in order to identify specific struggles, tensions and doubts social entrepreneurs face, as well as ways of how they cope with these. Moreover, Driver (2017) does not derive practical implications for social entrepreneurs and the education of social entrepreneurs from her analysis. In contrast to this, this study aims to discuss what practical implications the results of this study can have, as a response to the demands that were formulated by previous researchers (e.g. Pache and Chowdhury, 2012; Smith & Woodworth, 2012).

The evidence presented in this section suggests that the field of social entrepreneurial identity is still situated in an embryonic stage. While other studies focus primarily on the collective dimension of social entrepreneurial identity, compare it to other types of entrepreneurs and treat identity as a rather stable entity or as primarily dependent on external influences, this study aims to explore the internal and continuous character of the social entrepreneurial identity by applying the concept of identity work as a theoretical lens. The reasons why the concept of identity work serves as the appropriate theoretical concept to pursue this aim will be explained in the following section. Altogether, the intention of this study is to fill this identified research gap and by that contributing to the advancement of this young and undeveloped research field of social entrepreneurial identity.

2.3 Identity Work

Recognizing a shortage of studies that explore the concept social entrepreneurial identity from a processual and continuous point of view, this study follows Brown (2015), who argues for the function of the concept of identity work as an analytical tool for the processual identity construction of individuals. A function that has been, according to him, underestimated by the research community until today. In addition to this, Brown (2015) states that identity work is

“integral to any complete explanation of why and how people engage in entrepreneurship” (p.24). Altogether, Brown (2015) identifies identity work as the most important concept when studying the identity construction of individuals in an organizational context. This statement is also supported by Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) by referring to identity work as a major topic in the research field of identity. The following section will introduce the origin of the concept of identity work, the concept’s development through its application in the context of organizational studies and, by that, illustrate why the concept can be regarded as a suitable theoretical lens for this study.

The concept of identity work originates from Alvesson and Willmott (2001). In the context of their work about organizational control, they develop this term in order to describe the interplay of external and internal forces that influence the individual’s identity construction. In detail, that means that different aspects of the organizational context in the form of meetings, conversations, expressions of leadership, etc. might initiate internal psychological mechanisms and then constitute together “self-definition(s), coherence(s) and meaning(s)” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001, p.4) of the individual. As a prerequisite for allowing this calibrating process of identity work to happen, Alvesson and Willmott (2001) identify a certain level of self-critical thinking. Furthermore, they suggest two different scenarios of how identity work can affect an individual. On the one hand, they state that if the individual has the possibility to express itself through work and its self-view is confirmed by the organizational context, the individual’s identity work results in an improved self-image. On the other hand, they state that if this self-view is not confirmed and the organizational context produces confusion about this self-view, this might cause tensions with the individual. If identity work fails in solving these tensions, the consequence might be depression.

For the concept’s purpose in this study, i.e. utilizing it as an analytical tool, three main components of identity work can be derived from the above-mentioned definition. The way an individual sees himself or herself, a certain level of self-critique and coping strategies to deal with the tensions and doubts that are revealed by the self-critical reflection. How these three components function as a guideline for the analysis of the interview results of this study will be explained in the section “Data Analysis”.

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Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) develop the concept further by exploring the concept of identity work in a managerial context and describe it as the individual's engagement in "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" (p.1165) one's self-view on a continuous basis. Furthermore, they underline the social constructionist nature of identity work. Another contribution of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) to the research about identity work is that they point out the possible conflicting nature of identity work by talking about "identity as struggle" (p. 1188). In connection to this, they emphasize the importance of acknowledging forces outside work as influence when studying identity work. Moreover, they introduce the concept of anti-identity, describing the thought of "not-me" (p.1189), as important in the study of identity work. Overall, they see identity as an unsteady and evolving concept, which is why they present identity work as a concept that enables the researcher to capture and represent this nature of identity. The aspects of the social constructionist nature of identity work, the existence of struggle and anti-identities forming part of identity work that are identified by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), also serve as tools to understand and interpret the interview results of this study.

In the research about the identity work of different professions, managers are the group of individuals that is represented the most. The identity work of different types of managers is analysed in different organizational contexts. Alvesson (2004) explores the identity work of knowledge workers in the context of knowledge-intensive firms and points out the importance of social interactions as a part of identity work. This relational aspect of identity work is also emphasized by Watson (2009a) and Alvesson and Sveningsson (2011). Moreover, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2011) specifically include the profession of consultants and their previously mentioned concept of anti-identities as a component of identity work. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016) analyse specific challenges of managers and derive from them different types of conflicts as specific forms of identity work categorized in "identity adjustment, identity expression, identity juggling, identity wrestling and identity crashing" (p.246). The variety of aspects associated with identity work in these studies show the relevance of the concept as an analytical tool of individuals in the organizational context (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008).

A considerable amount of literature has been published in recent years on identity work in the general field of entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship has however been neglected in this

context. These studies, dealing with the identity work of entrepreneurs in general, can be divided into different subtopics. Roy (2016) focuses on creative entrepreneurs and investigates which impact the existence of multiple identities has on the identity work of these entrepreneurs. Another type of entrepreneur is analysed by Watson (2009b), the family business entrepreneur. In his study, Watson (2009b) includes the aspects of social identities and discourses into the analysis of the identity work of the family business entrepreneur. In the context of entrepreneurship education, Hytti & Heinonen (2014) emphasize the necessity to enable graduates to engage in identity work during the process of receiving education in the field of entrepreneurship. Another dimension impacting the identity work of entrepreneurs is highlighted by Larson & Pearson (2012). They focus on a group of high-tech entrepreneurs and the impact the geographical location of their work has on their identity work. The study of Verduyn, Dey, Tedmanson, Essers and Chasserio (2014) on identity work of woman in the context of entrepreneurship is complemented by Lewis's (2015) longitudinal study on gendered identity work of a female entrepreneur.

As the publishing dates indicate, this field of research can be regarded as rather young. There are dimensions of entrepreneurial identity work remaining, about relatively little is known. Altogether, this group of studies also shows that the concept of identity work is regarded as an appropriate concept for understanding entrepreneurs. Therefore, it makes sense to follow Driver (2017) and extend the application of this concept in the specific context of social entrepreneurs.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the current research in the field of social entrepreneurship, gave an insight into the small field of social entrepreneurial identity and introduced the field around the main theoretical framework used in this study, the concept of identity work.

The evidence reviewed in the section on social entrepreneurship shows that there is an increasing interest in this research field. Moreover, it shows that extending research about the individual key players, the social entrepreneurs, is necessary in order to further develop this field. In addition to this, the current interest in the relation of how the social and economic purpose are unified and which tensions these two opposing interests cause within companies,

is illustrated. However, a need for further exploring how this tension influences the social entrepreneurs as individuals, can be identified. Furthermore, in connection to this interest in researching the interaction of the two opposing logics, the demand from researchers of the field to include this specific topic into the education of future social entrepreneurs, is presented.

Taken together, the reviewed studies dealing with social entrepreneurial identity support the notion that the identity aspect is highly relevant and an important part in the development of the overarching field of social entrepreneurship. However, this small amount of studies belonging to this specific field dealing with topics such as the collective identity of social entrepreneurs, comparing their identity to other kinds of entrepreneurs and the generational aspect of this topic, is far from representing the full potential of this young research field.

The concept of identity work is introduced as a concept that captures the unsteady and complex nature of identity as such, which makes it a suitable theoretical lens for this specific study. Moreover, the collective of studies applying the concept in the field of entrepreneurship shows the relevance of applying it in the context of social entrepreneurship. A field in which this way of investigating identity has been neglected so far, with the exception of on other recent study.

3. Method

In this chapter, we explain and clarify our chosen method to conduct this study and the reason behind this choice. Firstly, we start introducing and explaining our approach used for the entire study and the epistemological considerations that have helped us understand and conduct the entire research. To continue, we explain our research design, questions and participants, as well as our data gathering and analysis to illustrate how we have gathered and interpreted the collected data. Finally, we share our thoughts on how to remain reflexive when studying such ambiguous fields to make the study as reliable and valid as possible.

3.1 Research Approach

Qualitative research has broadly been used by researchers to study how people make sense of their surroundings and experience processes (Styhre, 2013). Since this study has observed and identified forces that influence entrepreneurs' identity and thus give place to identity work, a qualitative methodology seemed to be the most beneficial. Further, an interpretive approach has been used, meaning that our own interpretations were the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world. This also means that our findings and conclusions are our own interpretations, subject to this particular context and moment in time and that can therefore not be generalized or understood as the single truth (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). By using this interpretative approach, we did not accept a single truth, but rather multiple truths constructed by our interpretations that are always influenced by own values and meanings.

Further, the empirical data has been collected in a specific time, influenced by the context, language and the interpretations of the researchers. It is therefore that the empirical material used in this study and the conclusions drawn from it cannot be understood outside of the particular context (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). A reflexive approach to the study has thus been necessary in order to reflect critically on the empirical material and look at it from different

methodological lenses, and so enable us to understand and interpret the data from different perspectives (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006).

In order to get this deeper insight and understanding, we have made use of symbolic interactionism, as well as a hermeneutic approach, by connecting our specific observations to the whole field of study and vice versa (Prasad, 2005). This approach has helped us to interpret the statements of the participants and discover underlying meanings that could bring us closer to their thoughts and identities.

We perceive identity studies as highly subjective, since it is an outcome of how people perceive themselves and their surroundings, and is therefore very dependent on the individual's perception. Therefore, we will follow a relativist approach and make clear that the interpretations defended in this study are subject to the context of the participants and researchers and cannot be taken out of it.

3.2 Research Design

Throughout this study, we take a relativist ontological approach, meaning that there are no scientific laws to be discovered but those are rather created by people (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Our view is that there are no single truths when studying the behaviour of people, but multiple truths constructed by the different perspectives from the researchers or protagonists. Further, our approach is constructionist, since all observations from the data will be strictly subject to our interpretations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

These approaches were used when gathering and collecting data, which mainly consisted of a combination of semi-structured interviews and research in the field. We aimed to start the data collection with none or little pre-assumptions in order to allow ideas to bloom from the data itself, following so an internal relativist approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Further, we also conducted in-depth research previous to the interviews to get familiarized with the field and have a better understanding of the data once collected.

As previously mentioned, the data was collected in form of semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of social entrepreneurs. We structured the interviews under various themes that were relevant for the study, while leaving room for the interviewees to conduct the conversation freely and so be open to unexpected answers that could illuminate out of the ordinary patterns or ideas (Styhre, 2013).

When analysing the data, we observed it from different perspectives and angles, being always critical and reflective on our own interpretations. Further, we intend to follow a hermeneutical approach by continuously linking our observations and interpretations to the whole field and vice versa (Prasad, 2005). Since we are studying identity issues of people, and more specifically how social entrepreneurs maintain their identity strong, we believe this approach to gather and analyse the data benefits our study the most and provides us with answers to our research questions. However, we want to pinpoint that our participants, and the data collected during the interviews, are not meant to represent all social entrepreneurs and can therefore not be empirically generalized. Instead, we have focused on the quality of our theoretical reasoning to increase the generalizability of our study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.3 Research Questions

Throughout this study, we aim to understand the identity work of social entrepreneurs by focusing on the forces that influence this process of framing and maintaining their identity. The research questions we aim to answer are the following:

- How do Social Entrepreneurs maintain a coherent self-view?
 - How do Social Entrepreneurs frame themselves?
 - What tensions and struggles provoke doubt about their self-view?
 - In what ways do they cope with such struggles?

We started this research study wanting to understand and study social entrepreneurs and their identities. After conducting interviews, gathering data and observations, and analysing it, we observed how they were engaging in identity work during the interviews itself, and identified

some patterns or commonalities that were repeated among all participants. From these observations, our three sub questions emerged. We thus focused the research on analysing in depth factors that seemed to either attack or strengthen the self-view or identities they were framing to us, giving so place to identity work.

The first and main research question we have intended to answer is how social entrepreneurs maintain a coherent self-view, despite the doubts and tensions they face. In order to answer this question, other questions were necessary to bring us closer to the answer. How they see and frame themselves was a necessary question to understand their identities. Further, responding to a third question, we have focused the research on the different forces that provoke doubts in them about their identity and engage them in identity work. Finally, we have looked for the strategies that strengthen this self-view or identity, which help them cope with the doubts they appear to face and so maintain a coherent self-view.

By answering these questions, we have been able to gain a deeper understanding of the identity work of this particular kind of entrepreneurs. The study also aims to not only provide a theoretical perspective of the field, but also provide social entrepreneurs with some overview of possible doubts they might have about their identity and what can help them strengthen this self-view.

3.4 Participants

After broad research on social start-ups and entrepreneurs, we chose a group of founders from different industries, ages, gender and nationalities. This decision of having very diverse group of social entrepreneurs was to ensure our data collection would give a broad understanding of these particular kind of entrepreneurs, and so enable us to draw relevant conclusions that were not subject to a specific generation, nationality or industry.

To contact each of the founders, we emailed and called them through the contact details provided on their website or via personal contacts we had in the sector. From the beginning, we tried to establish a friendly and trustful relationship with all of them to ensure a comfortable environment during the later-to-conduct interviews.

All seven participants were founders of social start-ups. Two out of the seven participants were female and all of them ranged between an age of 22 and 54. We did not focus on any specific background or personal trait to select these participants, but rather tried to have a mixed and diverse group regarding age, gender, industry and nationality. After interviewing these seven participants and gathering all the data we had from their conversations with us, we decided that interviewing more participants would not offer us more valuable insights that we already had to answer our questions. Therefore, we decided that this number of interviews was enough to conduct the analysis and have valuable findings.

Finally, in order to achieve openness and honesty from our participants during our conversations, we decided to anonymize all interviews and assign random names to all of them. By doing this, we also aimed to gather credible data and so increase the validity of the study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

3.5 Data Collection Method

Since interviews are seen as a relevant and valuable qualitative method (Edwards & Holland, 2013), we conducted seven semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of social entrepreneurs as our main source of data. All interviews were conducted in the place of choice of the participant after having previous contact with all of them in order to establish a relationship. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and lasted between 40 and 80 minutes. Even though we always left freedom for the participant to guide the conversation, we slightly structured the interviews into different themes and topics that were relevant for the study.

Further, since our focus was to understand the participants' self-view and forces influencing it, our chosen themes were based on these issues we wanted to explore to answer our research questions. We asked them questions regarding their personal background and about the project, questions around the topic of separation of working and private life, we also covered the topic of problems and challenges they had, which showed us the doubts they faced. Such themes and questions served us as a general guideline for the interviews. However, as already mentioned,

we used an open interviewing method by encouraging participants to freely conduct the interviews and so leave room for them to cover topics that were not mentioned or asked by us.

Therefore, during the interviews we stayed open to unexpected answers that could unveil interesting topics to us (Styhre, 2013). This approach enabled us to identify out of the ordinary patterns that led us to our findings and conclusions. After conducting the interviews and gathering all the data, we discussed our own individual interpretations and observations together. We shared, compared and reflected upon each other's interpretations and opinions to enter the analysis phase with an in-depth and shared understanding.

Moreover, the interviews were relaxed to ensure the interviewees felt comfortable and to try to create an atmosphere of trust among both parties. This way, we aimed to give the interviewees an extended role as important parties and co-constructors of the research process (Mishler, 1986). This approach has helped us to understand their identities and self-views and discover doubts they all faced that lead them to engage in identity work during the conversations they had with us. However, we have been aware and conscious of the fact that the way we understood and interpreted the conversations with them are our own and can therefore not be generalized.

3.6 Data Analysis

Wanting to understand how Social Entrepreneurs perceive themselves and if they are facing difficulties that hinder them from keeping their self-view strong, we started our research and data analysis. In order to conduct this analysis process in a structured and coherent manner, we found it helpful to keep in mind some theories and analysis methods such as the seven different steps used for grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We therefore started by familiarizing with our data and then continued by reflecting on it to be able to further discover some out of the ordinary patterns.

While conducting the interviews, we encouraged the participants to tell us more about themselves, the project, difficulties they encountered and their future expectations. Throughout the interviews, they were partially showing who they were to us by framing parts of their

identities. Since we understand identity as a broad and complex concept (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008), and believe that studying their whole identities would not have been possible with the scope of this study, we have consciously focused the analysis on particular parts of our participants' identities. Further, during these conversations, we observed how they all faced or had faced some struggles and doubts about their self-view. Since we observed tensions during the conversations, and their attempt to balance such doubts to maintain a strong identity, we clearly perceived it as identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2001). Therefore, since our participants presented multiple identity aspects to us, in order to gain a deep understanding of why and how social entrepreneurs engage in social entrepreneurship and how it affects their identity, using the concept of identity work seemed useful for our research. In this section, we explain what approach we have used and the steps we have followed to analyse our data and come up with our findings.

Our chosen approach to link our observations and interpretations to theory is abductive. We entered the analysis having a broad knowledge of the already existing literature and having a proper insight on existing theories and traditions. This previous knowledge enabled us to have a deep understanding of the data we gathered and allowed us to make sense of it and interpret it in relevant and new ways (Styhre, 2013). Consequently, in order to have a deeper and broader theoretical knowledge, we researched and gathered deep knowledge on the field of identity and identity work. This has given us the needed knowledge and tools to identify identity aspects that we would not have observed otherwise, and has also enabled us to elaborate valuable and reflective opinions.

The analysis was thus started by having a general overview of the data, familiarizing with and identifying general themes individually that would further be categorized into different themes. Further, the observations were mapped under different themes and topics based on patterns we encountered and on the different themes found on previous literature. By going through this process of linking our specific observations and interpretations to general concepts and theories in the field and vice versa, the *hermeneutic circle* was used, which provided us with a broader understanding of our data (Prasad, 2005).

During the coding process, we searched for commonalities and repetitions that the participants mentioned when talking about themselves, their thoughts and feelings to come up with patterns

among all of the interviewees. Further, we made more specific and concrete categories based on the observations that we both spotted. This part of the analysis was done together to make sure it was observations and interpretations from both of us. From this analysis, we spotted different patterns that we categorized into different topics, which would further comprise the different chapters of the analysis, as well as our findings.

This process presented some challenges, such as having to get rid of some observations or themes that did not seem to be worthy or valuable enough for the study. Such situations made us question if the data collected was enough to conduct a relevant study for the field. However, after looking at the data again in a critical way, there were some interesting patterns and themes that were relevant enough to keep and analyse. We related these findings to existing literature and studies and kept on with the analysis.

Overall, as previously mentioned, we guided our analysis process through the grounded analysis steps. We thus started by familiarizing with the entire field and data we had collected, we then reflected upon all our data and specific quotes we had selected, which allowed us to start with the coding process. As mentioned, we stayed reflexive and open during these steps, which also presented some challenges that made us reflect and re-code and restructure our data. Following these steps, we ended the process by linking our observations and findings to existing theories to have a more in-depth and relevant analysis. We thought this way of working helped us during the analysis to ensure all the data was taken into account in a relevant way. During this entire process, even though we slightly adapted our research questions along the way, we kept the main question and purpose always present to avoid deviating from our research topic.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is generally known for having a high level of subjectivity and ambiguity (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). We have been aware since the beginning of our study that researching about people's identity has a high degree of ambiguity, which requires a considerable amount of reflexivity during the entire study. This section will thus focus on the reflexivity needed in order for this study to be as valuable, credible and trustworthy as possible.

Chapter 3: Method

One of our main priorities throughout the study has been to avoid falling into own biases too quickly, that could condition our findings. We have been aware that the interpretations of data are our own interpretations, which, even though we have always been critical and reflexive on our thoughts, are influenced by our backgrounds and ways of making sense (Styhre, 2013). Therefore, we have always put effort in being distant from and critical on our own thoughts by doing in-depth research that would enable us to construct deeper and more valuable insights and interpretations. Also, to avoid being biased by own assumptions, we have always shared and critically thought about each other's thoughts by involving in cross-reflection.

However, we are aware that, even though we have always tried not to be biased, it is not possible to fully avoid our assumptions to influence the study. What we mean by this is that our findings are our own interpretations and represent the way we regarded the empirical material (Styhre, 2013). Therefore, the findings are strongly attached to the particular context of our study and to our own interpretations and views, for which they cannot be generalized (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Being aware of these limitations in qualitative research, we have strived to be reflexive during the entire process by continuously questioning and evaluating our interpretations and observations. We have thus consciously engaged in reflexivity by taking a step back from our thoughts and reflecting upon the forces affecting our own interpretations (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

Furthermore, to increase the trustworthiness of the study, we have always mutually agreed on our observations and the ideas we developed from these, to make the study internally reliable and valid (Bryman & Bell, 2015). We have also kept records of all phases of our analysis and research process in order to make it possible to audit and ensure the dependability of this research. Lastly, we have kept away from own values and theoretical inclinations to avoid our findings to be influenced by these, and so further increase the validity and trustworthiness of this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.8 Chapter Summary

Throughout this research study, we have followed an interpretive, abductive approach that enabled us to get closer to social entrepreneurs and their identities. We started this qualitative study with a great interest in the field, which enabled us to enter the research process with some insight and knowledge about the context of our participants. Further, to gather the data upon which we based our analysis and findings, we conducted seven semi-structured interviews, which gave us a deep understanding of our participant's identities. In order to address and find answers to our research questions, we stayed critical and reflexive during this entire analysis process by moving back and forth through our data and observations, and following so a hermeneutic and abductive approach. Our awareness of the subjectivity of this field of study, made us stay reflexive and critical during the entire process to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of our interpretations and findings.

4. Identity Work of Social Entrepreneurs

With a deep interest in social entrepreneurs, their identities and the challenges they face, we started our research. While conducting the interviews, we asked about themselves, the project, their everyday lives and about difficulties they had faced in this social entrepreneurial journey. During these conversations with them, we observed how they opened and framed themselves to us. While doing so, we also clearly perceived the existence of some tensions and doubts they faced with themselves. Following the definition from Alvesson and Willmott (2001), where they mention how identity work occurs when some degree of self-doubt provoked by tensions in one's self-view appears, we observed how our participants constantly engaged in identity work. Further, we also saw how they protected their self-view from these doubts they were facing, managing so to maintain a strong identity.

Throughout this chapter we bring up some fragments of the conversations that were crucial in understanding how the social entrepreneurs were reasoning about their identities. It is from the way in which they were narrating their self-views to us, that we observed their engagement in identity work. They firstly framed who they were to us, they presented some parts of their identities, which we called 'identity outcomes'. These were identified by us after observing them as patterns in the empirical material. Then, they mentioned and expressed some tensions and struggles they were facing that conflicted each one of these identities or self-views. Finally, they mentioned different ways in which they balanced and stopped these tensions, which enabled them to keep the identities they previously framed to us strong and so engage successfully in identity work.

We start our analysis by presenting the different 'identity outcomes' we observed when they framed themselves to us. We identified three of these, which we named 'I am the Responsible People Person', 'I am the Impact Maker' and 'I am the Project'. It is important to clarify that each of these identity outcomes we have identified cannot be understood as mutually exclusive as they are interlinked and all form part of the 'social entrepreneurial' part of the participant's identities. These three outcomes will thus represent the first three sections of this chapter. Then,

we continue the analysis by presenting the different struggles that can attack or threaten each of these identity outcomes. We identified four major ones; 'Business Leader Struggle', 'Lifestyle Struggle', 'Reality Frustration' and 'Vulnerability'. When presenting these struggles, we also demonstrate how identity work is happening and our interpretation of it. Finally, the last section of the chapter presents the 'coping strategies' we identified by which they cope with those tensions and manage to maintain a coherent self-view and identity, giving so place to successful identity work. Following this structure has helped us understand and analyse how they reason about their identities and engage in identity work.

4.1 'I am The Responsible People Person'

During the interviews, all participants projected themselves as being both an empathetic, caring and fair people person, as well as people taking a lot of responsibility by trying to solve a big societal problem. We called this identity outcome 'I am the Responsible People Person'. Naming them people person was not only because of their high ability to read and understand people, but also because of their empathetic and caring side towards others, which they projected as a very strong aspect of themselves. However, these strong identity aspects they showed to us were sometimes attacked by tensions they faced. Some of these tensions dealt with their need to take business decisions for the company's interests or their desire for a higher standard of life. When we observed these tensions, we also saw them trying to balance these doubts by engaging in identity work. This section will thus show how they projected themselves to us, and later, the main tensions they face that result in identity work.

When we asked about themselves, the majority mentioned their strong empathy, their desire to help and care for people and to change some major problem in society they were confronted with.

"When I was a child I travelled with my mom to South America and I was so confused when I saw the children that had these swollen bellies, and then I asked my mom why they had this and she said that this comes from being hungry. This experience shocked me because I could not understand why I have so much and they don't" - Ana

This quote illustrates one of the many stories they told us that showed us their empathetic, caring and fair side, which was also mostly the reason why they took the responsibility to take action and try to solve some of these societal problems that concerned them. This people person aspect was very obvious and strong among all participants. Further, as previously mentioned, they also showed themselves as taking a lot of responsibility that seemed to be born from a feeling of guilt and shame, which can be observed in the last part of the previous quote. With this strong responsibility, we mean that they take on the responsibility to take action and solve a problem that is not really theirs, like providing clean water to African communities. Such strong responsibility was also very present in all participants.

"It firstly came with a feeling of debt, seeing all this people living in such conditions while I had everything and more without doing anything more than they did(...) This feeling is not a very good one, because it also frustrates, it can take you to an extreme where you get lost (...)a bit auto destructive sometimes, because you come back home from these countries and you feel bad when you go and have a coke, which makes it very difficult to live here (...)" - Robert

In this previous quote, Robert explained how all the responsibility and pressure he put on himself was consciously done, which was on the one hand a strength and strong trait of himself he embraced, but also a weakness and dangerous part of himself. The danger he mentioned was regarding how taking this huge responsibility can take you to a very frustrating and auto destructive side when you expect to solve something as big as water scarcity. He knew that he had to balance this strong responsibility in order to avoid a breakdown in his identity, which again shows the existence of identity work and his conscious engagement in it.

All participants projected these two parts of themselves very strongly, seeming to be two very important parts of their identities and self-view. However, as previously mentioned, they also pointed out some major challenges and tensions that provoked doubts in them, which will be explained further below.

4.1.1 Business Leader Struggle

This 'I am the Responsible People Person' identity outcome we identified, seemed to be attacked sometimes, causing doubts among the participants and resulting in identity work. A first major doubt that seemed to be repeated in most participants was the challenge between having to take business decisions for the interests of the company, and on the other side not wanting to hurt or cause negative consequences to the people working for them. We have called this tension the 'Business Leader Struggle'.

We further present some statements that show this struggle our social entrepreneurs were facing. For instance, Ana presents herself as a natural people person when it comes to giving care, and that it seems to be harder for her to act business-like. This is something she has to learn to handle:

"I'm very naturally empathetic and so it creates some challenges too and everyone I work with is my friend and I love them, and it's a great exercise to be honest in a loving way and truthful, but sometimes I should have done things differently (...) I'm learning about being protective about who comes in and how to manage the business side of things... I have a strong vision and things need to go in a particular way... I'm working on finding a way to be loving and truthful with a compassionate communication style."
- Ana

This quote from Ana illustrates both, their clearly empathetic and people-person side, as well as the existence of some challenges. In this quote, in particular we observed the tension of having to take business decisions for the company's interest while being conflicted with the consequences it might have on the people working for her. Here in particular she was referring to a moment where she had to fire an employee because of his lack of competencies, but because she did not want to hurt his feelings, she struggled with the decision. Since business leaders who take money driven and rational decisions seem to be their anti-identity, such situations where they have to take business decisions, provoke doubts because it does not fit with the people-person part of their identity. Such doubts clearly show the existence of identity work.

"I'm currently choosing between becoming a cooperative- social/non-profit direction, or becoming a franchise- profit oriented direction." - Sofia

In this statement, *Sofia* expresses her indecision between taking the project towards a cooperative or a franchisee direction. She mentioned that by choosing the cooperative road, she would on the one hand keep the concept more pure and social, but on the other side she would also earn much less, making it difficult to live from the project. Making the project a franchisee allowed her to spread the concept much more, make it bigger, be able to make more profits, but it also risked the essence and social nature of the project. We perceived this doubt as her having struggles between being this very social, altruistic and caring people person that she was, or risking her more social, change maker part to be able to have a more secure and stable lifestyle, which did not seem to fit with who she truly was. During this part of the conversation we observed identity work, especially when she was having doubts about how she wanted her future and lifestyle to be, which attacked her self-view and this strong responsible people person she considered to be.

When analysing this struggle in depth, we found it helpful to compare it with the identity struggles of managers described by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016). In their book, they distinguish two major leadership approaches among managers: ‘the grand leader’ and ‘the human nature leader’. According to their study, many managers struggle with their identities when they want to act as a sympathetic humanist, but need to act as a driving force and a demanding manager (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). In general, it seems as if managers struggle more with their self-view when they have to be humanistic and act as a good friend towards employees. Our observation from the interviews is that in the case of social entrepreneurs it is the opposite, their struggles and tensions in identity arise when they have to act as a leader or manager taking business decisions, and leave their humanistic and people person aside. When business decisions are involved, their people-person identity is challenged, which is who they truly are according to what they projected to us. We observed how this was one main source of doubts in their self-view.

4.1.2 Lifestyle Struggle

The next major doubt many of them seemed to face was what we have called the ‘Lifestyle Struggle’. From our interviews, we observed that being a social entrepreneur mostly involves

having little or no earnings, which sometimes conflicts their identities by provoking doubts in the kind of lifestyle they want. We perceived a concern on missing out a higher standard of life among most of the participants, which provoked tensions in their self-view that they needed to balance to keep themselves and their identity strong. In this section, we will illustrate upon some statements where we observed identity work happening due to these common lifestyle struggles most of them faced.

" Sometimes I get a little tired and I ask myself, why am I doing this? (...) Also when I see other people doing their careers and being millionaires, and I am still sitting here (...) But these are only small moments where I get jealous and think about what else I could have done." - Tim

"I have friends working in consulting companies, earning a lot, and sometimes its hard, but again, what you get out from this is much bigger than all the money I could earn." - Lucas

Both these quotes show how Tim and Lucas sometimes struggle with the scarcity of money and income, the low stability that this kind of lifestyle has. Comparing themselves with friends makes them sometimes think of what they could have, the higher standard of life they could be living. We perceive this struggle as identity work, especially when they expressed how they sometimes thought of quitting and do something that would permit them to have a better lifestyle, which is not really supporting this social side they want to project to us. However, they also make very clear that these doubts and struggles are very momentary, they make clear that being a rich business man or women is not who they are. They try to stop and balance these doubts and keep the people person identity they project to us very strong, which they accomplish through some coping strategies they have. This attempt to stop the doubts and balance such tensions, again shows how identity work happens during the conversations we had with them. Their passion and enjoyment are some of the strategies or ways to cope with these doubts they use, which will be explained in depth in the next chapter.

4.2 'I am The Impact Maker'

A second identity outcome we recognized from the conversations we had with all participants is the one we have called 'I am The Impact Maker'. This aspect includes the participant's strong desire to change the world and have a big impact, as well as their confrontation with reality. We have explored in depth how such confrontations engage them in identity work by provoking tensions and doubts in the self-view they intend to project to us. By looking closely to the quotes, we gathered from the interviews, in this section we have explored in depth how they projected themselves as individuals that take action upon societal problems. They have all shown a strong unconformity with society and their need and desire to change that. However, we have not only seen this positive 'action taker' side of themselves, but also the doubts they seemed to have when being realistic and objective about the little impact they actually had. We firstly explain these positive aspects of themselves and then show how these also bring tensions that cause them to engage in identity work.

Throughout the interviews and the conversations we had with all participants, they all expressed a strong desire for change, which mostly developed from a personal experience that had affected them. The following quote from Julia clearly illustrates this:

"I think the main inspiration to "change" something in the fashion industry was Bangladesh (...) even if I was in factories that had human and rather fair working conditions, we saw all the other factories that you know from the documentaries and where you knew that behind these walls the production is not fair(..) and also the poverty that was so obvious to see." - Julia

This statement expresses her unconformity with labour conditions and poverty in particular, which she mentions to be her main inspiration to be a social entrepreneur. With such quotes, she projects herself to us as someone that takes action, someone who does not look away from all these problems that everyone is aware of, as a 'good citizen'. We could interpret this as identity work where she tries to be this 'change maker' in the world to clean or compensate her feeling of guilt and shame that arises from being part of this society.

"It was born from seeing a problem, and wanting to solve it and help in some way (...) people came to the hospital, and the biggest problem was always the lack of water or related to this (...) one example, kids dying because of drinking bad water and having diarrhoea and dying from that (...) I saw that and said to myself, it's great to build hospitals and schools, those are very necessary, but water is much more necessary" - Robert

This statement again shows how Robert's desire to make an impact in the world arises from some sort of unconformity, from seeing a problem and wanting to take action. At the end of the sentence he also refers to his previous profession as an architect, which he decided to sacrifice to be able to make an impact in the world and devote himself to provide clean water to communities. By mentioning this decision he made, he seems to frame himself as a very empathetic and caring person that is willing to sacrifice a part of him to help and be this 'impact maker', which appears to be a stronger part of himself.

Further, this desire for change was also linked to the ambitious personality all participants showed to have. They all projected themselves as highly ambitious people who not only want to make an impact and help society in some way, but also want to spread their concept and gain as much exposure as possible. Most of them mentioned to be very engaged in gaining media exposure, winning awards and spreading their concept. When we asked about their future goals, it seemed to us that helping on a small scale was not enough for them, the impact had to be big. These future goals referred to both their personal goals as well as to the project. In most cases, these future projections matched, which shows how who they desire to be in the future, i.e. their 'aspirational identity' (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009), is closely connected to their projects.

"I got a bit tired of only doing local projects and wanted to do bigger ones" - Tim

Here Tim clearly shows this ambition that was so present in all participants, which also made them aim for a big impact.

"I want it to be more than a shop, create awareness and spread the message" - Sofia

"I really want to see the project in other European countries or even globally" - Ana

In both these statements, Sofia and Ana express this strong willingness to expand their concept and grow their projects. By quotes like these, the participants project themselves as being persistent, ambitious, talented and recognized people that are making a change in the world. However, this part of their identities got attacked when they were confronted with reality, with their realization of the small impact they had on a global scale. This confrontation provoked doubts among participants, which we have explored in depth further below.

4.2.1 Reality Frustration

When participants looked objectively to the impact their projects were having in comparison to the scale of the problem, this ‘impact maker’ identity outcome seemed to be attacked, which caused doubts in their self-view. We have called this particular doubt and tension ‘Reality Frustration’, which has shown to be one major cause for identity work to happen among the social entrepreneurs we interviewed. We thus elaborate on how this tension affected the ‘impact maker’ identity outcome the participants projected to us.

Frustration seemed to appear when they thought about and realized how small their impact and change really meant for society in general. Such thoughts showed to cause doubts about their capabilities and possibilities to have the big impact they strived for, and to be this ‘impact maker’ they were projecting to us. One clear example of such doubts is the following quote mentioned by Ana:

"I've never wanted to quit, I've had some frustrations, mainly with myself and what is possible" - Ana

Here Ana clearly expresses how she sometimes questions her own capabilities to make a big impact, which, as she mentions, can be very frustrating. This ‘reality hit’ had been experienced by most of the participants, who all had had a difficult moment where they questioned the meaning of their project and work. Questioning their capabilities derived directly in doubting about themselves and their identities. Their attempt to balance these doubts and try to keep their faith and self-view strong showed to us how they were engaging in identity work.

"Sometimes I think this impact is so small on the world, but it still has impact..." - Sofia

This statement expressed by Sofia clearly shows this process of balancing between the idea of not having enough impact, but on the other hand being very conscious of the change she actually is making. By this we see how she is protecting her self-view of the doubts and tensions she sometimes faces, which again illustrates this process of identity work all participants showed to be engaging in to maintain a coherent view of themselves.

4.3 'I am The Project'

From the interviews we conducted with the seven social entrepreneurs, we identified another identity outcome as which they frame themselves and within which they engage in identity work. We called this outcome 'I am The Project', which describes their strong attachment to their projects, the blending of their work with their lives and the vulnerability this strong connection to the project implies. This section will explore in what ways they frame themselves as 'the project' by looking closely at statements where they express their high level of attachment to their projects to us and describe how the project is integrated into their everyday lives. Since these expressions are not solely positive but also include tensions and doubts, we see this outcome of their identity as a setting of strong engagement in identity work. These aspects will be explored in depth in the section that analyses their expressions of how this attachment and blending of work and live makes them vulnerable.

During the course of the interviews, the social entrepreneurs expressed their attachment to their projects in similar ways. They described the project as a part of themselves and as part of who they are. The following quote from Sofia is a strong example for this:

"The shop is a very personal thing, it has become a part of me (...)." - Sofia

This statement is a strong and figurative expression that her project forms part of who she is and how important it is to her. Moreover, she uses the project to frame and present herself to us in a specific way. The project is not simply something she does, but the project is an embodiment and representation of who she is. This shows a strong engagement in identity work as this self-presentation can be seen as an attempt to project the good characteristics of their

projects such as social, sustainable, innovative, etc. on themselves in front of us and themselves. The following statement can also be seen as a representation of this aspect:

"Some entrepreneurs say that their start-up is their baby, but for me the project is my soul" - Ana

In this statement, Ana even adds a spiritual aspect to the relationship of the social entrepreneur to her project by calling the project a representation of her soul. By presenting this comparison with other entrepreneurs, she also puts a strong emphasis on how special this makes her special relationship with the project. It seems as if the social entrepreneur does not regard the project and herself/himself as two separate entities, but one identity unit.

"The project is my soul, I feel so attached to it, i think of it all the time (...) i can't stop it (...) I think it has become a bit of an obsession (...) I'm developing myself in so many ways, it's so rewarding (...)." - Ana

This statement elicits the impression of someone who is in love. In particular, the aspects of feeling attached, thinking about it all the time, feeling obsessed about it resemble the symptoms of being in love (Colman, 2015). This leads to comparing the relationship of the social entrepreneur to his or her project with a love relationship. The metaphor of a love relationship illustrates further the high level of involvement with the project, but this is not the only aspect this expression reveals. On the one hand, Ana describes the work for the project as rewarding and on the other hand, she also recognizes the obsessive nature of her relationship with her project. This example illustrates a tense aspect of the social entrepreneurs' relationships with their projects. In the interview material, we can see that they are aware of the intense relationships with their projects. We interpret this awareness and reflection upon of the positive and negative aspects as engagement in identity work.

A common aspect that we could observe in all seven participants is that as a consequence of their high level of attachment, their life blend with their work. The project occupies the majority of their time but they do not present this as a burden but rather as something they are proud of.

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This quote is an example for expressing that they do not regard their project as an obligation but rather as something fun.

"It's fun, it doesn't feel like work." - Julia

This quote from Julia, who works at a second job in order to finance her social project, saying that she dedicates the free time from her other job to her project strengthens this perception even further.

"I mostly work on the project in the evening or on weekends." - Julia

We could observe that it is not of importance to make a clear separation of what is work for them and what is their free time, as the two parts blend into each other. A very figurative expression of this is shown in the statement of John:

"From when i wake up until i go to bed, I am 100% involved with this, I think about it all the time, I don't do any other thing." - John

Altogether, these declarations can be seen as expressions of their dedication and as validation of how attached they are to their projects. Moreover, they can be interpreted as a tool to frame themselves, again in front of us and themselves, as 'I am The Project' and by that express that they are someone who is overly attached to what he or she does and therefore dedicates all of his or her time and energy to it.

4.3.1 Vulnerability

As seen in the previous paragraphs, the aspect of the social entrepreneurs framing themselves as 'the project', meaning the expression of their high attachment to the project and the resulting merge of work and life, gives space for identity work to happen since the social entrepreneurs also express an awareness of tensions that aspects of their identity bring with them. These aspects of doubt will be elaborated on in the following part.

In the context of expressing their strong bond with their project, they also recognized that this nature of the relationship makes them vulnerable. The following quote from Robert functions

as an example for this awareness of being vulnerable that we observed in the majority of the participants.

“You are vulnerable towards the company, you have to be careful with your ego and you have to control that self-pressure because it can make you very egocentric and also very unhappy and frustrated.” - Robert

In this quote, it almost appears as an attempt to convince himself to be aware and control the pressure he puts on himself concerning the project. Moreover, it shows how the high level of attachment also implies a high degree of pressure on himself, which then results in the feeling of vulnerability. This feeling of vulnerability is given space by the notion of the project being a part of the social entrepreneur and vice versa that was illustrated earlier in the chapter. Taking a closer look on the interview results, this vulnerability presents itself in two ways. Firstly, the awareness and fear of the possibility that if the project fails, the consequences of this failure would harm themselves and in particular attack their self-view. A strong example of this fear is the following quote from Tim:

“If the project is all I have and for some reason the project goes down, all my legacy is gone and then I am ruined.” - Tim

Secondly, the fear of oneself being the one who harms the project which would equal a form of self-destruction because of the project being an embodiment of one's identity. This struggle is exemplified by Ana saying:

"My fear is that I will do something wrong that will jeopardize the success of the project. That's my biggest fear." - Ana

These expressions represent the downside of the strong attachment and the fact that they dedicate all their time and energy the project. Again, the metaphor of a love relationship helps to illustrate the inner struggle.

"If I would recognize that it all does not work anymore and would have to give up the project, that would be a big heartbreak." - Julia

Much like in a love relationship, it appears that with the high level of attachment and engagement, the social entrepreneur gives the project the power to break his or her heart. Altogether, them recognizing, being aware of and reflecting upon the struggle that being ‘the project’ makes them vulnerable, enables conscious identity work concerning this aspect of their identity.

In general, entrepreneurs have to be highly involved and committed to their start up in order to make it work, which is not different in the context of social entrepreneurship (Martin & Osberg, 2007). However, we observed that the nature of social start-ups, meaning helping and working with people, having the ambition to improve the society, additionally implies a high level of empathy and sensitiveness. From this observation, it can be derived that this makes the entrepreneur more vulnerable and emotionally dependent on the organisation, which also makes their identity work more dependent on the organisation’s success.

4.4 Coping Strategies

In the preceding paragraphs, we analysed how the social entrepreneurs framed themselves and where we could see identity work happen, elicited by struggles, problems and tensions. Based on this elaboration, we now want to analyse their strategies to cope with the aforementioned tensions and doubts. We will do that by elaborating on the different ways of maintaining and strengthening their identity, which we could observe during the interviews. In particular, we aim to examine how these different ways help them to maintain their self-view of being ‘The Responsible People Person’, ‘The Impact Maker’ and ‘The Project’.

Going back to the initial definition of the concept of identity work from Alvesson and Willmott (2001), we can see that tensions that attack the self-view of an individual can be resisted or dealt with through a “receptiveness to identity-securing positions” (p. 9). This receptiveness appears to be strong in all social entrepreneurs we interviewed, since we could observe several factors that they identified as helpful in moments of doubts related to their projects. Moreover, we identified that these ways of maintaining and strengthening their self-view can have external and internal sources. Furthermore, we determined three different ways of maintaining and strengthening, which we labelled as ‘Remembering Confirmation and Recognition’, ‘Reflecting

on Passion and Enjoyment' and 'Recollecting the Social Purpose'. It is important to note, that these three cannot be regarded as completely separate from each other but as interrelated.

4.4.1 Remembering Confirmation and Recognition

During the interviews with the seven social entrepreneurs we observed that confirmation and recognition from different parties were of high importance to them. Different sources of confirmation and recognition were repeated in the interviews such as, direct positive feedback from the people who benefit from their projects, the attention from media and academia and seeing how other people are inspired and start similar projects. We identify the conscious action of remembering these different sources of confirmation and recognition as an important part of their identity work because this act helps to maintain and strengthen their self-view as 'The Responsible People Person', 'The Impact Maker' and 'The Project'. How they do this will be illustrated with the help of their statements.

"I love success, besides having my friends together and getting positive feedback from the children, parents and the community (...) Winning prizes and starting new projects, growing the team, gaining influence and transforming our region." - Tim

This statement from Tim shows how important external recognition is for him. He mentions various sources of positive feedback that go beyond the direct feedback from the people he helps through his project. Especially the aspect of winning a prize is a tangible confirmation that what he does is important, makes an impact and is worth the hard work. Through this, the external feedback helps to solve tensions and doubts, in this case especially the 'Reality Frustration' and the 'Lifestyle Struggle'. The direct feedback illustrates the impact he makes and the prizes compensate for the prestige and money another job would possibly provide him with. In the following quote from Ana, again two external sources of feedback play an important role for her. However, the feedback from the people she helps through her project and supporters who confirm that what she does is great, is in focus.

"It's so rewarding, every time I meet with the people they say 'I am so thankful and I don't feel so alone now, I have hope now' this really fuels me and keeps me going (...) And also to talk to other people that say that this is a great project that they would

donate for, I am really using the input from these parties as a motivation to keep going”

- Ana

The feedback that is recalled in this interview statement confirms to herself and to us that she is someone who cares for other people in need, and therefore a ‘responsible people person’. Moreover, it supports her self-view as an ‘impact maker’ by confirming that she makes a change in other people’s lives by giving them a new perspective.

"Also requests for interviews from students like you show me how relevant and important my project is which is of course a big motivation." - Julia

This quote from Julia is a good example of how the interview itself gave space for identity work. The external interest in her project strengthens her self-view as the ‘impact maker’ by confirming the importance and relevance of what she does.

"And as well to see that the importance of social and sustainable concepts become more and more important lets me believe that this is not only a trend but a real movement" - Julia

An example of how events that are not directed at the project itself are perceived as confirming is shown in her quote above. She projects this indirect confirmation and attention from society for related concepts on her own project and herself. Therefore, this quote is a good illustration for the strong “receptiveness to identity-securing positions” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001, p. 9) we observed in the seven social entrepreneurs. Another aspect of ‘Remembering Confirmation and Recognition’ as a tool to maintain and strengthen the self-view of social entrepreneurs is revealed in the following quote of Sofia.

"Seeing other people starting something out from this idea shows the impact." - Sofia

Being a role model and inspiring other people to start projects with a social or sustainable purpose particularly targets the aspect of being the ‘impact maker’ as these other projects can be regarded as tangible proof for the own impact. Altogether, the above-mentioned interview statements showed that remembering how they receive confirmation and recognition through

different channels, as part of their identity work, help them to dissolve tensions and doubts and by that strengthen their self-view and identity outcomes.

4.4.2 Reflecting on Passion and Enjoyment

Another coping strategy for dealing with problems and doubts we could observe in the interviews with the social entrepreneurs, was the aspect of the passion and enjoyment they experience with their projects. We saw that reflecting on and telling us about how passionate they are about their project and the enjoyment they get out of it played an important factor in dealing with the problems and doubts that were analysed in the previous chapter. In comparison to the aspect of confirmation and recognition, which were received from external sources, the aspect of passion and enjoyment seems to stem from an internal source of the social entrepreneurs.

We see this aspect becoming part of their identity work of social entrepreneurs. By reflecting on the passion and enjoyment the project brings them, they confirm their strong social part of themselves. In moments where they face struggles and doubt about themselves, reflecting on this aspect helps them to strengthen and confirm their identity outcomes. Taking a closer look on how the social entrepreneurs presented the passion and enjoyment they feel towards their projects during the interviews, an antithetic pattern becomes evident. After mentioning difficult phases they have experienced during their time as social entrepreneurs, this expression of doubt was followed by a 'but' and a confession of how much their work means to them. An illustrative example is the following quote from Julia.

"There was never a moment where I wanted to quit but of course there are difficult phases. (...) But even in these times my heart is so attached to the project and I always remember how much energy and how much blood, sweat and tears I have put into it already which is then always the motivation to keep going" - Julia

A similar structure is presented in Sofia's quote referring to how much of her time the project consumes.

" I do not have a lot of personal time, but the shop is my passion so that is fine." - Sofia

Again, a negative aspect of the project is immediately followed by a strong opposition, presenting the project as her passion. The following quote from Robert also presents the contrasting structure like the two previous quotes but in a slightly different form.

"I wanted to quit, yes , this occurs in different ways, one when I think of my friends who work in consultancies or banks and earn a lot and go on vacation, and I can't go, which makes me sometimes think that I'm missing out on a very nice life I could be living, but that thought has very short legs, because my reality is that my day to day is great and I have a job I love, I sleep with a peacefully conscience(...) my friends on the other hand, always complain about their jobs, they wait for Friday to get drunk, and that happens a lot, which is very sad and dramatic" - Robert

This can be connected back to the struggle of having the feeling of missing out on a higher standard of living which was analysed in the previous chapter. He compares the own passion and even 'love' he feels for his project to his friends who earn more money than him but seem very unhappy with their jobs. This conscious contrasting of the money his friends earn against the love and passion he has for his project, is a clear way of how he solves the 'Lifestyle Struggle', meaning the feeling of missing out on a higher standard of living and thus maintains a coherent self-view and his identity. A similar engagement in identity work can be observed in this quote by Lucas.

"I have friends working in consulting companies, earning a lot, and sometimes its hard, but again, what you get out from this is much bigger than all the money I could earn."
- Lucas

The contrasting and balancing structure of the aforementioned quotes can be regarded as a very illustrative representation of their identity work, since they are dissolving tensions that are caused by doubts or "difficult times". They do this by consciously referring to positive aspects of passion and enjoyment as substitutes for monetary rewards. Through this process, the passion and enjoyment they connect with the project become "identity-securing positions" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2001, p.9) and therefore a way to maintain a strong self-view.

4.4.3 Recollecting the Social Purpose

In the interviews with the social entrepreneurs, we identified another common way of maintaining and strengthening a coherent self-view which we labelled as ‘Recollecting the Social Purpose’. In particular, this means that the conscious act of focusing on the very purpose of being social and contributing to an improvement of society plays an important role in the process of dissolving tensions and overcoming doubts. During the interviews, we observed several indicators for the importance of this social nature. The social entrepreneurs emphasized how important it is for them to work with a purpose. Moreover, they recalled specific events where they made a social impact. This aspect is closely related to the previously analysed coping strategies as they cannot be separated completely, but we identified quotes that expressed this specific aspect which will be elaborated on in the following section.

The following quotes express which important role the aspect of reminding themselves of the purpose has in the process of deciding to which purpose they dedicate their time and energy.

“Every time I do something where I don’t see a sense, I feel like I am wasting my time.”

- Tim

“I already know what it means to start a company with monetary and profit purpose and wanted to do something new.” – John

These two quotes from Tim and John express the importance of doing something meaningful in their lives. Working on a project or in a company that only has an economic purpose is meaningless for them. The relevance of this aspect is reflected again in the following quotes.

“Being social is a key motivation to continue (...) it’s not the same as working for amazon for example (...) their purpose is to deliver packages (...) being social motivates you, it has a purpose.” - John

“My previous jobs were fun but never really fulfilling.” - Julia

All of these quotes can be connected to ‘I am The Project’, one of the parts of their identity as which they frame themselves. Recalling and focusing on the fact that they are doing something

that has a clear social purpose, can be regarded as a way to cope with the tensions and struggle of 'Vulnerability'. Their goal is to live a meaningful life which equals for them to work with a social purpose. So, since working with a purpose is one of their major values, the vulnerability this close and engaged relationship with their social project brings with it is a factor they put up with in order to avoid a life without meaning. The act of reminding themselves of this overarching goal can therefore be regarded as a way to overcome the tensions and doubts they face from time to time.

Likewise, recalling specific events where the social aspect of their work becomes evident, is also part of this way to maintain and strengthen a coherent self-view. This aspect is closely related to the coping strategy of 'Remembering Confirmation and Recognition' but here the overall social aspect and purpose of their work is in focus.

"I have thought of quitting hundreds of times, but that thought lasts very shortly, then you see how much you are helping society and people, you hear stories and understand why you do all this." - Lucas

"When I have a bad day, I like to look back to videos, such as this one (where first you see how a lady has to walk 10km a day to pick up some water and go back to the village) and this other one (afterwards, where you see the entire village happy because they have clean water)" - Robert

In both quotes it appears as if the social entrepreneurs present these thoughts about how they make themselves aware of the social impact they have as an evidence in front of us and themselves for how they frame themselves. This conscious recall of their social impact especially helps to maintain and strengthen 'the Responsible People Person' and 'the Impact Maker'.

"Being social also helps a lot in those difficult moments." - Robert

In this quote, Robert refers to the act of being social as a helpful tool in the difficult situations he explained to us earlier. This can be seen as additional illustration of how the social purpose becomes a coping strategy for tensions and doubts.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The previous chapter provided an extensive analysis of the empirical data that was obtained during the interviews with seven social entrepreneurs. The first three sections of the analysis deal with the three identity outcomes and their corresponding tensions and doubts that can become threats to these identity outcomes. In the last section, the specific coping strategies with which they handle doubts and dissolve tensions related to their identity outcomes are presented.

The first identity outcome we identified was the one of ‘I am the Responsible People Person’. Here, we identified that the ‘Business Leader Struggle’ and the ‘Lifestyle Struggle’ elicit engagement in identity work. As a second setting of visible identity work, we determined the identity outcome of ‘I am the Impact Maker’ where the doubt of ‘Reality Frustration’ acts as an initiating force for identity work. In addition to these two, we identified the identity outcome of ‘I am The Project’ which includes the tension of ‘Vulnerability’ towards the project and therefore also becomes a setting for engagement in identity work.

The second part of the analysis is composed of three coping strategies through which the social entrepreneurs manage to solve and cope with these tensions and doubts and therefore are able to maintain a coherent self-view. In particular, we identified the coping strategies of ‘Remembering Confirmation and Recognition’, ‘Reflecting on Passion and Enjoyment’ and ‘Recollecting the Social Purpose’. In the following chapter, these results obtained by analysing the empirical data will be discussed and embedded in the context of previous research.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we aim to present our main findings derived from the analysis of the empirical data, formulate the answers to the study's research questions and examine our findings in relation to existing literature in the fields of social entrepreneurial identity and identity work.

Throughout this research we aimed to answer the question of how social entrepreneurs maintain a coherent self-view. Looking at previous literature in the aforementioned fields, we identified the need to contribute to the research investigating the identity of social entrepreneurs. To our surprise, only one other study by Driver (2017) applies the concept of identity work in order to gain a deeper understanding of the social entrepreneurial identity. The first step in this process of understanding and exploring was the conduction of semi-structured interviews with seven social entrepreneurs. Having collected this data, we took an interpretive approach, meaning that we looked at what our data was telling us and developed our analysis based on the observations and patterns we derived from the interview material. During this process of coding and interpreting the obtained data, it became apparent that in order to answer the aforementioned research question, it had to be broken down into the three following sub questions: How do social entrepreneurs frame themselves? What tensions and struggles provoke doubt about their self-view? In what ways do they cope with such struggles?

As the overarching answer to the main research question, we analysed that the social entrepreneurs maintain a coherent self-view by consciously and successfully engaging in identity work. Whilst analysing how our participants were reasoning about their identities and engaging in identity work, we observed they did so through a circular process. This circular process consisted of three parts; as presented in the analysis, they firstly reasoned about and presented their identities, who they are. Then, they expressed different tensions and struggles that attacked each of the specific identities they framed. The last part of the process consisted of strengthening and maintaining these identities through different coping strategies. Hence, based on the initial definition of the concept of identity work by Alvesson and Willmott (2001), and on the circular process by which the social entrepreneurs reasoned about and narrated their identities, we conceived the 'Circle of Identity Work', which is constituted by the

aforementioned parts. This circle mainly helped us to structure our findings in clear and coherent manner.

These three parts of the circle constitute the answers to the three sub questions raised throughout this research. As the answer to the question of how the social entrepreneurs frame themselves, we identified three main identity outcomes as which they frame themselves and labelled them ‘I am the Responsible People Person’, ‘I am the Impact Maker’ and ‘I am the Project’. Answering the second sub question about what tensions and struggles provoke doubt about the self-view of the social entrepreneurs, we identified the ‘Business Leader Struggle’, the ‘Lifestyle Struggle’, ‘Reality Frustration’ and ‘Vulnerability’. As an answer to the third sub question of how they cope with these identified struggles, we identified three major coping strategies which we labelled ‘Remembering Confirmation and Recognition’, ‘Reflecting on Passion and Enjoyment’ and the ‘Recollecting the Social Purpose’. An extensive discussion of these results in relation to existing literature follows in the next section of this chapter.

5.1 The Circle of Identity Work

The ‘Circle of Identity Work’ we conceived, is not solely based on the circular process by which social entrepreneurs were reasoning about their identities, but also on the aforementioned definition of identity work from Alvesson and Willmott (2001). As already mentioned, they describe identity work as a process happening when some degree of self-doubt, provoked by tensions in one’s self-view, appears. Further, they also emphasise on the need for therapeutic identity work to avoid a breakdown in identity. Since we observed how our participants went through and mentioned all these aspects, the existence of tensions and their need to balance those, we saw their engagement in identity work. We also perceived how this engagement happened in the form of a three-phase circular process for them, which we explained earlier. Our perception of it being circular is because of the way in which our participants narrated it as a continuous process, where we perceived each part as interconnected and mutually dependent.

Further, another interesting observation we made was that, for our participants, the tensions and their engagement in identity work were mostly inherent. Going back to Alvesson and Willmott’s (2001) definition, they state that identity work is triggered by “specific events, encounters, transitions, experiences, surprises, as well as more constant strains” (p.626).

However, our perception was that for social entrepreneurs, the tensions and identity work were not only triggered by specific events, but were also inherent due to the two contrasting dimensions, social versus economic, that form the context in which they operate. Such inherency also describes the process as being constant and permanent, which also made us perceive their identity work as circular.

Seeing how the social entrepreneurs framed themselves to us, the different tensions and doubts they faced and mentioned, and their ways of dealing with those challenges, not only revealed us the answer to our research question, but also this three-part circular process. With this circle, we intent to present how social entrepreneurs were reasoning about their identities and engaging in identity work. Therefore, we present this circle as a new perspective and way of interpreting the process of identity work, which we have derived from the way in which our participants engaged in this process.

Our major findings are thus these three different parts, which consist of the different ‘identities’ they framed to us, the major struggles and tensions that make them question this self-view, and finally, the different coping strategies they used to strengthen and confirm their self-view. All being parts of their identity work that we saw happening in a circular process. We will follow this structure to present our findings in a coherent and clear manner.

5.2 ‘Who I Am.’

As a first part of the ‘Circle of Identity Work’ we identified three main identity outcomes by which our social entrepreneurs showed ‘who they are’ to us. ‘I am the Responsible People Person’, ‘I am the Impact Maker’ and ‘I am the Project’ represent these. Understanding identity as a very broad field of study and being aware of its complexity, kept us away from trying to provide an overview of the whole identities of social entrepreneurs, concentrating so on our own perspective and findings (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). With these three main outcomes, we aimed to explore in-depth some particular parts of their identities. These represent the main outcomes that were strongly defended by the participants when framing ‘who they are’ to us. Such mental activity we saw of understanding themselves in a positive and coherent manner, trying to answer and frame the question of ‘who am I?’, which is also defined as

identity work (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). When the participants framed these identities to us, they also seemed to express clearly who they were not, which we perceived as their anti-identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This enabled us to discover these three main identity outcomes we found and presented in the analysis. Further, we will elaborate on the different struggles we found that made them question this self-view or identities.

5.3 ‘Am I?’

The second part of the ‘Circle of Identity Work’ represents the struggles social entrepreneurs showed to face, which made them question ‘who they are’ and, therefore, consciously engage in identity work. This second part of the circle is also supported by Alvesson and Willmott (2001), who state that “conscious identity work is thus grounded in at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological-existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them”(p.9). Since we observed this self-doubt among all our participants, we understood it as a core part of identity work. As presented in the analysis, the major struggles we found were the ‘Business Leader Struggle’, ‘Lifestyle Struggle’, ‘Reality Frustration’ and ‘Vulnerability’.

These findings of identity struggles among our participants are consistent with those of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), who also identify various identity struggles among their participants. In their study, managers seem to face identity struggles in situations where they want to act and behave as a sympathetic humanist, but need to act as a driving force and a demanding manager. However, in the case of social entrepreneurs, our findings are the opposite. Social entrepreneurs face identity struggles when they have to take business decisions and act as managers, and leave their humanistic and people person aside. This mainly represents the ‘business leader struggle’ we identified among the participants.

Further, as mentioned in the theory section, researchers such as Stevens, Moray and Bruneel (2015) also identified these tensions between the social and economic dimensions of the organization. They also emphasize the need for social entrepreneurs to balance these two dimensions very carefully. Furthermore, Driver (2017) mentions this common struggle of social entrepreneurs when seeking to integrate ‘business principles with social objectives’. However,

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Driver (2017) only emphasizes on the need to balance this major struggle, but she does not suggest coping strategies to do that. Therefore, with our study we take her studies one step further by not only identifying specific struggles, but also by discussing the different ways by which they cope and balance these tensions, which we presented in the analysis and will discuss in depth in the next section.

A second main struggle we identified that provoked doubts in their self-view was the ‘Reality Frustration’, which mainly attacked their ‘I am the Impact Maker’ identity outcome. We mostly observed this frustration when our participants talked about their future goals and expectations regarding their projects and themselves. Our perception when asking about these future goals was, that helping on a small scale was not enough for them, they aimed for a big impact, which again expresses their ‘impact maker’ identity. Their momentary thoughts and reflections on the impact they were actually having on the world, and realizing this impact is rather small, led them to this state of frustration that caused doubts among them. This ‘Reality Frustration’ struggle made them question their ability to make a change and be this ‘impact maker’ they believe to be, which again provokes doubt among their identities.

Finally, ‘Vulnerability’ is the last major struggle we found that attacked this identity outcome and thus prompted identity work. As explained in the analysis, this strong attachment with the project also led to the blending of their work and lives, which again confirms the inexistent need of work-life balance among them. Since our participants did not have the need to balance their work with their life, this outcome seemed to be contrary to the concept of work-life balance, defined as “The division of one's time and focus between working and family or leisure activities” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

This section has presented the second part of the circle, the tensions and struggles they faced, which provoked identity work to happen. By identifying this second part of the circle, we further support the definition from Alvesson and Willmott (2001), where they define identity work as this process of being “continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (p.9). Following this definition, in our empirical data we mostly saw our participants engaging in maintaining and strengthening their identities through the coping strategies we identified. Further, they also recall on the need for self-criticism and self-

doubt to engage in identity work. This also accords with our earlier observations, which showed that the social entrepreneurs were self-critical and consciously engaged in identity work when trying to maintain their self-view strong.

To further elaborate and answer on how they maintain their self-view strong, we will present another important finding, the different ways social entrepreneurs have to protect their self-view strong from these doubts and confirm who they are. We have called them ‘Coping Strategies’, which also represent the third and last part of the ‘Circle of Identity Work’.

5.4 ‘Yes, I am!’

Having presented the first two parts of the circle, we now elaborate on the coping strategies we identified, which constitute the third part of this circular process. Such coping strategies have shown to be indispensable for social entrepreneurs to engage successfully in identity work by being able to stop the struggles and tensions they faced, and so maintain a coherent and strong self-view. In contrast, the absence of these strategies would develop into an identity breakdown, meaning an incapacity to maintain a stable and coherent identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). If this would happen, social entrepreneurs could eventually get lost and lose their understanding of who they are. From our observations, we identified three main coping strategies that served as strengthening tools for our participants to balance their doubts, and maintain their self-view and self-perception strong. We have labelled these as ‘Remembering Confirmation and Recognition’, ‘Reflecting on Passion and Enjoyment’ and ‘Recollecting the Social Purpose’. We will now elaborate in depth upon each of these tools by linking and comparing them to previous studies.

As presented in the previous chapter, ‘Remembering Confirmation and Recognition’ as coping strategy refers to the importance of being confirmed and recognized by their surroundings in order to strengthen their identities and balance the doubts and tensions they face. In order to do that, they remember instances where their work was confirmed and recognized, and collect those moments as something they can hold on to, as mental trophies that can help them cope with difficult struggles. This result may be explained by the fact that identity work is a social construction process (Grimes, 2010). In previous studies, Identity work is defined as caused by

social interaction that elicits questions of ‘who am I?’ and ‘who are we?’ (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Other studies also claim that “identities are created, negotiated and developed in relation to others. Yet it is also in these relations that identities are at times threatened and undermined” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p.34). These claims clearly describe identity as a social constructionist process, which also applies for identity work. Our findings support and illustrate these studies by exploring in-depth how confirmation and recognition from external parties influence and fuel identity work. These results are thus consistent with the studies from Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), who also mention the importance of feedback and confirmation in order to avoid a dissatisfaction of identity work.

The second coping strategy we found is ‘Reflecting on Passion and Enjoyment’, which refers to how they can maintain their self-view strong, by reflecting on the passion they feel for their projects and the enjoyment they get out of it. During the conversations, we observed this to be a very strong way for them to strengthen their self-perception as ‘responsible people persons’, ‘impact makers’ and as ‘the projects’. With the ‘Lifestyle Struggle’ for example, when they compared their low economic stability against the luxurious life of some friends, they sometimes doubted about doing something else that would provide them a higher standard of life. However, as we mentioned in the analysis, being a rich-businessman who does not enjoy his job, is not who they are. They make that clear by reflecting on the enjoyment and passion they get from their jobs. Therefore, by doing this conscious act of reflection they confirm this ‘responsible people person’ they truly are, and protect themselves from the struggles they face.

Finally, the third and last coping strategy we found was ‘Recollecting the Social Purpose’, which, as previously mentioned, refers to the importance of being social as a crucial way to dissolve tensions and keep their identities strong. In previous chapters, we already mention the major tension social entrepreneurs face due to the two contrary dimensions in which they operate, the economic and the social one. As Stevens, Moray and Brunel (2015) emphasize, social entrepreneurs need to balance both dimensions, which can sometimes lead to doubts in their identities. We perceived this as if they sometimes encountered themselves in between these two opposite worlds, which could make them feel lost in regard of who they are. Therefore, they also mentioned the importance of recollecting their social purpose, as a way to confirm their position in the social side and not in the economic one. That way they manage to maintain their identity as social entrepreneur strong.

To point out the importance of these coping strategies that help to balance and cope with tensions and doubts, we found it useful to refer to the study from Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), where they come up with the concept of 'identity crash'. According to their study, when managers experience a "strong contrast between their self-view and the environment which undermines this, often results in the identity being threatened and collapsed" (p.260). Our point here is that, if social entrepreneurs would not draw on the 'coping strategies', they would probably not be able to balance the struggles they face and could experience an 'identity breakdown', similar to the 'identity crash' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Furthermore, this third part of the circle, supports the initial definition from Alvesson and Willmott (2001), who mention that "occasionally a sense of contradiction, disruption and confusion may become pervasive and sustained. Intensive remedial 'identity work' is then called for, perhaps even of a therapeutic kind. When such identity work fails, tensions and the possibility of breakdown follows." (p.9). Interestingly, throughout the conversations with the social entrepreneurs, none of them expressed or showed signs of identity breakdown, they only showed doubts and tension which they were able to stop with and solve through their strong coping strategies, which again demonstrates the need and importance of these.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter we present our findings and demonstrate how our observations and interpretations support previous studies. Understanding how social entrepreneurs engage in identity work and reason about their identities through a three-part circular process, revealed our findings. As stated earlier, we firstly identified three major identity outcomes, which were necessary to further discover the different struggles and coping strategies we found. Again, each of these represent one of the three parts of the 'Circle of Identity Work' we presented throughout the chapter. Overall, the point we make by presenting this circular process is that, from our observations, every part of the 'Circle of Identity work' is indispensable for our social entrepreneurs to maintain a coherent self-view. Firstly, the need for a strong self-view among our participants is obvious. Without this strong self-view, they could not engage in identity work. Then, referring to the second part, the existence of self-criticism and struggles cause a need for identity work to happen. If struggles would be inexistent, their engagement in identity

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work would not be necessary. Finally, if social entrepreneurs would not be able to cope with such tensions and struggles, they would not manage to keep their self-view strong, which could eventually lead to an ‘identity breakdown’. This being said, and after presenting our findings, we can say that we took one step further from the study of Driver (2017) and developed a deeper understanding of the identity work of social entrepreneurs.

6. Conclusion

This chapter concludes our study by presenting the implications of the results for theory and practice, as well as limitations and recommendations for future research. We will start this chapter by presenting evidence of the importance and relevance of this study.

Having identified a gap in the research field of social entrepreneurial identity at the beginning of this study, we now want to elaborate on how our results contribute to this specific research field. Through identifying identity outcomes that were repeated in the empirical material, we were able to analyse and name what specific struggles the social entrepreneurs face. Beyond this contribution of the identified struggles, we determined specific coping strategies that the social entrepreneurs use to work against and solve the struggles and tensions they face. Moreover, we saw that these components of identity work of social entrepreneurs relate to each other in a circular process. This contribution can be regarded as unique and relevant as it extends the understanding of the social entrepreneurial identity and provides a new perspective on of the the concept by applying identity work as an analytical tool.

Next to the theoretical implications, the results that were summarized and discussed in the previous chapter are also of direct practical relevance. First and foremost, the results can be regarded as relevant for institutions educating future social entrepreneurs. Looking back at the demands from Pache and Chowdhury (2012) and Smith and Woodworth (2012) for advancing and extending the education of future social entrepreneurs, our findings could help formulating course material for that purpose. Moreover, this study also reinforces the recommendation for the introduction of a psychological preparation that is embedded into the education of social entrepreneurs that covers possible tensions and doubts and recommends ways of coping with them effectively. Whilst providing insights that are relevant for the researchers demand to integrate the possible conflicting aspect of social purpose and economic purpose into education in social entrepreneurship, the different identity outcomes we identified could also function as examples that could help students to find out whether they see themselves as social

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entrepreneurs or not. Above all, the more extensive knowledge educational institutions have about the topic of social entrepreneurial identity, the better they can guide and encourage students to choose the path of social entrepreneurship. As an extension of the educational implication, current social entrepreneurs might regard the results as intellectual nourishment and as a source of answers concerning their own struggles and ways of coping with them. Moreover, they could receive them as an encouragement for consciously dealing with their tensions and doubts instead of ignoring them.

Despite practical implications that the study brings forward, we also want to acknowledge its limitations. The relatively small sample size of seven participants did not allow us to develop broad and encompassing findings that can be applied to social entrepreneurs in general. For the above-mentioned implications that means, that they have to be regarded in the view of these results being derived from our own interpretations of our interviews with this specific group of seven social entrepreneurs. Hence, this study's results can only be treated as a first guideline and inspiration, but not as the objective truth about the identity work of all social entrepreneurs. Moreover, the scope of this study was limited in terms of time. Therefore, the conducted interviews only represent a snapshot of their current identity work. Nevertheless, as the discussion has shown, there are several possibilities to connect our findings to previous literature which implies that the results are generalizable to a certain degree. Moreover, despite the small sample size, the sample presents a various group of social entrepreneurs in terms of gender, age, industry and nationality. This variety implies that the results identified in the analysis are not only relevant for one specific type of social entrepreneurs.

After having looked at the practical implications and limitations of this study, we would like to formulate five specific recommendations for further research. Firstly, considerably more work will need to be done to determine whether the 'Circle of Identity Work' is applicable to other contexts than social entrepreneurship. Secondly, since the different nationalities and countries of residence of the social entrepreneurs only extended the relevance of the results but were not a dimension of the analysis, it would be interesting to research this aspect in upcoming studies. In particular, the question of how this aspect of geographical location, nationality and different national support for social entrepreneurs affect their projects and their identity work remains to be resolved. Thirdly, in order to expand the research on how the different phases of the project lifecycle affect the identity work of social entrepreneurs, a longitudinal study would be necessary. Fourthly, another interesting dimension to look at in future studies would be in how

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far the gender aspect plays a role in the identity work of social entrepreneurs. Lastly, since none of our participants showed signs for an identity breakdown, it would be interesting for future research to study whether there is a connection between working with a social purpose and being able to engage successfully in identity work.

Altogether this study provided a deeper understanding of the people behind the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. In particular, it has shown that the unification and balancing of the social and economic dimension also conveys struggles and tension on the individual identity level. Nevertheless, it also has shown how the social entrepreneurs manage to maintain a coherent self-view despite these struggles and the tense context they operate in, through consciously and successfully engaging in identity work. As the previous paragraph shows, a multitude of aspects remains to be research, but we hope that our study contributes to the further development of this relevant research domain about the social entrepreneurial identity.

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Appendix A: Interview Guideline

During our interviews, we made use of a guideline with different themes that were relevant for our study. We here present the different topics we chose and some examples of questions we asked. However, in most interviews, our participants provided answers to these questions without having asked them.

In all cases we had previously contacted all our participants to introduce ourselves and our interest in interviewing them. Before initiating the conversation, we always asked for permission to record and if they desired to be anonymized.

- Introduction and Ice breaking
 - Thank the interviewee for having us.
 - Ask about their day, Easter holidays.
- Personal and Project
 - Background: Tell us about yourself.
 - Project: Tell us about your project.
 - Inspiration: Moment/Reason that inspired you to start the project.
- Work and Private life
 - Describe your day.
 - How do you combine them?
- Challenges
 - Moment when you wanted to quit.
 - Difficult situations and why.
 - How did you handle it?
- Goals
 - Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
 - Where do you see the project in 5 years?
 - What will be biggest challenges and how will you face them?
- Thoughts
 - Any other thoughts or reflections to share.
- Follow up
 - Ask for permission to email or call to follow up.
 - Thank the interviewee for his/her time and contribution.

Appendix B: Social Entrepreneurs

Interviewee	Description
Tim	A young 23 years old student who also started his social organization a few years ago in the youth development sector.
Ana	A 34 years old social entrepreneur who has extensive experience in the NGO sector and is currently in the starting phase with her social crowdfunding platform.
Lucas	A 29 years old social entrepreneur who started his project in the elder care services sector five years ago.
John	A 54 years old social entrepreneur who has an extensive and broad career in different industries. He is now devoted in his first social project in the logistics sector.
Julia	A 26 years old social entrepreneur who has worked in the fashion industry for some years, and decided to start a social project in this industry three years ago.
Robert	A 27 years old social entrepreneur who left his career as an architect aside to start his social project in the beverage industry five years ago.
Sofia	A 41 years old social entrepreneur that had a career in marketing until she started her project in the consumer goods industry.