LUND UNIVERSITY

The Ritualistic Nature of Business Incubation

An example from Northern Sweden

Elis Kaljuvee

Master of Applied Cultural Analysis
Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences
TKAM02 - Spring 2018

Supervisor
Charlotte Hagström

Abstract

This thesis opens up the "black box" of business incubation and analyses how this process works in an incubator for cultural and creative ventures in Northern Sweden. The theoretical framework of the rites of passage by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner was adopted to guide the analysis. This theory indicates that one can move from one status to the next in a society through the means of different rites. The material was collected by ethnographic methods such as participant observations and semi-structured interviews.

It is concluded that the business incubation process is set up in a similar manner as a rite of passage, consisting of three phases: separation rites, transition rites, and incorporation rites. The main focus of the incubator is on the middle phase which is seen as a liminal state where the incubatees find themselves somewhere in-between: they are not yet established entrepreneurs but can no longer be seen as just employees either. In this phase, the incubatees are submitted to various events of ritualistic nature that are supposed to give them necessary know-how to become entrepreneurs. One of these events was educational days which took place three times throughout the incubation year and during which the incubatees were given training on topics deemed relevant for entrepreneurs, such as product pricing, sales, and business behaviour. Another event was personal monthly meetings during which the incubator manager and the incubatee discussed the progress made since the last meeting. All these events are transition rites and a person can become an entrepreneur only if she manages to undergo all of them.

The main conclusion of this thesis is that the business incubation process is a mix of individual and collective rites – there are some elements that apply to each and every incubatee but there are also aspects that need a more individual approach. This means that incubators should put more focus on finding a balance between individual and collective rites.

Keywords: business incubation, incubator, rites of passage, liminality, entrepreneur, organizational culture, cultural and creative ventures, cultural analysis, ethnography, Sweden

Lühiülevaade

Magistritöö võtab lähema vaatluse alla ettevõtlusinkubatsiooni, mis on siiani suuresti jäänud „mustaks kastiks“ – inkubatsiooni käigus tekivad küll uued ettevõtted, aga jääb selgusetuks, kuidas see protsess täpselt välja näeb. Seega analüüsitakse selles magistritöös, kuidas toimub ettevõtlusinkubatsioon ühes Põhja-Rootsis asuvas loomemajandusinkubaatoris. Analüüs toetub Arnold van Gennepi ja Victor Turneri siirderiituste teooriale, mis ütleb, et ühiskonnas liigutakse ühest staatusest teise eri riituste läbimisel. Analüüsitav materjal koguti etnograafiliste uurimismeetodite abil, mille hulka kuulusid näiteks osalusvaatlused ja poolstruktureeritud intervjuud.

Ettevõtlusinkubatsiooni protsess on üles seatud samal moel nagu siirderiitus, mis koosneb kolmest faasist. Nendeks on eraldumisriitused, üleminekuriitused ja inkorporeerivad riitused. Inkubaatoris on põhirõhk teisel faasil ehk üleminekuriitustel. Sel ajal on inkubaatoris olevad ettevõtjad liminaalses seisundis, mis tähendab, et nad on kahe staatuse vahel. Üheltpoolt ei kuulu nad veel väljakujunenud ettevõtjate hulka, teisalt aga ei ole nad enam ka lihtsalt palgatöötajad. Selles faasis tuleb inkubaatorettevõtjatel läbida mitmeid rituaalseid tegevusi, mille eesmärk on anda neile teadmised, ilma milleta ei ole võimalik ettevõtjateks saada. Üks nendest tegevustest on koolituspäevad, mis toimuvad kolm korda ühe inkubatsiooniaasta jooksul ja mille käigus koolitatakse inkubaatorettevõtjaid teemadel, mida peetakse kõigile ettevõtjatele vajalikuks. Nende teemade seas on näiteks hinnakujundus, müük ja ärikäitumine. Tegevuste hulka kuulub ka igakuine personaalne kohtumine, mille käigus arutavad inkubaatori juhataja ja inkubaatorettevõtja, kuidas on inkubaatorettevõtte edasi arenenud. Kõik need kuuluvad üleminekuriituste hulka, mille läbimisel on võimalik omandada ühiskonnas ettevõtja staatus.

Magistritöö peamine järeldus on, et ettevõtlusinkubatsiooni protsess on segu individuaalsetest ja kollektiivsetest riitustest. Protsessis on tegevusi, mis rakenduvad kõigile inkubaatorettevõtjatele ühtemoodi, aga samas leidub ka tegevusi, mis vajavad personaalsemat lähenemist. See tähendab, et inkubaatorid peaksid pöörama rohkem tähelepanu sellele, et leida tasakaal individuaalsete ja kollektiivsete riituste vahel.

Võtmesõnad: inkubatsioon, ettevõtlusinkubaator, siirderiitus, liminaalsus, ettevõtja, organisatsioonikultuur, loomemajandus, kultuurianalüüs, etnograafia, Rootsi

Sammandrag

Den här uppsatsen handlar om en företagsinkubator för blivande entreprenörer inom kulturella och kreativa näringar i norra Sverige. Syftet är att med utgångspunkt i deltagarnas erfarenhet öppna upp inkubatorns ”svarta låda” och analysera den process de genomgår under tiden i inkubatorn. Det empiriska materialet har samlats genom etnografiska metoder, bland annat deltagande observationer och semistrukturerade intervjuer. Analysen baseras på Arnold van Genneps och Victor Turners teoretiska ramverk kring övergångsriter som innebär att medlemmar i grupper och samhällen går från en status till en annan genom olika riter.

Det visar sig att processen för företagsinkubation utförs på samma sätt som övergångsriterna. Den här processen består av tre faser: en separationsfas, en liminalfas och en inkorporeringsfas. I inkubatorn ligger fokus på den andra fasen där de blivande entreprenörerna befinner sig i en liminal fas: någonstans mittemellan. De är ännu inte riktiga entreprenörer men de är heller inte längre bara anställda. I den här fasen genomgår de olika uppgifter som ska ge dem sakkunskap vilket är nödvändigt ifall de verkligen vill bli entreprenörer. En av uppgifterna var att delta i de utbildningsdagar som ägde rum tre gånger inom ett inkubationsår. Deltagarna fick utbildningar inom ämnen som ansågs vara viktiga för alla entreprenörer, bland annat prissättning, försäljning och affärsbeteende. Ett annat uppdrag var personliga månadsmöten där den inkubatorsansvariga och den blivande entreprenören diskuterade hur långt företagen hade utvecklat sig sedan det senaste mötet. Alla de här uppdragen tillhör övergångsriterna och entreprenör blir bara den som lyckas genomgå dem alla.

Den viktigaste slutsatsen är att företagsinkubation är en blandning av individuella och kollektiva riter. Det finns processer som alla blivande entreprenörer måste genomgå på samma sätt men det finns också tillfällen där individuell handledning behövs. Det betyder att inkubatorer borde lägga mer fokus på att hitta en balans mellan individuella och kollektiva riter.

Nyckelord: inkubation, företagsinkubator, övergångsrit, liminalitet, entreprenör, organisationskultur, kulturella och kreativa näringar, kulturanalys, etnografi, Sverige

Acknowledgements

There are several people whose contribution helped this thesis to take form. There is no way of showing exactly how grateful I am but a notion in the beginning of a Master's thesis should come pretty close.

My biggest and utmost 'Thank you!' goes to all my informants. I am deeply grateful for your warm welcome and enthusiasm in the research project. I am truly happy that I had the chance to spend so much time with you and that you let me take a peek at your life. This experience was unforgettable for me. A special 'Thank you!' goes to Anna Burstedt for introducing me to the incubator in the first place and thus making it possible for me to meet all these great people.

My second and equally big 'Thank you!' goes to my supervisor Charlotte Hagström whose positive energy and enthusiasm in the topic were keeping me on track throughout the writing process. All the discussions we had and the solutions you offered when I was stuck were of immense help. I could not have asked for a better supervisor!

I also want to thank all my coursemates who made these past two years so enjoyable. There are however three people who deserve special thanks. Olga Zabalueva who was always happy to give me feedback even though she herself was drowning in a dozen other articles and assignments she had to write. Kim Roelofs who had another perspective up her sleeve whenever I myself was a little lost. Tijana Jakšić who kept on encouraging me with her excellent sense of humour at times when nothing seemed funny at all. I salute you all!

My proof-reader and language editor Johanna Päädam also deserves a huge thank you. There would have been a lot more messy sentences, past tenses colliding with present tenses, and lost commas if your eagle eye had not looked it over (including this very section where I am thanking you).

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my parents for their endless support even if they did not always completely understand what I was doing. You have always had my back and I cannot thank you enough for that. And mom – I know it is not a book but it is 60 pages of written text that is published and you are mentioned in it so I hope it makes you happy!

Lund, 28-05-2018

Elis Kaljuvee

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1. INTRODUCTION

The peeping sound from the door indicates that someone is typing in their code to enter the office. It is Daisy. Another sound indicates that the code was not correct and the door remains shut. Another try, another failure. I am just about to go and let her in when finally the door opens and Daisy enters. She smiles at me and says: "I think I always use the same numbers but never in the same order. Yet the door always opens."

Accessing the office is a constant reminder of the special condition that the people have in this incubator for cultural and creative ventures.[1] In this thesis, a business incubator will be seen as an organisation that supplies "joint location, services, business support and networks to early stage ventures" (Bergek & Norrman, 2008, p. 22) in order to "nurture young firms, helping them to survive and grow during the start-up period when they are most vulnerable" (Aernoudt, 2004, p. 127). However, this incubator also accepted ventures that had been in existence for some time but had not gained desired revenue or were economically falling into a downward spiral.

I spent 10 weeks from September to mid-October 2017 as an intern in a business incubator in Northern Sweden which was funded both by the EU and regional authorities. It was established in order to create new ventures and assist them in their business development. It was required from the incubator to train venture owners and organise a series of events about other entrepreneurs' journeys. Everything else was in the hands of the two project managers who led the incubator. One of them was responsible for the overall organisation management and the other for organising specific developmental events for the accepted venture owners. It had a common office space for 12 aspiring entrepreneurs and included many smaller events for them that were spread over the incubation year. An entrepreneur in this thesis is seen as a social role, e.g. someone who is deemed as such by the society (Yao, Farmer & Kung-McIntyre, 2016). More broadly, it is a person who "organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or an enterprise" (Entrepreneur, n.d.).

My role there was to help the project managers by means of cultural analysis to understand how to get more of the entrepreneurs to use the office and how to create a stronger bond between them so that they would contribute more to each other's development. As the research evolved, I found that there seemed to be some confusion about what the incubator was supposed to do, as illustrated by this quote from one of the informants:

[1] Cultural and creative ventures are divided into nine branches: fashion, literature and press, audiovisual work, performing arts, arts and crafts, architecture, advertising, literary and artistic creation, and cultural heritage which all in their turn include various activities (Tillväxtverket, 2017, pp. 20-21).

> I have not really understood what [name of the incubator] is. Why should we be here? How much should we contribute? They [the incubator managers] have not clarified this. And this is what you [the interviewer] can clarify at the end. How you have experienced this. (Claire, Interview, 12 October 2017)

Although much research has been done on the topic of business incubation, e.g. the process of business development and becoming an entrepreneur with the help of a business incubator, the incubator itself still largely remains a "black box" (see Bergek & Norrman, 2008). This means that there is a void between what is happening inside the incubator and how entrepreneurs emerge from it. Thus, my thesis will help to open up the "black box" and show what happens inside an incubator and what the business incubation process looks like. I will do this by adopting the theory of the rites of passage which will be discussed in chapter two. In addition, I will be studying an incubator tailored specifically for cultural and creative industries that are important in providing employment[2] and attracting both new investors and inhabitants in the region[3]. This could provide another angle and a basis for comparison in future research. What is more, this will be the first longer ethnographic study in a business incubator in Northern Sweden.

1.1. Aim of the thesis

This thesis has two aims: First, to provide a deeper understanding on how the overall business incubation process works, and second, to analyse the influence that the incubator can have on aspiring entrepreneurs. This thesis will achieve these aims by seeking to answer the following questions:

1. How is the incubation process set up?
2. What is the role of the different elements in the whole incubation process?
3. How is the incubator beneficial for the aspiring entrepreneurs?

1.2. Previous research on incubators

There is a vast amount of research on the topic of business incubators, most of it from economical, technological, and managerial perspectives. In order to position my thesis in this research field, it is thus crucial to first provide an overview of the work already conducted.

[2] Cultural and creative industries account for approximately 4% of the GDP and provide employment for 12 million people in the EU (Austrian Institute for SME Research and VVA Europe, 2016).

[3] Cultural and creative ventures are among the most creative companies and organisations and if nurtured correctly they can create a spill-over effect and have a "significant role to play with a view to help cities and regions to re-invent themselves and give abandoned areas new purposes and identity" (Culture for Cities and Regions, n.d.).

Some of the authors have concentrated on providing a historical perspective on the development of business incubators (Aernoudt, 2004; Hackett & Dilts, 2004; Leblebici & Shah, 2004; Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse & McGowan, 2014). It has been widely recognised that the first business incubator was established in the USA in 1959 after a factory was closed down. A family purchased one of the factory buildings and started renting it out as an office space to help local families to get back on their feet (Leblebici & Shah, 2004; Hackett & Dilts, 2004; Tavoletti, 2013). From that point on, different generations of business incubators have been discussed. The first generation is dated to 1980s when the incubators mainly offered office space for new businesses. The second generation emerged during early 1990s and was mostly focused on technology-intensive companies, providing them not only with office space but training them in areas such as product development, financial planning, and business management. The third generation of incubators had its beginning in the late 1990s and added access to technological, professional, and financial networks to their portfolio so that the new ventures were no longer only dependent on their own personal contacts (Leblebici & Shah, 2004; Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse, & Groen, 2012; Pauwels, Clarysse, Wright, & van Hove, 2016).

Other authors have been concerned with analysing different business incubation models (Grimaldi & Grandi, 2005; Mrkajic, 2017). There has also been a discussion on the correlation between "types of innovation and incubator archetypes" (Barbero, Casillas, Wright & Garcia, 2014). In addition to these more general conceptualisations and overviews, specific research has been done, for example, about the unique challenges of bio-incubators on the example of Karolinska Institute's incubation system (Baraldi & Havenvid, 2016) and on the typology of arts incubators in the USA (Essig, 2014). Even sustainable development in the business incubators in East Africa has been brought up in the research (Hernández & Carrà, 2016).

Previous research has also been focused on aspects of incubator management. Economist Ernesto Tavoletti (2013) has proposed principles that could help governments to decide when they should establish an incubator. A potential link between incubator performance and its screening practices has been proposed (Aerts, Matthyssens & Vandenbempt, 2007). However, it has also been argued that incubator performance has not been well-defined and further exploration is needed concerning this topic (Phan, Siegel & Wright, 2005). Innovation and management scholars Anna Bergek and Charlotte Norrman (2008) have further suggested that previous studies have been too focused on the numerical outcomes to evaluate performance. They argue that there has not been enough insight into the

functioning of an incubator and thus the incubator largely remains a “black box” where things just happen (Bergek & Norrman, 2008).

Based on research done in Valencia, it has also been argued that the characteristics of incubator tenants have an impact on how they relate to the services provided: younger people with higher education, for example, tend to see the services more useful (Albort-Morant & Oghazi, 2016). It has been further suggested that not all the start-ups fully use the services provided by the incubator (van Weele, van Rijnsoever & Nauta, 2017). These authors argue that the entrepreneurs are either not happy with the quality of the services or that they do not understand which resources they need (ibid.).

Although most of this research comes from the disciplines of management, innovation, and technology, there have even been a few studies that have adopted ethnographic methods for data collection. One of these studies that has gained more response in the literature discussed incubation as a social process with the help of a mechanics-driven theory (Ahmad, 2014). The other analysed the situation in a self-managed incubator in Denmark where companies themselves run the whole building and exchange contacts without the presence of any assigned managers (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005).

One of the longer ethnographic studies in an incubator was taken on by the business management scholar Irina Popova (2016) in her doctoral dissertation about a newly opened social venture incubator in London. Popova observed the venture development during a one-year period from selection to graduation and used both social exchange theory and the theory on the rites of passage to analyse the engagement in the incubator. Her research added many new perspectives to incubation research. Most importantly, she brought out that venture and incubatee (the owner of the venture) development cannot be separated but rather should be seen as two sides of the same coin. She also argued that some kind of a measure of engagement has to be added to evaluate the incubation impact on the ventures.

As can be seen from this discussion, the research on incubators is exhaustive and has many different viewpoints. My thesis will adopt a similar approach to that of Popova (2016) as I am also going to analyse the incubation process from the perspective of the rites of passage. However, my thesis is more concerned with the role of the different (ritualistic) elements in the whole incubation process and how these elements affect the people in the incubator. Although I will discuss the process as a whole, my main focus will be on the liminal phase, i.e. what is happening while the aspiring entrepreneurs are in the incubator.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

I will first provide a theoretical framework and discuss the methods used during the fieldwork. This will then be followed by a chapter that discusses the selection phase in the incubator. The next and most exhaustive chapter will focus on the different elements in the incubation process and how people engage with these elements. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the incubatees' goals which helps to place the incubator in a broader context. The thesis will end with a discussion and provide some ideas on how this analysis could be applied.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this section is to set up a theoretical lens which will guide the entire analysis. Some other perspectives will be added throughout the paper to expand the analysis. I will first outline a theory of the rites of passage and, moreover, the liminal period in them. I will then move on to the concept of rituals.

2.1. Into the rites of passage

In 1909, ethnographer Arnold van Gennep published his book *Les Rites de Passage* in French wherein he provided a classification of different rites (Thomassen, 2014, p. 3). It did not find a bigger audience, though, and it was the British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner who first rediscovered the works of van Gennep and used those ideas in his book *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) and further in *The Ritual Process* (1969). Nowadays their ideas are well-known and often used in the context of ritual studies.

Rites have accompanied human life for a long time and the clearest distinction can be made between life-crisis rites and seasonal, or calendrical, rites. Both van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) have explained that seasonal rites are those that mark the passage of time, for example New Year or the first harvest, whereas life-crisis rites are mainly connected to birth, marriage, social puberty, pregnancy, and funerals. Life-crisis rites are said to "culturally mark a person's transition from one stage of social life to another" (Bell, 2009, p. 94).

Even though these rites are somewhat different, van Gennep sees both of these types of rites as rites of passage. These are the rites that mark "transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next" and include special ceremonies "whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 3).

Rites of passage are divided into three different phases: separation rites (preliminal rites), transition rites (liminal rites), and incorporation rites (postliminal rites) (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 11). Separation rites are meant to signify "the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions" (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 94). Transition rites, or the liminal phase, indicate that the individual or group is no longer connected to the previous state but not yet part of the future state either (ibid.). In the third phase, the incorporation rites, the individual or group is joined with the new state and "is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards" (ibid.). Thus, rites of passage are a ritual process where "the person leaves behind one social group and its concomitant social identity and passes through a stage of no identity or affiliation before admission into another social group that confers a new identity" (Bell, 2009, p. 95). Even though not all the subcategories are of equal importance in all rites, it is crucial to see all these rites in a larger context and understand "their position in a dynamic whole" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 89).

That being said, the main focus of this thesis will be on the liminal phase in the rites of passage. Liminality comes from the Latin word *limen* and means "threshold" (Turner, 1969, p. 94). In essence, liminality refers to being "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" which means that one is "neither here nor there" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). The people in liminality, or the liminal personae, could be understood as being structurally invisible in a sense that they are "at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 96). Turner also argues that there are two types of liminality: one that characterises the rituals of status elevation and the other that characterises the rituals of status reversal. The first type of liminality occurs when an individual or a group wants to move from "a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions", whereas the other takes place when "groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors" (Turner, 1969, p. 167). In order to show that one is worthy of a higher position, one has to go through all the rituals and even ritual degradation that may take place in the state of liminality. Thus, throughout the liminal period, people acquire "the necessary knowledge and experience in order that their transformed beings may eventually re-enter society and take up their new roles" (Thomassen, 2014, p. 92).

There has been some critique of the works of van Gennep from the ritual studies scholar Ronald L. Grimes due to the fact that he made initiation, and especially initiation into

manhood, the main model for the rites of passage (2000, p. 105). Grimes further argues that initiation rites are so diverse that there cannot be a set structure to follow. Although rites vary a lot throughout the world, I would argue that the overall idea developed by van Gennep is still valuable in understanding how people move from one position to the next. That is why this thesis concentrates on the overarching ideas of the rites of passage and liminality.

Hence, liminality is to be seen as the in-between phase of a rite of passage where an individual or a group undergoes certain rituals in order to leave behind the old state of being and acquire necessary knowledge to be accepted in a new state. In order to better understand the process of a rite of passage, further elaboration on rites and rituals is needed. The next section will be focused on just that.

2.2. Understanding rituals

There is a vast amount of literature on rituals which comes to the conclusion that a ritual can be "either everywhere or nowhere" (Grimes, 2014, p. 188). These "all-or-nothing defining strategies" should be avoided, though, and instead it should be discussed how the word is used "on this occasion in this place" (ibid.).

In this thesis, the terms are used in the same way as Grimes (2013, 2014) has explained them. "Rite" and "a ritual" are used synonymously and denote "specific enactments located in concrete times and places" which are often named, for example bar mitzvah or baptism (Grimes, 2014, p. 192). "Ritualizing" is seen as "the act of cultivating or inventing rites" (ibid). "Ritualization" is used to talk about an "activity that is not culturally framed as ritual but which someone, often an observer, interprets as if it were potential ritual" (Grimes, 2013, p. 7).

Grimes (2014) further argues that there are two ways how one could discuss rituals: either have a formal definition or talk about the qualities a ritual has (p. 196). Both of those can work in different contexts: definitions are more useful when the boundaries between ritual and not ritual are clear whereas "a set of family resemblances" is better "in situations where boundaries are faintly marked" (ibid.). Thus, he has come up with a list of so-called family characteristics of ritual which includes eleven items that are not all-inclusive but rather help to describe in what ways an action or event is ritualized. He argues that: "Actions can become ritualized by:

- traditionalizing them, for instance, by claiming that they originated a long time ago or with the ancestors

- elevating them by associating them with sacredly held values, those that make people who they are and that display either how things really are or how they ought to be
- repeating them – over and over, in the same way – thus inscribing them in community and/or self
- singularizing them, that is, offering them as rare or even one-time events
- prescribing their details so they are performed in the proper way
- stylizing them, so they are carried out with flare
- entering them with a nonordinary attitude or in a special state of mind, for example, contemplatively or in trance
- invoking powers to whom respect or reverence is due – gods, royalty, and spirits, for example
- attributing to them special power or influence
- situating them in special places and/or times
- being performed by specially qualified persons" (Grimes, 2014, p. 194).

Even though rituals seem to be mainly connected to religious contexts, both Grimes (2006, 2013, 2014) and Bell (2009) beg to differ. Grimes has stated that "rituals are constructed out of the most mundane stuff imaginable" (2013, p. 112) and Bell (2009) brings out some ritual-like activities, such as formal greetings or Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, to show that ritualization can happen everywhere. Thus, rituals are not necessarily related to religious contexts.

Grimes' (2014) and Bell's (1992) views differ when it comes to the discussion of what rituals do. Bell thinks that ritualization is a "rather blunt tool" and does not have the necessary power to accomplish social ends (1992, p. 212). Grimes, on the other hand, argues that rituals can have various, sometimes even opposing effects. He brings out that rituals can both empower and disempower groups, attune and disattune bodies, reinforce the status quo and enact transformation, and make and unmake meaning (2014, pp. 302-328). These all are important effects rituals can have depending on the context wherein they occur.

This means that rituals (or rites) are events or actions which occur and are enacted at a certain time and place. Each and every one of them should showcase at least some of the family characteristics of rituals in general.

Thus, in this thesis I will adopt the perspective of ritualization and discuss the incubation process as one distinctive type of the rite of passage. However, before moving on to the analytical discussion, I will take up the methodological aspects of my research.

3. METHODS AND EXPERIENCES IN THE FIELD

This chapter gives an overview of the main ethnographic methods used during the fieldwork. I will also discuss some of the ethical conundrums I faced during the fieldwork and analyse my position in these situations.

3.1. Methodological overview

As already discussed, I did my fieldwork at the business incubator in Northern Sweden on the course of 10 weeks. It concentrated on helping the project managers understand why the people at the incubator do not spend as much time there as they should and how to make this group of people come together and contribute to the development of others' businesses as well. My previous experience in leading several student organisations where member inclusion and education has been crucial was highly beneficial in developing an understanding of this incubator. This fieldwork, however, provided a larger view on business incubation in general and thus grew into this thesis.

Most of the fieldwork was done by participant observations. It has been argued that participant observations help the researcher to experience and observe how a group lives in their natural setting (O'reilly, 2012, p. 88). In the context of my research, the natural setting for the group of aspiring entrepreneurs was the incubator office where most of the activities took place. Thus, I was in the office almost every working day, spending time with the people there, working along them and discussing all kinds of matters. This helped them to get used to me so that I earned their trust and was able to fully participate and observe without upsetting the overall setting too much (O'reilly, 2012, p. 88). All the observations were written down either in my notebook or typed in a computer file as I had my own working spot in the office. I have altogether around 50 pages of field notes both from the situations and events in the office and from educational days which were conducted in a separate conference house. 190 pictures were added to these notes.

The participant observations were complemented with individual semi-structured interviews with one of the project managers and the 10 incubatees who used the incubator office while I was there. Semi-structured interviewing helps the researcher to dig deeper into some questions, skip others and even explore some new matters that come up while still having the original aim in mind (Davies, 2008, p. 105). As I had established friendships and gained trust by spending time in the office, semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to chat freely with my informants and learn more about them and the incubator. This had been a lot more difficult if I had just stuck to a set list of questions. All in all, I

interviewed two incubatees one time and eight of them twice. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours.

Lastly, I conducted one 40-minute long focus group interview with the incubatees. This was done during the beginning of the fieldwork to get an insight into the different views among them. Although sociologist Karen O'reilly (2012) has argued that focus groups are supposed to help the participants argue and thus create new viewpoints, this did not happen during my focus group interview. The participants were trying to reach a consensus instead of adding up to each other's views. Thus, I decided to focus on individual interviews to understand how their views might differ. However, this focus group interview brought the topic of community to the surface which was not something I initially planned to research. Thus, this focus group interview was also transcribed and some of the viewpoints from there were used in the analysis.

3.2. Analysis

The analysis started together with the fieldwork. While I was typing in my field notes and again when I was reading them through at the end of the day, I was also open coding them (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 172). This means that I added various comments, themes, and ideas which seemed relevant at the time. The same was done with the transcribed interviews. Some of these themes started to repeat in the course of the fieldwork and those themes were separately noted down to keep track of them.

This was then followed by focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 172). This means that I went over all the notes and transcriptions again and selected the themes and ideas which were all connected under the topic of liminality. Theoretical viewpoints were added to put these themes into a larger context and explain the situation in the incubator.

As all the informants were guaranteed anonymity, I took on various strategies to protect their data while I was analysing the material. Firstly, I do not mention the name of the incubator or the business names. Secondly, all the quotes used here were translated from Swedish to English which makes it more difficult to guess the informants' background based on their dialect or way of speech. Thirdly, there were both men and women in the incubator but as I promised not to use gender distinctions in my analysis, all the informants in this thesis were given female names and are addressed to as women. This way the analysis still has a personal touch and should be easy to follow without revealing anyone's identity.

3.3. Manifold nature of the cultural analyst: Ethics & reflexivity

In addition to protecting my informants' identity, this fieldwork also put me into several situations where I had to negotiate my own role identity and position in the incubator. Some of these situations were easier to handle than others.

I had my distinctive role as a Master's student doing her research in the incubator. However, as I spent a lot of time in the office, participated in the activities and even helped out during the events or gave feedback to some of the informants, this distinctive role was quickly overlooked and I was seen as another member of the incubator. As I only spoke Swedish to them, it was easier for me to blend in. Thus, I had a similar experience as sociologist Carolyn Ellis (2007) during her undergraduate study In Crab Reef. She, too, introduced herself as a researcher and the locals were aware of her research but they did not ponder on it too much. Thus, I was in a "semi-overt role" where people knew what I was doing but it was not always on their mind (O'reilly, 2012, p. 88).

Despite knowing my role and research aim, I still faced situations where my role became very visible for the incubatees so I had to explain my aim again and "reconfirm consent" (O'reilly, 2012, p. 66). It happened a couple of times that people noticed me taking notes and then queried me about the content of those notes and if this data would still be anonymous. I assured them that their identity was safe and I was just observing the general situation. Most of the people got used to me taking notes and even made some witty comments when they saw me sitting with my black notebook again. Thus I experienced this constant insider-outsider opposition (see Labaree, 2002) where I was both part of the incubator but at the same time taking a stance as a researcher.

This "insider yet outsider" position brought about several situations where I was not sure which role to take. There were, for example, some interview situations where I was suddenly not seen as a researcher any longer but more as a confidant. The incubatees thought that they could trust me even with more personal matters because I had promised them confidentiality, meaning not to reveal these things to others (O'reilly, 2012, p. 68). Some of them even asked me again during the interview if it was confidential and then went on to share some of their concerns. I think I was a good confidant in their eyes because I was familiar with the situations and people but at the same time still distant and would not reveal their thoughts to anyone. Some of these interviews were quite difficult for me because I got to know everybody's viewpoints and thus was probably more aware of the different sides of the problem than the person talking about her own experience. O'reilly (2012) has argued that the ethnographer has to think about the role to take and the effect this role could have on the

interview and the relations with the informant (p. 146). She further argues that the ethnographer cannot take on the role of a therapist because she is not trained as such (ibid.). However, I would argue that the ethnographer can at least be a friend and provide support if people are struggling with something. It could be frustrating for the informant if she shares something and does not get any feedback and this could make her reluctant to discuss other matters. Thus, the researcher has to be fine-tuned in these situations. I, for example, did give some advice but did not take any sides if the problem concerned others in the incubator.

Hence, it could be said that I was also in a liminal state during my fieldwork – stepping in and out of a role depending on the situation at hand. I was both a researcher, a member of the incubator, and a friend. All these roles helped me to get a more detailed understanding of the incubator life and develop the analysis to which I will now turn.

4. CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

As argued above, rites of passage consist of three phases: rites of separation (preliminal rites), transition rites (liminal rites), and rites of incorporation (postliminal rites) (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 11). This chapter is focused on the preliminal rites in the business incubator and aims to understand how the aspiring entrepreneurs are taken in to the incubator and why they have chosen to join it. This will help to tackle the overall question of how the incubation process is set up.

4.1. Getting a place in the incubator

The first phase, rites of separation, tends to seclude the "individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both" (Turner, 1969, p. 94). Even though the works of van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) focused on describing, comparing and classifying rites among tribes around the world, their ideas can still be used to analyse the rites today.

In their work, rites of separation are exemplified as the first part in initiation rites which are held to pass children to adulthood, usually boys and girls separately. It has been argued that it is difficult to find a general indicator of when exactly the separation rite takes place (van Gennep, 1909/1960). In some cases, it may follow a girl's first menstruation, in other cases it may be held after reaching a certain age. In the case of Thomson Indians, it was even argued that boys reached adolescence after the night they had "first dreamed of an arrow, a canoe, or a woman" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, pp. 68-69). Although these rites of separation differ vastly from that of the incubator, it should nevertheless be understood that

there is usually a common thread among the people who undergo the rites of separation. Thus, people undergo a rite after they have shown a sign of some characteristic or after a certain period of time has passed.

The rite of separation in the incubator begins with an online application which can be found on the incubator's webpage and has to be filled in by anyone interested in joining the incubator. This form consists of eight questions and in addition to the generic personal and contact information it only includes two questions that need a longer answer: 1) what is your business idea, and 2) what are your ambitions for your company's development/the time in the incubator. Although it is usually filled out in May the latest because the selection process takes time and the first introductory meeting is held in August, the form is up on the webpage all the time so the incubator is technically always open for applications. However, there are only 12 places available so the request to join will be denied if all the places are filled. Nevertheless, it has happened on several occasions that some people join before or after the official start. For example, Emma joined in November 2016, Irene in March 2017, and Jane in mid-September 2017. Thus, even though most of the people started their separation rite at the same time, there were some exceptions.

The next step in the rite of separation is an interview that is conducted by the project managers separately with each applicant. The managers described that they cannot evaluate if the business will be successful or not and they are instead looking for an idea that has the potential to succeed. Moreover, they are looking for "entrepreneurs" – people who have the will to work hard, develop their business, spend time in the office, and learn as much as they can by using all the possibilities that the incubator has to offer. They also mentioned that they tried to analyse if the person would match the atmosphere in the incubator. Thus, the incubator managers have the sole right to choose the people in the incubator. The same was stated by Popova (2016) in her research about the social venture incubator in the UK.

Although most of the people in the incubator described the interview very briefly and almost as an ordinary act not even worth mentioning, there were some exceptions. Claire, for example, said that she was offered a place in the incubator right after a brief chat with one of the incubator managers during an event and she could not even remember if there had been an official interview (Interview, 13 Sept 2017). Jane had a completely opposite experience. Being friends with another person in the incubator, this friend invited Jane to the first meeting in August where she could talk to the incubator managers and see if Jane could also join. After a brief conversation, Jane was offered a place in the incubator. A few days later, the offer was taken back and it was explained to Jane that she was not ready with her business so

she should set up her business and then come back again. Jane set up the legal body for the business and a few weeks later she met the incubator manager again. This time Jane was given the permission to be part of the incubator (Jane, Interview, 11 Oct 2017).

This discussion shows that the rite of separation in the case of the incubator has its official structure even if it is more of an administrative sort and mainly based on an application and an interview. The incubator managers have come up with some characteristics they would like to see in the future incubatees and are in control of who will be taken in to the incubator and thus gets the access to this rite of passage. These people should have an idea for a cultural and creative venture and, even more importantly, should have also shown a will to develop their own business and interest in becoming an entrepreneur. This is the shared trait among the people being separated (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969) that distinguishes them from other members of society, especially from people who are just employees and work for someone else. It could even be argued that the managers are in some ways looking for people who have the qualities of *tabula rasa* – "a blank slate on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status" (Turner, 1969, p. 103). It is not only necessary that the people have an idea and a will to develop but that they actually demonstrate some qualities which show that they can gain new perspectives. However, the project managers still have the final say.

4.2. Why are the incubatees here?

Even though the project managers have the right to decide who will be accepted in the incubator, the people are free to choose if they want to join the incubator or not even after they have been asked to do so. This makes the incubator rite of passage different from most of those described by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969). However, there is at least one rite of passage which is voluntary and that is the rite of status elevation "in which the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions" (Turner, 1969, p. 167). These rites were meant to initiate a chief of a tribe, for example, but if the chosen person did not want to take this role then he technically could decline it, even though it would have probably affected his future situation in that tribe (see Turner, 1969). The people in the incubator also aim to gain a new position which is seen as desirable and valued in many Western countries today – that of an entrepreneur. As there is no real obligation to be in the incubator, I will discuss here the various reasons why people have still chosen to join.

One of the main reasons for joining was the chance to build a network. Daisy and Jane said that they first joined because there were several potential cooperation partners for them in the building (Daisy, Interview, 11 Sept 2017; Jane, Interview, 11 Oct 2017). Jane even said that most of the jobs in her area come from knowing someone who knows someone so getting to know the main people in the field was of huge importance for her. Irene also said that one of her main goals was to build a network which would in turn help to make her business known (Interview, 12 Sept 2017). Beth did not join the incubator for the potential network itself but said that she had received a lot of new contacts just from talking to people who would then guide them to the next people (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). Many of the incubatees thus thought that the incubator could give them access to valuable new contacts.

The second reason for joining the incubator was getting help with marketing, specifically digital marketing. Beth, for example, had taken over the business that her father had started and said that the business really needed a new way for marketing in order to grow (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). Claire and Hanna wanted to start exporting their products and thus needed to establish an online presence, be it through social media or renewing their business webpages (Claire, Interview, 13 Sept 2017; Hanna, Interview, 28 Sept 2017). Both Claire and Hanna admitted that they did not have sufficient competencies to establish an online presence on their own so they needed guidance with it. The incubator provided them this guidance.

Another theme brought up by the incubatees was learning about the overall business management. Fay, for example, was new to the whole business world and said: “I don’t really have any experience at all in managing a business and I’m completely hopeless when it comes to the financial part” and stated that the incubator “seemed like a good opportunity to start your company” (Interview, 3 Oct 2017). Daisy also said that she needed to learn more and more about entrepreneurship, for example, about how an entrepreneur thinks and acts (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). Although other incubatees did not explicitly emphasise the entrepreneurial or financial aspects of running a business, many of them pointed out that all those training events and tools they received during various workshops and educational days were valuable.

The last theme I would like to discuss here is a little difficult to sum up in one word. This is the overall help, support, guidance, push, inspiration, and motivation that the incubatees can get both from the project managers and each other. Claire said that it is great to have someone who believes in her product and thinks that it can become successful (Interview, 13 Sept 2017). Daisy and Hanna especially appreciated the motivational talks they had with one of the project managers who helped them make many decisions (Daisy,

Interview, 11 Sept 2017; Hanna, Interview, 28 Sept 2017). Fay appreciated the fact that there is someone who helps to set concrete goals and makes sure that she is actually working on achieving these goals (Interview, 3 Oct 2017). Thus most of the incubatees admitted that it is difficult to just sit on your own with the business and to try and develop it. They truly appreciated the fact that they had others with whom they could discuss their ideas, get feedback and motivation from to keep going. The incubator proved to be a safe playground where one does not have to be afraid of making mistakes. At the same time, they were expected to take concrete steps and make progress, not just sit around.

Therefore, the incubatees chose to join the incubator because it provided them with opportunities that were more difficult to acquire from elsewhere. They were in need of a network, of making themselves known, and the incubator was a great place to get introduced to people. They were also in need of a digital presence so that potential clients could find them more easily. They even needed some general entrepreneurial skills or knowledge that they believed was expected of them if they wanted to become entrepreneurs. Finally, they were in general need of guidance, support, and a motivating environment. They could get all this both from the project managers and from their peers in the incubator. Hence, the incubatees joined because they saw that the incubator offered most of the things they thought they would need if they wanted to become successful entrepreneurs. They did not have to struggle alone and look for particular workshops or book meetings with business advisors, but had everything served for them in one place.

4.3. Keys to the hut

The selection process is concluded with the first meeting in mid-August where all the people who were accepted to take part in the incubation process for the year meet for the first time. It was described as a semi-formal meeting where they met the building managers, got an overview of the events to come and how the year will look like, learned the requirements they needed to fulfil in order to maintain their place in the incubator, got to know each other, and last, but certainly not least, were given the keys to the “hut”.

It has been described that the people who undergo a transition rite “are secluded from the spheres of everyday life” (Turner, 1969, p. 169) and secluded “in a special place, in a special hut” (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 74). This is mainly done so because the people who go through a transition rite are seen as something abnormal, something that should not exist in the first place and thus have to be hidden (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 98). The people in the business incubator did not have to be hidden because incubators in general have gained a lot

of popularity during the past couple of decades and there is nothing abnormal about the people who develop their businesses in an incubator. Moreover, the seclusion is not as strict as in those cases described by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) where the people who were secluded could only meet a selected few for a certain period of time. This incubator resembled rather a flexible office space in the sense that people were free to come and go whenever they wished as long as they abided by the general rules and requirements imposed on them (see page 21). Thus, they were not secluded from the other aspects of their everyday life. Nevertheless, this office still differed from other office places because of the special condition in which the incubatees found themselves. People usually have a concrete job role in an office setting, meaning that they have clear assignments to work on. However, in this office the incubatees were working on their business but were at the same time also given education about how to work on their business. Hence, this office both provided them with a working place but also helped them to prepare for their new role in the society – that of an entrepreneur.

Thus, if someone wanted to access the place, they had to hold their key against an electronic reader and then insert their personal code. If everything was done correctly, the door opened and they could step across the threshold. A door, or even a threshold, often marks the boundary between old and new, foreign and domestic, or even profane and sacred and therefore "to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 20). This proved to be true for most of the people in the incubator as many of them described the office as a place where they can just concentrate on their business, learn new things, and are not reminded of their other obligations. One informant described that she liked the chance to "work in an office together with other people who find themselves in the future" (Amy, Interview, 15 Sept 2017).

As I received the key myself and witnessed two people who joined later on receiving the key, I could understand that getting the keys and with it an access to the place was an important rite. The key was given to everybody on their first day at the incubator by one of the project managers. It was more than just passing on a key and a code. The person was led to their specific working spot and shown how to log on to the computer. Then the key with the personal code taped on one side of it was placed onto their palm and the project managers explained in detail how to use it. Moreover, it was said that one can access the building with this key even after the working hours. Another rite relating to the key happened when I finished my fieldwork and had my last day in the incubator. After finishing my final presentation, I handed my key to one of the project managers to which she said: "This really

means you are leaving" with sadness in her voice. Thus, it was made clear that the key has a special value and only a few selected people can use it. This also became clear with Jane who was first given the key and access to the office but it was later taken back. Jane came by and handed over the keys but she was told that she could try to join again once she had developed her business further. Jane did just that and then met one of the project managers again. This time Jane was seen as ready enough and once again she received the key and with it the access to the office and, moreover, to the transition rites.

The key in the incubator worked as a "sign of union" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 72) or "temporary differentiation" (ibid., p. 74) which indicated a sense of membership in this group of people. It has been described that people in transition rites are often marked somehow to detach them from the "common mass of humanity by a rite of separation" and unite them with their current group (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 72). In some cases, it can be done by mutilation, for example piercing; in other cases body paint, masks or dresses are used (van Gennep, 1909/1960, pp. 72-74). Instead of a bodily marker, the people in the incubator had their keys which worked both as a way to separate them from "ordinary people" who could not access the place without the help from someone from the inside and to mark them as people belonging to a group who was undergoing a specific transition rite. It should be noted, however, that there were other offices in the building and all the people working there had a similar key as well. Even though one could argue that the key was then a sign of belonging to a bigger group of people who worked in the house, these people could not access every office in the building. The key and the code only opened the office one worked in and some common rooms, e.g. meeting rooms. Thus, I would still argue that having a key worked as a "sign of union" for this group of people in the incubator.

This sign of union caused some disunion in how the hut should be accessed. When I arrived to the incubator to do my fieldwork, I was told that one needs to have the key with oneself at all times and that the door needs to be closed at all times as well. I was told that there had been a case of theft in the building and after that it was advised not to keep the office doors open. Even though the instructions seemed to be clear to not to leave the door open, it still came to be one of the most confusing aspects about the office because of one thing – a doorstop. Daisy told me that she was fascinated by the doorstop because it had been said that it should not be used but yet it was still there quite often (Interview, 10 Oct 2017). Daisy had her own way of navigating around the doorstop – if it was there, she left it there; if it was not, she did not put it in place either. The only exception was when she would still have the door in sight, for example, when she went out to get water to make coffee because then

she could still see the door from the location of the tap. Other incubatees were more reliant on their peers in the office, meaning that when there was someone else in the office, they usually used the doorstop. This shows that the people in the incubator trusted each other in the sense that everybody would keep an eye on each other's things and not let any unfamiliar people wonder around in the office place that was only meant to be used by the incubatees and the incubator managers.

Fig. 1 The doorstop. The sign on the door says: Keep the door closed and locked.

The incubatees were confident enough to use the doorstop when their peers were in the office because they knew that their things were being looked after. However, even if they did use the doorstop, most of them still took their keys with them because they could not be sure that there would still be people in the office when they came back because people had very different schedules. It became this unspoken rule that if there was nobody else in the office, the door should be closed. Thus, if a person was in the office alone and she wanted to have a quick bathroom break, she was expected to take the key with her and close the door. Nobody

wanted their things to be stolen. Hence the key provided the incubatees with a certainty that they can access this place and their things whenever they so wished.

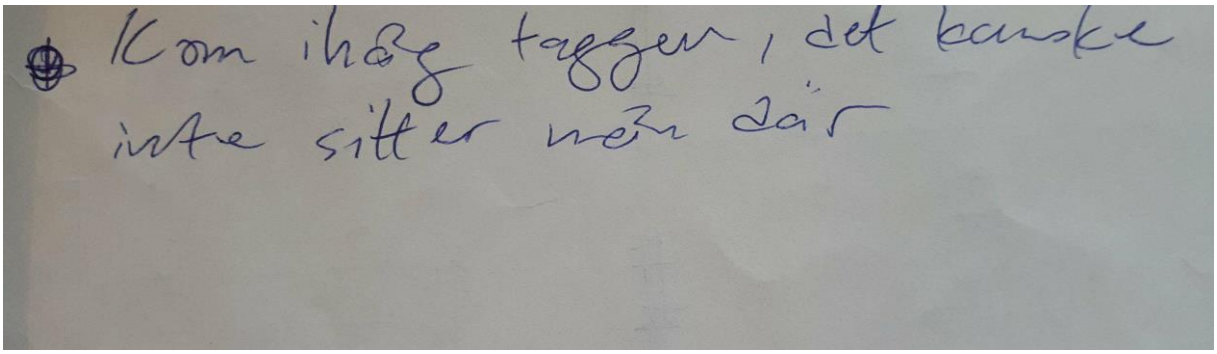

Fig. 2 Remember the key, there might not be anyone else sitting there.

Using the doorstop meant that other people besides the incubtees and the incubator managers could access the hut as well. However, their access was limited in the sense that they did not have their designated place in the office and as they did not own a key, they were not a part of this group. Hence, they could only access the physical location but not the transition rite itself.

All in all, the incubator office functioned as a "seclusion hut" (Turner, 1969) where a group of people were separated from the overall mass of people to undergo a transition rite. Even though the seclusion was not complete, meaning that they could stay in touch with other spheres of their life, it still marked a place which was mainly meant for the transition. The access to the seclusion hut was granted by personal keys which had to be on their person at all times to make sure that they could cross the threshold. As van Gennep (1909/1960) has stated, "In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, or waiting, and of departure – that is, as rites of passage" (p. 25). Therefore, getting the keys to the hut was a part of the rite of separation.

5. BEING IN THE IN-BETWEEN

The second, and most important, part in the rites of passage is the liminal phase or transition rites. In this phase, the people are subjected to various events that are intended to transform them and take them from one fixed social position to the next (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967/1970 and 1969). This chapter concentrates on the liminal phase and the rites connected to it. My aim is to analyse the role of the different elements in the incubation process and the effect they have on the incubatees.

5.1. Rules to abide by

Once the people who are undergoing a rite, the neophytes, have been separated from others and "the old identity" (Bell, 1997, p. 36), they enter into a transition stage where "rules distinctive to this state are carefully followed" (Bell, 1997, p. 36). These rules apply equally to everyone going through the transition rite and if someone happens to break any of these rules or fails to follow them, they have to somehow make up for them or otherwise they cannot finish the transition to a new position or status (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). Specific rules were also set up to guide the incubation process. In this section, I will give an overview of these rules, discuss the incubatees' overall perception of them, and analyse their necessity.

There were six clear rules that the incubatees had to follow: be at the incubator office 50% of the working time, take part in all the monthly breakfast meetings, take part in all the educational days, have a personal meeting with the project managers once a month, find a mentor and meet them twice a month, and take part in the meetings of the shadow board of directors. Most of the rules are self-explanatory. Spending 50% of the working time in the office was supposed to make sure that the people are working on their business because they had a place where they could come and concentrate on their tasks. The monthly breakfast meetings worked as a motivational or inspirational time where everybody gathered and had the chance to share their problems and successes. They could get ideas from others or see that others were facing similar challenges. Thus, it also helped to unite them. Educational days provided the incubatees with new knowledge and perspectives which helped to deal with some specific aspects of their businesses. The same logic worked for the mentor, the only difference being that the mentor gave very personal advice closely related to the current problems that the incubatee had. The monthly meetings with the project managers helped the incubatees to see how much they had developed and to plan the next steps. These meetings also worked as motivation or inspiration. Finally, the shadow board of directors' meetings were supposed to give a glimpse of the official way of running a business so that the incubatees would know what to expect from their future board of directors if they were to get one.

Thus, on the one hand, these rules were supposed to motivate and help the incubatees to develop their businesses and make sure that they were actually working on their businesses. On the other hand, the project managers could see the incubatees' development and show later on to their funders how the finances had been used and the results it had produced.

Even though everybody was to abide by the rules, there were still some who did not. For example, out of the ten people who had a designated spot in the incubator office, only three fulfilled the requirement of spending at least 20 hours a week there. This is a fixed rule and if one does not abide by this rule, one should be removed from the transition rite or at least have to face some consequences to make up for the breach (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). However, there were no consequences for the people who did not obey the rules. Only Emma said that she received an e-mail with a note that said "We have not seen you at the office for a while" which for her worked as a sign that it is now time to spend some time at the office (Interview, 29 Sept 2017). Others did not bring up anything similar.

Yet, all the incubatees stated that the rules were reasonable or good. Amy even said that there were no rules, only advantages (Interview, 15 Sept 2017). Claire added that if she gets everything for free then "it is quite reasonable that there are some rules that I have to be here as well" (Interview, 13 Sept 2017). This shows that the incubatees understood why the rules were in place and how they could benefit from them.

This being said, the situation with the rules was still confusing for most of them. Fay thought that the rules were vague: "And like this is obligatory, except for this and this and this. So that you get this unconscious idea that maybe this isn't that obligatory after all" (Interview, 3 Oct 2017). The same view was expressed by Claire: "But I don't know if the rules are that big because there are not so many of us who actually sit here" (Interview, 13 Sept 2017). Jane added: "I mean, from how it looks like now, I think the rules are not that hard" (Interview, 11 Oct 2017). Thus, as the incubatees had not witnessed any consequences for not following the rules, they started to question their value and necessity. Daisy even said that the rules were reasonable but "too general for my taste" (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). She would have liked to replace some of the rules with something else that was more relevant for her company, for example, instead of finding a mentor she would have liked to get more business-related training. This shows that there was even a need for a more personal approach to the rules guiding the incubation process. However, a personal approach is not that common in the transition rites described by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969). They show that the whole group of neophytes is supposed to go through the same events as everyone else in the history of the tribe because this is the way how they acquire the necessary know-how and prove themselves to be worthy of being accepted in their new state. It could be argued then that if the rules and events are personalised, the people undergoing the rite would not gain all the know-how relevant for their new state in the society.

This discussion indicates that the transition rite in the incubator differs from those discussed by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) when it comes to obeying the rules. In a transition rite, it is usually required that all the neophytes follow all the rules and if they fail to do so, they have to face the consequences and redeem themselves or they cannot finish the transition rite (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). Although there were clear rules in the incubator, the people still did not see the rules as "hard" or something they definitely had to follow if they wanted to keep their place in the incubator and go through the transition rite. This view was influenced by the lack of consequences for the people who did not follow the rules. Thus, even if the incubatees understood that these rules were set up to guide them in the business development process so that they would gain as much from it as possible, they were still trying to modify these rules to their own taste and did not always accept the rite as a whole.

5.2. Place for 12, used by 5

One of the aforementioned rules was to spend time in the office. Hence, the office had its special role in the incubation process because it worked as a sort of a "seclusion hut" (Turner, 1969) where the transition from one state to the next was supposed to happen. Although ritual places usually tend to be in stark contrast with our everyday places – home, office, workshop, and school (Åkesson, Salomonsson & Hagström, 2008, p. 119) – even these everyday places can be used for rituals. In this section, I will discuss the role of the office in the incubation process.

The office itself was designed as an open plan space. There were three groups of tables, each accommodating four people. These groups were separated from each other with a drape to provide some kind of seclusion but also for a very practical reason – to keep the sunlight from reflecting on the computer screens. People in the table groups were sitting across each other, separated by a computer screen. The sitting places were assigned on purpose taking into account how much time each of these incubatees would spend in the office. More isolated places were assigned to the people who said during the application interview that they would spend more than 20 hours in the office. Daisy was sitting in the very back of the room and said that this was perfect for her because she could have an overview of the office. At the same time she could choose how social she wanted to be because others did not tend to walk there that often, only when they wanted to use the printing room at the back of the office (Daisy, Interview, 11 Sept 2017).

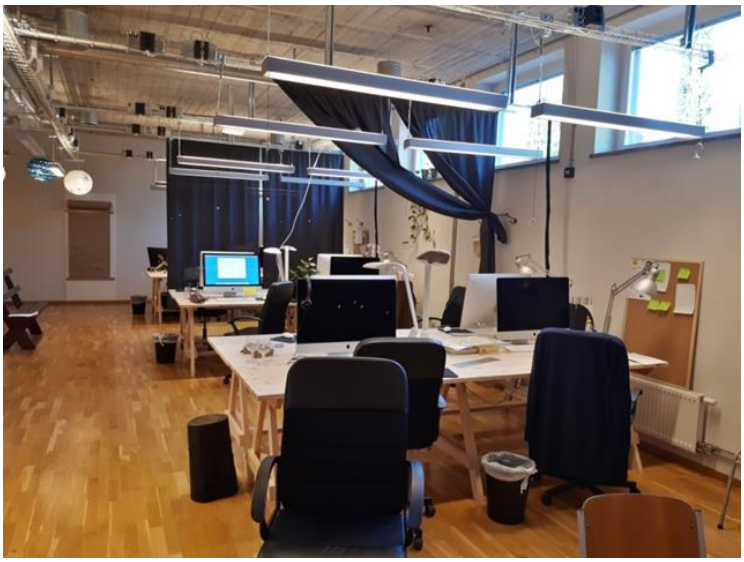

Fig. 3 Office landscape

Most of the time the office just functioned as an office and people conformed to its setting. This means that for most of the time the incubatees were sitting behind their computer working on something, be it paying bills or designing flyers. There was occasional chatter when somebody asked a question aloud or stopped by someone else's table to make small talk but other than that people were just quietly looking at their computer screens. In a sense, they regulated their behaviour according to the obligations and expectations which were described by sociologist Erving Goffman (1956) as deference and demeanour. Goffman argues that it is everybody's obligation to show respect and good behaviour towards others and expect to get the same treatment back. The people in the incubator did not want to disturb others in their work so everybody tried to make as little noise as possible. Hence, the structure of a commonly accepted good behaviour in an office was quickly adopted. Moreover, the office also worked as a sort of behaviour regulating system because when everybody else was working, one felt the obligation to work as well (see Foucault, 1975/1991).

However, as time went by people became more comfortable with the office and with each other. There were several occasions when people started chatting with each other or when someone spoke on the phone quite loudly. It even happened that somebody burst out singing or whistling. These situations could sometimes cause some passive discontent, for example, the changing of looks or some sighs or coughs to indicate that the person causing the noise is disturbing others (see Goffman, 1956). When the noise level rose too high, people were also told off and asked to try and keep it quiet. So the need for silence felt almost clinical. Jane concluded, "It feels more like an *office* office than a creative milieu where ideas emerge" (Interview, 11 Oct 2017).

The quote from Jane illustrates that some people were expecting more from the office setting than it could actually provide. That is why a place meant for 12 incubatees was usually occupied by three, maximum five, at a time and many people did not abide by the rule of spending 50% of the time in the office. Some people had either other business-related obligations elsewhere or another job on the side but spending time in office was also affected by the incubatees' view on the office. Those people who saw it as place where they could concentrate on their business development tended to spend more time there. Daisy, who spent the most time in the office, said that she could concentrate better in the office (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). Hanna, who spent the least amount of time in the office, however, stated that there was nothing practical to do in the office (Interview, 28 Sept 2017). Moreover, whenever Hanna was in the office, she liked to talk to others and get new ideas from them which was sometimes disturbing for others. Thus, like Popova (2016) discussed in her dissertation, the office space was both inspiring and distracting at the same time. Inspiring because the office was quiet enough for people to concentrate on their work but they could still talk to each other and get new ideas. It was distracting because there was still some chatter and some people liked to chat more than work in the office.

It thus appears that it was easy for the incubatees to forget their transitional state in the office because they conformed to the familiar setting of an office and overlooked the liminal nature of an incubator. Thus, instead of being a sort of a "seclusion hut" where people transition to another state (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969), the office quickly became an everyday working place. However, developing their businesses was a crucial part of the overall transition process, so the incubator office gave a way for the incubatees to do just that – to prepare for their new state as an entrepreneur (Turner, 1969).

That being said, there were still ways how liminality and the transitional state became explicit in the office. Daisy, for example, put up the ideas, profiles and timelines of all her projects. Although it is a common practice in offices to have timelines and sticky notes up on the walls to track the work progress, I would argue that in this case there was more to it than just making sure that everything was running smoothly. These visuals also worked as a reminder of what the incubatees wanted to achieve during their time in the incubator and what needed to be done in order to achieve these things.

Amy had her Business Model Canvas together with a to-do list up on the wall next to her desk. Every Friday when she was in the office, Amy would look at her Business Model Canvas and that week's to-do list and make sure that the things written down there had been

done. This also worked as a reminder for her that the time spent in the incubator is short and this time has to be used wisely to succeed in her business.

Fay set up sticky notes on her computer. These sticky notes held questions that were supposed to keep her on track, for example “Have you posted on Instagram?”, “Have you reached 500 followers on Instagram in October?” and “Have you made 15 products?” Again, these could be important questions for any entrepreneur, but in this case they were connected to the monthly meeting between Fay and one of the project managers during which Fay was told to sharpen up or otherwise she could not continue in the incubator. Thus, these notes worked as a reminder that the incubator is a liminal place and one has to work if one wants to succeed and come through the rite of passage.

Another mark or symbol of liminality was a bathtub made by one of the former incubatees which was brought in the office mid-September. The incubator was organising an exhibition of Northern Swedish design in Japan and all the products that were selected out to be exhibited were stored in the office or in one of the storage rooms in the building so that all the things could be transported together from one place. This bathtub was one of the products picked out to be sent to Japan and as it was too large and heavy to be taken to one of the storage rooms in the basement, it was stored in the office. The bathtub stayed in the back of the office the whole time I was there and even though it was only kept there to make the transportation process easier, I would argue that the bathtub also worked as a reminder that there were people who had already passed the liminal stage in the incubator and were now successful. Thus, others too had the chance to succeed.

In addition to these little indicators of liminality, there was one particular part in the office that had different roles in the transition process. This place was the so-called cosy corner (*myshörna* in Swedish) with a couch, a table and some chairs where people could socialise or take a break from working on the computer and read a magazine about entrepreneurship.

Fig. 4 The cosy corner

Firstly, this was the place where the incubatees and the project managers would gather every day at around nine or ten in the morning and two or three in the afternoon to chat over a cup of coffee and some biscuits. This custom is called *fika* in Sweden and is a common practice in Swedish work places. It is even said that *fika* in the work place is an "important and inevitable social structure" (Valeri, 1996, p. 143). It gives a "natural rhythm of the work" and helps to move things forward, especially during long meetings where a coming *fika*-break can motivate people to make a decision (ibid.). Coffee itself works as a "social lubricant" and coffee breaks help to create better relations in the working place (ibid., p. 149). Although everybody in the incubator was free to choose if they wanted to join or not, the practice is so common that usually everybody present in the office joined for at least ten minutes. This can also be seen as an everyday ritual (see Frykman & Löfgren, 1996) which is meant to facilitate bonding and inclusion in the group – people can share their problems, get to know each other more and even offer to help each other. Many of the informants told me that it is often during *fika* when they can find a solution to a problem with which they had been dealing for a long

time. Thus, *fika* helped to create close-knit relations between the people, something that can be seen as part of a communitas (see page 29).

Secondly, the cosy corner was used for monthly breakfast meetings where the project managers filled everybody in with the organisational news and where all the incubatees had to give an overview about their current state and future plans (see page 38 for further discussion). The place was changed a little for monthly meetings: instead of the usual four chairs, more chairs were brought in and set around the table so that everybody would have a place and could see each other. This setting showcased that all the incubatees are equal – this is an important notion in the rites of passage (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967/1970). The project managers, on the other hand, took their place on the couch. By doing this, they indicated that they are in charge of the meeting and have authority, something that is also common for the rites of passage (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967/1970). Thus, the office and moreover, the cosy corner, worked as a special ritual place (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). It helped to conduct a part of the transition process which in this case was showcasing progress and readiness to move on with the rites.

Thirdly, the cosy corner was used for a series of lectures/workshops about WordPress, a certain online tool for creating a website. In this case, the lecturer sat at the table with his laptop connected to the screen. The incubatees who had joined the voluntary workshops grabbed themselves a chair and sat further away from the table facing the screen to see how to use this tool. On this occasion, the cosy corner again helped to enforce an authoritative structure and mark the "qualified person" in this ritual situation (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). This was well exemplified during the very first workshop when the time for *fika* was approaching and one of the incubatees asked another who was closer to the kettle to switch it on. Time passed and people started to fidget on their chairs but the lecturer went on. After a while the lecturer realized that nobody had taken coffee and said that he believed that everybody would just take coffee while he kept on talking. Emma replied in a mild sarcastic tone that no, everybody will sit and listen properly. The lecturer then said that he will show one final thing after which they will take a *fika*-break.

Thus, it could be argued that the cosy corner is a constant reminder of the liminal state of the incubatees. It changes form from one occasion to another and is used to host various events that are meant to help the incubatees to make progress on their journey of becoming an entrepreneur. The cosy corner is used, for example, for structured breakfast meetings where all the incubatees have to show how far they have come with their business development. It is

even used for giving concrete know-how on some aspects of business management, e.g. how to operate a website.

This discussion shows that the office space functions as a ritual place because it is only meant for a few selected people and there are some clear indicators of liminality, for example, when people set up timelines or when the cosy corner is changed to host the monthly breakfast meetings. However, as the incubatees quickly adopted the view that it is just an office space where people come to work on the computer, the transition process was not as evident. Even though they were working on their businesses, coming to the office mostly seemed like an ordinary assignment and not as something that is supposed to transform them in the long run. This being said, the incubator office was still a ritual place that helped to facilitate the transition even if it was not always noticed by the incubatees. Moreover, it helped to create a bond between the people, something that is emphasised a lot in the literature on the rites of passage. This will be discussed below.

5.3. Is there a communitas?

The relations in a liminal rite tend to be of a very particular kind – complete authority to the elders is mixed with complete equality between the liminal personae (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 99). Turner even argues that the society during a liminal rite is "unstructured or rudimentarily structured" and thus makes way to a communitas; that is a "communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (1969, p. 96). Turner prefers the term "communitas" to the term "community" because the latter tends to carry a meaning of an "area of common living" whereas "communitas" is more understood as a specific "modality of social relationships" (ibid.). In this section, I will discuss the relations among the incubatees in the view of a communitas which is an important element in the rites of passage.

To begin with, Turner (1967/1970) argues that if the rites are collective then there should be a sense of comradeship that "transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship position, and, in some kinds of cultic group, even of sex" (p. 100). The institutionalised roles are left behind and people can, as Turner states, "be themselves" (ibid., p. 101). This proved to be true in the incubator. There were almost as many men as there were women, the age differences between the incubatees could be anywhere from one to thirty years, and recent graduates were developing their businesses side by side with people who had already worked in their own company for several years. Even though it sometimes happens that people with more experience look down to those with less experience, this was not the case in the incubator. Everybody was equally valued and nobody was left aside. Daisy described this as a

non-competitive atmosphere where one is not required to always have the highest performance but rather has the opportunity to be vulnerable. She called it "a non-performance-oriented togetherness" (Daisy, Interview, 10 Oct 2017). Many of the incubatees said that they liked tossing around ideas with others and thought that it gave them motivation to work on their business when they saw that others are also facing similar dilemmas.

However, there were other viewpoints concerning this. Gia, for example, thought that people were mostly sitting in their own silo and not collaborating or sharing as many ideas as they should (Interview, 25 Sept 2017). Jane, who joined a little later, questioned if there even was a group that she could join. Her first impression was that people were just coming to the office and going back home again without interacting that much in between (Jane, Interview, 11 Oct 2017). As argued in the previous section, the office was seen as just an office which means that people tended to avoid making noise or talking to each other in fear of disturbing others. Thus, the office was generally a quiet place with the exceptions of *fika*-times and some small discussions here and there, for example, when somebody needed help with her computer. There were not that many common activities.

Not having that many common activities was something I observed during my first weeks in the field and so I decided to bring this topic up during the focus group interview. As the group had just started, I wanted to know what they thought of the opportunities of getting to know each other in the incubator. Beth said that she would have liked to see more people in the office (Focus group interview, 18 Sept 2017). People were just not in the office at the same time due to very different schedules and that made it more difficult to learn more about others. Gia said that there was not much initiative from the incubator's side and that one had to take initiative oneself if one wanted to get to know others (Focus group interview, 18 Sept 2017). Gia thought that communication so far had been quite one-sided, meaning that the project managers informed the incubatees of something but there was no dialogue. Gia further suggested that the incubatees should have their own online group discussion on a webpage called Riot where everybody can post about the things they are currently doing and get an overview about what others are doing. This focus group ended with everybody present agreeing to creating this page and starting the communication there.

I was also invited to that page and could observe the communication there. Despite the initial enthusiasm and two or three posts, there was nothing happening on that page. Some people admitted during later individual interviews that the platform chosen for online communication was not the most suitable one for keeping the communication going. Fay was one of the people who posted something in the beginning. However, Fay admitted that she

was not very keen on Riot's layout and found it more confusing than not. She added that more active online communication could have maybe taken place on Facebook because everybody was already using it (Fay, Interview, 17 Oct 2017). Amy, who was not present during the focus group, said that she liked the initiative of having a group chat but she just was not the kind of person who could spend time chatting online (Interview, 10 Oct 2017). Amy just got up do date with what everybody was doing while she was in the office or when she ran into them during other events. Thus, even though creating an online channel where everybody could keep each other up to date could have facilitated a greater sense of communitas, it did not happen because of two main reasons. Firstly, the chosen channel was too unfamiliar for most of the people so they did not find the time or will to learn to use it. Secondly, most of the people had many other obligations and chatting online just did not make it into their schedules. This last part might have also had something to do with age differences because the people who were initially using this chatroom were in their twenties. Hence, the communitas that people were missing at the beginning of the incubator year did not come into existence online.

Nevertheless, there were indicators of the close-knit relations between the incubatees. They rooted for each other on several occasions very much in the sense of "each for all, and all for each" (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 101). For example, when Hanna finished a phone call with selling her third product in that week, she shared this with everybody else in the office. Others in the office congratulated Hanna and were rejoicing together with her. This kind of support from others was also described by Popova (2016) who found that sharing the same experience and spending time in the same place helped to create a communitas (p. 101).

Another example took place when Daisy was waiting for the answer to a funding application and everybody knew that the answer was supposed to come on that particular Friday. There was anticipation in the air and every incubatee who entered the office queried Daisy if she had already heard back from the fund. Then, at around 13:00, right after the lunch break, Daisy came back to the office and saw that she had finally received an e-mail from the fund. Everybody was so certain that Daisy would get the funding and encouraged her to open the e-mail. Daisy was a little nervous to open it because it was so important for her. So she waited for a while and said several times loudly that she cannot make herself to open it. Jane then offered that she could open the e-mail for Daisy and read it first. Daisy still wanted to open it herself but waited for another 10 minutes before she finally did it. Unfortunately she had been declined funding and the mood in the office changed drastically. Everybody felt for Daisy and showed their disappointment while at the same time trying to cheer her up and

telling her that there will be other opportunities. Amy entered the office shortly after this disappointing news and as a complete coincidence had brought some cookies with her. Emma then commented that it was perfect timing for coming to the office with some sweets. Although Daisy avoided eating sugar, she decided to make an exception this time and ate some cookies to "drown the sadness". Everybody who was in the office at that time sat together in the cosy corner and talked about the situation, discussed other opportunities, and then started joking around to lift the mood. Thus, this was the time when everybody came together to support one of their members after they had a setback.

This discussion shows that the communitas was starting to emerge at the beginning of the incubation year. As people had not got to know each other that well yet and were at the office during different times, they questioned if there was a coherent group and were looking for common events that would bring them more tightly together. However, they were sharing ideas and supporting each other. Irene even said that "this is my group now" (Interview, 10 Oct 2017) which shows that the "comradeship**,** with its familiarity, ease and, […], mutual outspokenness" (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 101) was definitely present in the incubator, even if it was not always easy to spot.

5.4. Importance of time

The liminal period in rites of passage is temporary, lasting for a specific time which can vary considerably (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967/1970). Moreover, Grimes (2014) has also argued that enacting rituals at a special time is another family characteristic of rituals (p. 194). This is also true for the incubator - the incubatees have one year to develop their business after which they should be able to continue on their own. This section focuses on the time-related aspects of the incubator and how these aspects are affecting the incubatees.

Both van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) have argued that rites of passage can be of an individual or collective type. An example of an individual rite of passage would be a status elevation rite where one member of the group is chosen as a potential new leader of the group and this person then has to go through a series of tasks, or rituals. An example of a collective rite of passage would be rites connected to reaching social puberty or adulthood where a group of adolescents together go through a series of rites. People undergoing a collective rite are not all acquiring the same characteristics but rather go through a personal development. However, the rites are still collective because everybody submits to the same tasks or rites at the same time and are expected to showcase at least some skills common for the group to which they want to be accepted (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969).

The transition rites in the incubator were meant to be collective but this was not always the case. As neophytes need to go through the same rites at the same time, the rites should begin and end at the same time for everybody. However, as it was discussed on page 13, some of the incubatees joined a little later than others and some were still in the incubator from the previous group. Thus, the time-scale of the rites was different for some. Emma, for example, was almost at the end of her incubation process when the new group started. Moreover, although Emma should have ended the incubation process at the end of October, she was allowed to stay in the incubator for a little longer because nobody else had applied for a spot. Thus, the overall timeframe of the incubation process was fluctuating. Even though there was a clear beginning and end set up for the group who was participating in the incubation process, there were many deviations from this order. It has to be kept in mind, though, that the timeframe is set up artificially and there is no clear way of indicating how much time someone needs for developing their business. Hence, it can be very valuable for people who seek to start their own business to have the opportunity to hop on the incubation process midway and still get quite a lot out of it. However, it can also cause some problems in the order of the rites because the incubatees are in very different stages with their businesses that it is difficult to form a plan that would cover all their needs. Then again, this has to be taken into account by the person who is going to join the process later – they need to understand that others might have already gone through the things they needed and thus it makes no sense to repeat it. It seems then that the transition rite in this business incubator is collective as defined by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) with some exceptions. It means that the rite has a clear beginning and end for everybody who belongs in the same incubation group but others are welcome to join if there are vacancies.

However, not all of the incubatees could join in all the events offered in the incubation process. Some of the incubatees had other obligations directly related to their business or on the side. Emma's business was quite established already which meant that she spent a lot of time on her business location. Irene had also recently acquired a new client which meant that she spent two days a week on her client's premises. Amy, Hanna and Fay had either full-time or part-time jobs. These incubatees had the hardest time with scheduling incubator events. Irene said that if the event was scheduled on a Monday or a Wednesday then she simply could not make it even if she wanted to because she had to work for her client (Interview, 10 Oct 2017). Irene and Amy really appreciated the fact that most of the events had already been planned before the start of the incubation year so they could schedule all the other events around them whenever possible. Beth, Claire and Daisy, on the other hand, had quite flexible

schedules and took part in most of the events that came with a shorter notice and did not see any problems with planning around these events. They all emphasised that since they are in this incubator only for a limited time, they want to take in as much as possible (Beth, Interview, 11 Oct 2017; Claire, Interview, 12 Oct 2017; Daisy, Interview, 10 Oct 2017). These were the incubatees who also spent the most time in the office and this was the kind of attitude that the project managers truly liked. They understood that people had other obligations but they would have liked to see all the incubatees completely engaged in the incubation process.

The view of how much time one can or should dedicate to one's business in the incubator was different for each and every incubatee. Some people decided to use the incubator to the fullest and spend as much time there as possible. Others had either other obligations or had already developed their business so far that they were not able to abide by the rule of spending 50% of their working time in the incubator office. This also affected their participation in the events (see next section).

It can then be discussed if the incubator should only be meant for people who do not have other obligations and who can dedicate all their time for the incubation process. This is a matter that came to my attention when I was planning a two-hour event as part of my internship in the incubator. This event was meant to be a structured group discussion about the issues most relevant for the incubatees at that time. There were eight people interested and the date was already set but then the project managers discovered another event that they wanted to visit during that same day. They told me that I could either join them or that I could lead the group exercise alone. As I was a little intimidated of guiding the discussion without the help of the project managers and I was curious of the event as well I decided to reschedule the group exercise. I sent out an email and most of the incubatees answered that the new date would also suit them well. Except for one incubatee who wrote that she had actually declined another event on that first date because she had wanted to prioritise the events offered by the incubator (Irene, Personal communication, 5 Oct, 2017). This answer made me realise that the incubator is more suitable and perhaps even more directed to people who have a flexible schedule. Those without one can be quite quickly excluded from some events even if they would really like to participate.

Some incubatees also found it difficult to understand the logic behind the scheduled events. Fay said that she would have appreciated if the monthly breakfast meetings took place either at the beginning or the end of the month (Interview, 17 Oct 2017). I was only able to take part in one breakfast meeting that took place on 19 October but the meeting for

November was also scheduled in the second half of the month. Fay said that she was thinking in the frame of a calendrical month so it was difficult for her to understand what she needed to bring up during these meetings – would it include the previous month or should one be focused on the current month only? Fay said that two weeks was quite a short time for something relevant to happen and it was also more difficult to remember what she had done in the previous month so she did not understand why the events were scheduled like so (Interview, 17 Oct 2017). Although this might be a pseudo-problem because she could prepare beforehand and see what she had done since the last breakfast meeting, it also shows that at least some of the informants were not able to switch off the time-logic of the "everyday" world. Even if the incubator was a secluded place with its own timeframe and requirements, the rules and ideas that guide everyday life were still present and affected the way the incubatees related to the incubator.

This discussion shows that the incubation process was mainly designed for people who are flexible and could join in even at a late notice. Many incubatees who had other obligations missed out on events simply because they could not be flexible with their schedules. Although a special time period was set for the incubation process and the events it included, other assignments were still influencing the participation. Thus, this created a curious situation where people were constantly stepping in and out of the transition rite, something that could not have been possible in the rites described by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969). Despite the special time set aside for the transition rite, it was never completely secluded from everyday activities.

5.5. Events

So far I have been discussing the elements of time, place and the communitas in the incubator rite of passage. This part will be focused on the most important element, i.e. the actual rites enacted in the incubator and what they are supposed to convey to the incubatees in order for them to transition from one state to the next. As Thomassen has argued, rites of passage consist of a "series of tests and personality transforming ordeals" (2014, p. 4) which are supposed to show that the people undergoing these tests are ready to acquire the new status or position. There were five mandatory events in which the incubatees had to take part and some voluntary events. I will first discuss three of the mandatory events in greater detail and then analyse some of the voluntary ones.

5.5.1. Educational days

The most important mandatory event which the incubatees held in highest regard was the educational days. There were three sets of two-day educational days planned for the whole year: the first in September, the second in November and the third in January. The project managers stated that the incubatees needed to get most of the knowledge during the first half-year so that they could really come out with their businesses in spring. In essence, the educational days were two consecutive schooling days filled with lectures or seminars with *fika*-breaks and a longer lunch in between. There were usually two to three speakers talking about certain topics on each day. Some of the topics were, for example, marketing, product pricing, business behaviour, building your trademark, sales, and search engine optimisation.

The whole setting of the educational days resembled that of a classroom where all the knowledge comes from one person who shares it with others. The speaker was always standing in front of the room but moved around during practical exercises to talk one-on-one to the incubatees or see how the group discussion was going. The speakers usually combined a lecture with a seminar or a practical task, meaning that after getting to know everyone in the room they would give an overview about some aspect of their topic which was then followed by a brief discussion or an exercise. Even though none of the speakers claimed to have absolute knowledge of the topic and were more than happy to gain new viewpoints from the incubatees, the speakers were still given the superior position in this situation. They were the ones holding and sharing the knowledge, attitudes and skills that the incubatees needed.

All of these educational days showcased that the incubatees were in the liminal phase on their journey of becoming an entrepreneur. Each and every workshop or seminar during these educational days worked as a sort of a test or a "personality transforming ordeal" (Thomassen, 2014, p. 4) through which the incubatees were supposed to acquire necessary know-how and show some personal qualities associated with being an entrepreneur, be it knowing how to handle a social media campaign or being familiar with the expected behaviour in a business setting. As these educational days were spread out throughout the incubation year, each of them was a step further in the process and a step closer to becoming an entrepreneur.

The educational days were highly appreciated by most of the incubatees precisely because they gained the knowledge, attitudes and skills that they were expected to have in their future status of an entrepreneur. Beth, for example, said that training is what she wants from this incubator (Interview, 11 Oct 2017). Irene was impressed by the quality of the training events: "The best speakers in Sweden in those topics and I get it for free!" (Interview,

12 Sept 2017). There were other opinions, however, best represented by Gia who said that the project managers "maybe should be a bit more flexible with those educational days. Like, when you've already learned something similar then you don't need to go there. But then you can do something else." (Interview, 25 Sept 2017). Thus, some of the incubatees did not appreciate the repetition and would have liked to be able to choose more on their own.

Although the educational days were mandatory, some incubatees were still absent from them. Yet, no consequences followed those who were not able to participate for some reason. Emma, for example, did not take part in the first set of educational days because she had other obligations during that time but also because she was already more or less familiar with the information given there. Thus, the incubatees were still somewhat free to choose if they wanted to participate or not, even in the case of mandatory events.

As the educational days were organised in a specifically marked place and time, they had two of the family characteristics of a ritual as described by Grimes (2014). Moreover, special influence is also attributed to them, something that is also important for a ritual (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). The educational days, and the lectures included in them, were given the power to convey some of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the incubatees to succeed in their new status. This is what the rites of passage do – they prepare the neophytes for the new position in the society (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969).

The educational days worked as a collective rite (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969), meaning that all the incubatees got the exact same assignments and received a common understanding of the ways business could or even should be done. On the other hand, each of them would pick up the information most relevant for their business at that specific time-point. After the first set of educational days Fay, for example, stated that she found the social media presentation most useful whereas Hanna appreciated the presentation of different types of consumers the most. Thus, the educational days were also somewhat individual because each of the incubatees would have a personal approach to the assignments given and pick up the information they needed at that particular time.

What is more, the lectures and seminars were conducted by "qualified persons" – another aspect relevant for a ritual (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). These were the people considered to be experts in their respective fields. As they had been chosen by the project managers and the incubatees trusted that they know what is needed to succeed, the speakers' expertise was not questioned often. Even though these topics are widely seen as the core of a business, I would argue that the educational days enforced the status quo of doing business and did not give many alternatives. There was one exception during the second set of educational days

when successful coffee makers presented their road to the business world. They had a light attitude towards the seriousness of the business world and took many things with slight irony. This showcased that there are other ways of doing business, although all the other speakers during the educational days were more or less telling the opposite.

Hence, the educational days functioned as specific rites in an overall transition rite. These were the events through which the incubatees were supposed to acquire all the necessary know-how in order to succeed in their new position of an entrepreneur.

5.5.2. Breakfast meetings

Another mandatory event was the incubator breakfast meeting that took place once a month at the incubator office. Thus, it was also enacted in a special place and time which are two of the family characteristics of a ritual as described by Grimes (2014, p. 194). As already mentioned earlier, I was only able to participate in one of these meetings that took place in October.

The breakfast meeting was scheduled from eight to ten in the morning. The project managers were present a little earlier to set up the breakfast. One by one the incubatees started to come in, made some sandwiches for themselves and then grabbed a chair at the round table to enjoy the breakfast and chat with others. It was a cosy environment where everybody just made small talk for the first 10 minutes and enjoyed themselves. However, even in this quite informal setting the seating clearly suggested that the project managers are in control of the meeting because they were slightly separated from the incubatees.

After letting the incubatees chat for some time, one of the project managers suggested that they should now officially start. She first went over some of the organisational matters, for example, that the fire drill was going to take place soon, introduced upcoming events and even announced that a new person would be joining the incubator in a few weeks. Then she said that she would now like to hear how all the incubatees were doing. One by one all of them brought up some achievements and challenges ahead. It was a free environment in the sense that others were quick to jump in and comment on something or give recommendations. Although everybody felt comfortable, this unstructured setting gave way to some inequality because not everybody had enough time to talk. As I had to leave earlier that day, I did not witness it myself but one of the project managers later admitted that the last incubatee only had about five minutes for her because some of the others were taking 20 min to talk.

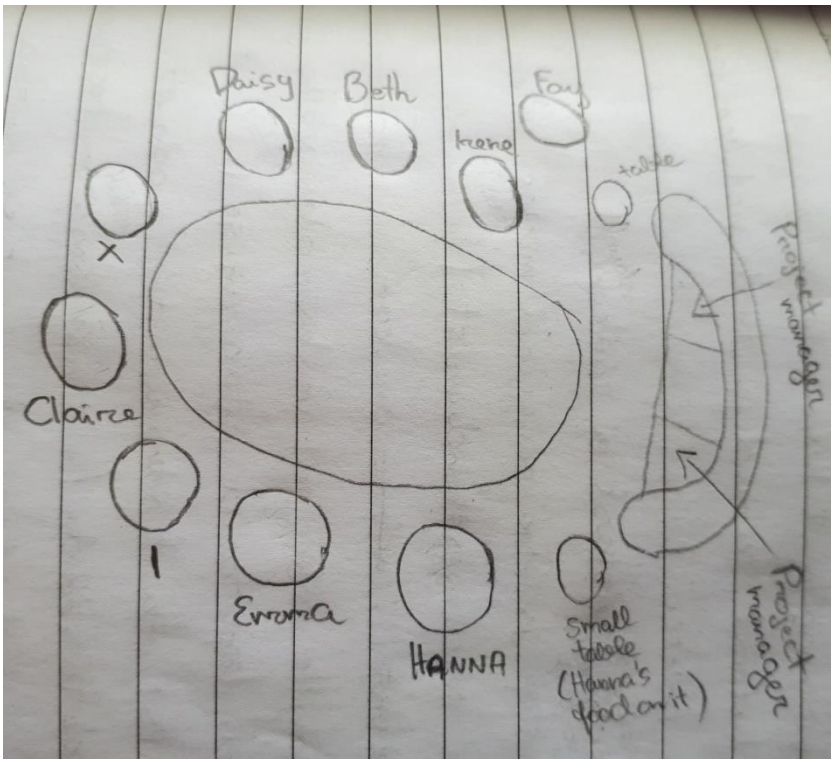

Fig. 5 Seating during the breakfast meeting

This breakfast meeting thus also functioned as a collective rite (Turner, 1969) but instead of giving knowledge to the neophytes, it was a way to bring all of them together. That way both the incubatees and the project managers could get an overview of everybody's progress. This in turn encouraged some incubatees to catch up with others but also worked as a reminder that they were facing similar challenges. It is a rare occasion were all the neophytes are gathered in the same room and get encouragement from each other. This helps to create a stronger communitas (Turner, 1967/1970) and provides some sense of belonging and direction in a transition rite where things can often be more confusing than not. It was also supposed to teach the incubatees that getting advice and encouragement from others and constantly looking over their progress is something they should do.

The breakfast meeting had another family characteristic of a ritual – repetition (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). As it took place every month, it also showcased that the incubatees are in an in-between phase, slowly moving towards a new state (van Gennep 1909/1960, Turner, 1969). Moreover, each breakfast meeting built on the last one, meaning that the incubatees were always speaking about what they had done since the last meeting. Hence, these meetings were always implying that the incubatees are making more or less steady progress towards acquiring a new state in the society – that of an entrepreneur.

5.5.3. Personal monthly meeting

The last mandatory event to be discussed here is the personal monthly meeting between the incubatee and the project manager. This is more of an individual rite (Turner, 1969) because things are discussed one on one. I was only able to participate in three of these meetings, two together with Claire and one with Fay. Nevertheless, all these meetings were conducted in a similar manner.

These meetings had four family characteristics of a ritual – taking place in a specific time and place, being led by a qualified person, and occurring repeatedly (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). The meeting was between the incubatee and the incubator manager, took place once a month and was usually not conducted in the incubator office but in one of the meeting rooms in the building. The room itself marked a clear separation from any previous situation or environment because once the door was closed and everybody had taken a seat, the project manager would quickly lead the conversation to the topics related to the incubatee's business.

The incubatee was the one who chose topics to be discussed during the meeting. At the end of each meeting, the incubatee and the project manager together determined the things to be done before the next meeting and these things were then definitely taken up next time. Thus, these personal monthly meetings also showcased that the incubatee is in a liminal phase and transition from one state to the next (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). The incubatees were always setting goals for the next meeting and had to always tell how far they had progressed since the last meeting. Claire, for example, had promised during the first meeting that she would have her logo ready and that she would decide on the markets she would like to reach with her product. She showed her logo during the second meeting but was still a little confused about the markets so the project manager gave her some more ideas about which markets to choose.

The project manager approached these meetings individually. Although her aim was to guide the incubatees and nudge them in the direction she thought to be most relevant for them, she did it in radically different ways. The atmosphere of the meeting with Claire was cheerful and supportive whereas the meeting with Fay was quite harsh.

Fay had recently been on holiday and thus she was absent from the incubator for a while. What is more, she had faced some personal problems which had hindered her participation in the incubator even more. The project manager was not satisfied with these excuses and vague promises and quite frankly said that Fay could not continue in the incubator if she did not sharpen up. Together they decided on some goals and actions for the coming month and these were the goals that were set up on Post-it notes on Fay's computer

screen, as discussed on page 26. Fay later said that this meeting was useful for her because it gave her a clear idea about what needed to be done. Nevertheless, she admitted that this meeting was on the border of turning into a fiasco because if people push her too much, she might just give up (Fay, Interview, 3 Oct 2017). However, as both she and Claire trusted the project manager and saw her as a qualified person (see Grimes, 2014, p. 194) to give advice and enact the rite, they then acted on her advice.

Hence, the personal monthly meetings were meant to help the incubatees with their specific challenges and check-up on their progress. This was how the project managers made sure that the incubatees were working on their businesses and advancing in the transition rite to become an entrepreneur. As the meeting was a repetitive ritual (Grimes, 2014, p. 194), it also reminded the incubatees that they are in the liminal phase, in the process of acquiring a new state (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969), and constantly need to track their progress in order to truly become entrepreneurs.

What emerges from this discussion is that the incubation process came up to be a mix of collective and individual rites. Although the main emphasis was on the collective rites, i.e. the educational days that gave the same know-how to all the incubatees at the same time, everybody was still able to decide what in this know-how was useful for their concrete businesses. The breakfast meetings were also collective rites because all the incubatees came together and shared their progress but they were not expected to be at the same developmental stage. They were in very different stages in their business development that it was near impossible to make them move through this rite as a collective where everybody is on the exact same level. Thus, the personal monthly meetings were added. They functioned as purely individual rites and were only focused on helping the individual incubatee to progress further in the overall transitional phase, without making explicit what this further progress or end goal entails. All of these events still had some of the characteristics of a ritual, be it a special place and time, qualified persons to lead them, or repetition. They all showed what is expected from the incubatees if they want to progress to the new status (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969) of an entrepreneur. It was overall supposed to be more of a collective rite because there seems to be some common know-how that all the incubatees need to gain if they want to reach the new state in the society and become entrepreneurs.

5.5.4. Voluntary events

In addition to the mandatory events, there were several other events in which the incubatees were free to participate if they so wished. There were several events that were planned in advance, for example, Pitch Workshop during which everybody had the chance to create and practice a 3-minute sales pitch. Other events came with a shorter notice, for example, Mastermind – a structured group discussion during which everybody had the chance to get ideas from others. This adds to the previous discussion about time and shows that those incubatees who did not have other obligations on the side were a little more favoured and had an advantage over others in the incubation process. It is something that would not be possible in the rites of passage described by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969) so in this sense the incubator differs from the "original" rites of passage.

However, all these events were still supposed to guide the incubatees in the transition process as they all provide some concrete knowledge, attitudes or skills necessary to succeed in their new status (see Turner, 1969). For example, xTalks was a series of events where entrepreneurs would come and share their story of becoming an entrepreneur. They shared both their successes and setbacks which were supposed to show to the incubatees that it is possible to succeed if they work for their goals. It worked as a reminder that all that they learn in the incubator can be put into use. The Pitch Workshop, on the other hand, was supposed to give a concrete skill to the incubatees – how to present their businesses to potential partners and customers. Giving necessary skills to the neophytes is an important part of any rites of passage (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). There was also a series of seminars about WordPress, a programme for building websites, for everyone who was interested in creating a website or needed some help with it. As an online presence seems to be a must in today's business world, the project managers thought that it would be valuable for the incubatees to obtain skills for creating and managing their own website.

All these voluntary events also had some of the family characteristics of a ritual, namely a specific time and place and a "qualified person" to lead them (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). They could also be interpreted as simple lectures or seminars that have nothing to do with rites but I would argue that they bore the meaning of a rite in this context. They were all meant to transfer some specific knowledge, skills or attitudes that could be useful in the business world. Although these events, or rites, were not compulsory to pass the overall incubation process, they were still helping the incubatees to develop both themselves and their businesses.

5.6. The role of the masters of ceremony

All of these events described in the previous section were organised by the project managers who thus had a specific role in the context of the transition rites – that of a "qualified person" (Grimes, 2014, p. 194). Thomassen has used the term "master of the ceremony" to talk about the people whose role is to lead the neophytes through the passage while "subjecting them to a series of tests and personality transforming ordeals" (2014, p. 4). Turner has described the role of a ritual elder to whom the liminal personae have to submit (1969, p. 96). Turner argues that this kind of relations between the neophytes and the elders is typical for the communitas in a rite of passage (ibid.). Thus this section aims to analyse the position of the project managers and discuss how they affect the incubation process in general and both the personal and professional development of the incubatees.

Turner (1967/1970) argues that the elders or the instructors have complete authority over the neophytes who always have to submit to their elders (p. 99). Hence, there should be indications of authority or power-relations in the incubator. One such indication was evident in the incubator office itself – the project managers each had their own room in the office. The room had a glass door that could be closed. Although the see-through doors were usually open, the project managers closed them if they had to make or answer a phone call, were concentrating on their tasks or could not cope with the noise coming from the office. As the incubatees did not have the same opportunity to cut themselves off from the surroundings, the see-through glass doors worked as a symbol for power or authority. Foucault (1975/1991), who has analysed the power relations in many contexts, has discussed the idea of a panopticon where the prisoners could always see a watchtower but could never know if there was actually a guard watching them or not. Thus, the prisoners always acted as if the guards were observing (ibid.). Although the incubator office cannot be compared to a prison, I would argue that the separate rooms were an indicator that someone was keeping an eye on the comings and goings of the incubatees. Therefore, the glass doors made the higher status or power of the project managers more visible in the office.

The separate offices and, moreover, closed doors were also a source of confusion for some of the incubatees because they were not sure how they should approach the project managers in there. Claire said that even though the project managers had said that the incubatees should always go and ask when they have any concerns or questions, she still did not want to "take all their time" (Interview, 13 Sept 2017). Amy, on the other hand, said that she had no problem approaching the project managers precisely because they had told everyone that the incubatees should go and talk to them (Interview, 15 Sept 2017). Thus, the

people took on different strategies when approaching the project managers in their rooms. Some of the incubatees felt comfortable enough shouting over the office when they had a quick question, others quietly walked up to the door. If the door was closed, they knocked or otherwise tried to catch the manager's attention. If it was open, they first asked "Am I disturbing?" and if the project manager gave permission to go ahead, the incubatee started the dialogue. It has to be emphasised that I did not witness any case where someone was declined help – the project managers were always ready to listen. This kind of careful behaviour from the incubatees' side can be analysed with the help of anthropologist Sherry Ortner's (1973) theory of different symbols and their functions. In this case, the separate rooms and glass doors were symbols with action elaborating power but the action required was not made clear by the symbol itself (Ortner, 1973, p. 1340). People understood that these rooms have to be approached somehow but they did not know how. This behaviour is also connected to respect for each other and even being humble and seeing one's own needs as less important than the obligations of others.

Even online communication was top-down more often than not. It was common that the project managers would send out e-mails about upcoming events or communicating other potentially relevant information for the incubatees but there was rarely any response, at least not to everyone included in the e-mail. The same logic functioned in the common Facebook group where the project managers would post about events happening in the office on the same day or giving brief and urgent information. Beth, Claire and Fay admitted that they were not sure if they were expected to post in the group or if it just was more of an alternative channel for the project managers to inform everybody. Claire said that the project managers had never explicitly expressed that the incubatees could or should also post anything (Interview, 12 Oct 2017). Even though I saw one of the incubatees post something in this Facebook group a little before my fieldwork ended, most of the time they did not actively use the group – there were only a few occasional likes and comments. The online communication was then more of a top-down type and the project managers were in charge.

Another indication of how the relations between project managers and incubatees could be seen as that of authority was exemplified by the way the incubatees trusted their advice and recommendations. Although they were more or less free to decide on their own about the aspects of their business, any advice from the project managers was usually taken at face value and put to use. Moreover, many of the incubatees expressed how valuable the project managers were and how they hoped that they could continue using their help after they have finished the incubation process. Hanna, for example, said that one of the project

managers was giving such great advice that she hoped that this project manager would become a member of the company's board of advisors (Interview, 28 Sept 2017). This shows that the project managers were also seen as "qualified persons" (Grimes, 2014, p. 194) who know enough to guide everybody through the rite and help them to gain the desired status.

This complete trust in the project managers became also apparent after a meeting for all the companies and organisations in the building where Daisy was also asked to introduce her company. She had a very casual approach to this: she just walked on the stage, said something about her work and even joked a little. I later heard from Daisy that one of the project managers told her after this event that she should act more professionally and be more prepared if she wants others to take her and her company seriously. In this case, the project manager thought that some role behaviour was missing. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1956/1990) has compared human social interaction to that of a theatrical performance and argued that people are acting out several front stage roles with its specific rules of conduct that are commonly accepted in a cultural context. Thus, the project manager who had already established herself as an entrepreneur and knew the rules of conduct gave Daisy some concrete guidelines for the proper front stage behaviour in the business context. Daisy said that she really appreciated this talk because it made her understand how she should act in the business world (Interview, 11 Sept 2017).

This complete trust and authority only exists because the project managers are seen as representing "the absolute, the axiomatic values of society in which are expressed the 'common good' and the common interest" (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 100). In the case of the incubator, the project managers were seen as being knowledgeable of the ways of becoming a successful entrepreneur in the wider society and keeping the best interests of the incubatees in mind. That is why the incubatees had complete trust in their recommendations.

The project managers also had the sole right to decide who could start and stay in the incubator. One of them said that they were "looking for entrepreneurs" or "people that we think can cultivate ideas and create things that can be great" (Project manager, Interview, 18 Sept 2017). This indicates that the project managers had enough expertise to choose the businesses that could flourish in the incubator. Moreover, they also knew what kind of behaviour, or front stage act (Goffman, 1956/1990), the incubatees had to showcase if they wanted to become entrepreneurs. There were concrete examples in the incubator were applicants were not accepted because their behaviour and mindset were not suitable for a future entrepreneur. The project managers thus had the right to decide who can be taught the necessary behaviour and who cannot.

The most direct way how the project managers influenced the behaviour and development of the incubatees was during the personal monthly meetings which were discussed on page 40. As the project manager was seen as an authority, or a "qualified person" (Grimes, 2014, p. 194), her ideas at those meetings were usually implemented. Even Fay, who had a rougher meeting, understood that the project manager had her best interests in mind and wanted her to succeed. That is why she listened to her demands. However, the project manager could have scared her off with this harsh communication strategy which might have ended up with the incubatee losing confidence in her entrepreneurial abilities. Even though the project managers are mainly concentrated on business development, they also have an impact on personal development. This was also emphasised by Popova (2016).

Turner (1969) argues that the neophytes need to be humble, obey the instructors and if they fail in doing so, they need to accept their punishment (p. 95). Even though the project managers had authority, there were still occasions when the incubatees did not submit to all the rules. All of the incubatees told me that they did not see these rules or requirements as obligatory because there was no follow-up for anyone when they missed something. Thus, the requirements were too flexible for a rite of passage because it is required that everybody goes through the same events. Otherwise one cannot pass the rite. Hence, even the authority of the project managers can be seen as fluctuating – they had strong authority when it came to giving advice about the incubatees' business but they were seen as less authoritative when it came to the overall incubation management.

In relation to this, the responsibility in the incubator was unclear. It is described that the ritual elders are in total control of the rite of passage and guide the neophytes through the process and various activities on the way (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967/1970; Thomassen, 2014). This was not completely true for the incubator. There were certain requirements and obligations for the incubatees but these were not always enforced. Moreover, the project managers did not always want to take the responsibility for the incubation process. As part of my internship, I had to make a presentation of what I had found and give some recommendations. One of my recommendations was to include some fun activities with the obligatory events so that the incubatees had more time to learn from one another. One of the incubatees offered that they could all have dinner together in the evening of the first day during educational days. One of the project managers then asked if the incubatees themselves would be ready to organise some kind of an event for that time. I then said that it should be the project managers' responsibility to take charge of this to which she answered that they do not have time for this. As they were organising a huge exhibition, I

could understand that there were many other things for them to do, but it also showed that they were not taking full control of the transition rite.

This discussion indicates that much like in any rite of passage, the incubation process also had its ritual elders even if they were not called that. As exemplified by other rites of passage in the works of van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1967/1970, 1969), the project managers, much like ritual elders, were responsible for guiding the people through a liminal phase and making sure that everybody acquires the relevant know-how to obtain the new status of an entrepreneur. However, I would argue that the project managers were more focused on one specific part of the transition rite while somewhat neglecting the other. They took on the responsibility for giving relevant knowledge and helping everybody with the business development. At the same time, they did not put enough emphasis on facilitating the overall rite of passage. For example, they did not enforce the rules which often left the incubatees a little puzzled over the incubation process. It also shows that the relations between the incubatees and the project managers were not completely similar to that of the neophyte and a master of ceremony because the incubatees were still free to choose which advice they would take and how much they would participate. The same point was also made by Popova (2016) who used social exchange theory to help to analyse the relations in the incubator. However, I would even argue that sometimes the project managers were making some business-related decisions for the incubatees or at least influenced them to go in a certain direction. At the same time, they did not take enough time to explain the importance of participating in the overall incubation process with all its elements. Hence, the project managers did not function as complete ritual elders in this transition rite but only opted for some tasks and responsibilities expected from them.

5.7. What is the incubator like?

My discussion so far has concentrated on the role of the different ritualistic elements in the liminal phase of the incubator. However, the in-between state of the incubatees cannot only be seen in the overall organisation of the incubator but it is also illustrated by the way the incubatees discuss their experience there. Many of the aspiring entrepreneurs used specific language and terms to explain how they conceive the incubator. In this section, I will thus showcase some of these linguistic expressions and discuss how they illustrate being in the incubator.

Linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have argued that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (1980, p. 3). One of the

examples they discuss to illustrate this point is the "argument is war" concept. They showcase expressions we use in arguments that can be linked to war, for example attack or defend an argument, but even state that, similar to war, we can win or lose an argument (ibid., p. 4). They also discuss that all these metaphors we use are linked to our cultural background and experience. What I am mostly interested here, however, is their statement that "[t]*he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (ibid., p. 5, original emphasis). I will now look more deeply into some of the metaphors which are used to make sense of the incubator experience.

The word "incubator" itself has to be discussed first. Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives three definitions for this: "an apparatus by which eggs are hatched artificially", "an apparatus with a chamber used to provide controlled environmental conditions especially for the cultivation of microorganisms or the care and protection of premature or sick babies", and "an organization or place that aids the development of new business ventures" (Incubator, n.d.). This term caused some confusion even among the incubatees which culminated with a discussion between Jane and a project manager. Jane asked if incubator has the same meaning as *kuvös* in Swedish, which is a term more often used in Swedish to refer to the apparatus used to take care of premature and sick babies. Jane asked about the connection between a place for babies and a place for businesses. The project manager then said: "What do you mean? That it is something warm and safe where you develop?" This shows that the incubator is designed to be a safe and cosy environment where all the newly started ventures have time to adjust to the new conditions and get all the support needed to grow strong enough to survive in the business world. This also indicates that the incubator is designed from the scratch to be a liminal entity where the new entrepreneurs have come into existence but are not "real" entrepreneurs yet and thus need support from more knowledgeable people to survive.

This understanding was also exemplified by the way Fay described her experience in the incubator:

> How I see this is that the company is a bike and [the name of the incubator] is training wheels and then I have to bike quickly enough when [the name of the incubator] stops its work and the training wheels come off so that I can keep rolling. So I have to build up the speed and learn how to ride it myself" (Interview, 17 Oct 2017).[4]

[4] The Swedish word used instead of "training wheels" was *stödben* which could be directly translated to "support legs" but it does not change the overall meaning.

Fay indicates that she knows how to ride a bike, or run a business, with the training wheels on or when someone is helping her to keep her balance. Despite the experience of riding a bicycle with training wheels, she is not yet able to keep the balance herself. Hence, the incubator is once again seen as a safe place where nobody will fall off the bike; or if they do there is always someone to catch them. Moreover, the incubatee is in the liminal state of learning to run a business – she understands the basic rules in theory but is not yet completely ready to put this knowledge into action on her own.

Another metaphor used to understand what the incubatees were doing was the act of building. Irene said: "I see [the name of the incubator] like a help to build the foundation. That I'm currently building a company and now I've got the opportunity to build a stable foundation" (Interview, 10 Oct 2017). This shows that establishing a company resembles building a house. If one does not succeed in laying down a strong foundation, the whole building might collapse. Irene sees the incubator as a contributing factor in building this strong foundation. She does not claim that the incubator is the only way for doing this but she appreciates its help. I would also argue that the incubatees are in the middle of this building process which means that the building has started to resemble a house but it is nowhere near ready to be lived in. They have started their businesses and keep developing them but they are not up and running or generating as much income as they would like. This also indicates a liminal state – the incubatees are somewhere in the process of establishing a company.

The metaphor of building was not only used in terms of construction but even in terms of putting together or building a puzzle. Daisy said: "But I hope to lay down a number of pieces of a puzzle during the time in the incubator" (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). This indicates that a company is a puzzle consisting of numerous pieces that are all connected to each other and have to be placed properly so that one can see a clear picture at the end. This quote also shows that the incubator can either offer some of these pieces or help put the pieces in the right place. Again, the incubatees are in the process of building a company – they have started to lay down the pieces but one cannot see the whole picture yet.

Two explicit metaphors or sayings were also used to discuss the role of the project managers. Emma said the following to describe what she needed in dealing with her business:

> This like raven on the shoulder who is picking your ear: 'Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this? Have you thought about this? And what will happen with this? (Interview, 29 Sept 2017)

This indicates a need for guidance; to have someone nearby who points out some of the things that might go unnoticed by the person herself. Emma believes that the project managers fulfil this function and provide guidance and assistance when necessary.

Gia uses another kind of expression: “So I thought that, okay, this can work well as a sort of carrot and stick” (Interview, 25 Sept 2017). The Swedish word for stick in this sentence actually translates to “whip” which might be even more apt for the situation. This expression indicates that there is someone who knows or has decided where to go and uses the methods in hand to make sure that people, or in the original sense, donkeys, are moving in that direction. What Gia means is that it is not always easy to keep everything on track so it is good to have something or someone to motivate one, both with rewards and tougher methods.

In both of these cases, the project managers function as mentors or guides who make sure that the incubatees are taking all the necessary steps to develop their business. Although the incubatees are responsible for actually taking the steps, it is the project managers who are expected to know more and nudge them in the right direction with the apt methods.

From learning to ride a bike and building to having a raven sit on one’s shoulder and using carrots and sticks, it is clear that the cultural background has formed the way the informants understand and conceptualise the incubator. Some of the metaphors, for example, learning to ride a bike, show that being in the incubator is a liminal state, meaning that people have not yet acquired all the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive on their own. Other metaphors, for example, the carrot and stick, show that there is a need for someone who can use various methods to guide the people in the right direction. Moreover, the incubator in itself is a noteworthy metaphor because it comes from another field where a certain machine or action is needed to hatch eggs, cultivate microorganisms, and give aid to premature babies. This shows that the incubatees are in a liminal state where they are somewhere in the way of becoming an entrepreneur but not quite there yet. In order to become one, they need the help and guidance from others more experienced or knowledgeable in the business world.

6. WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

So far I have discussed the separation and the transition rites. The final part in the overall rites of passage is formed by the incorporation rites which facilitate the end of the transformation and incorporate the neophytes to the new state (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). As my research took place in the beginning of the incubation year, I am not able to analyse how the transition ends. Instead, this chapter focuses on what the incubatees themselves hope to gain by the end of the year.

In general, there were two approaches to the incubation process – those who had quite vague expectations and those who were clear on where they wanted to be once the year is over. This does not mean, however, that the first group did not focus on business development. On the contrary, their aim was to learn as much as possible about running a business.

Fay, who was one of the people who did not have a specific goal in mind, said, "I want to figure out how I can run a smaller business in practice" (Interview, 3 Oct 2017). Moreover, it was not important for Fay to make all her living from her company as she understood that the company was nowhere near ready for this to happen. Her aim was to earn around half of her total income from the company. It was more important for her to "get the discipline and mindset" to continue working on her company once the incubation year has ended (Fay, Interview, 3 Oct 2017).

Daisy had a similar view – she did not have a specific goal concerning the business but was more interested in learning as much as possible about entrepreneurship (Interview, 11 Sept 2017). Daisy was a little afraid that she would lose focus from developing both herself and her company once the incubation year is over (Interview, 10 Oct 2017). Thus, it was important for her to make sure that she keeps the attitude of always learning something new.

Hanna was somewhat unsure about her goal with the incubation year. She admitted that she had not set a concrete goal but explained that she would like to make the company more visible so that she could sell her products even in Europe and start living off her company (Hanna, Interview, 28 Sept 2017). So she was putting emphasis on the marketing aspects but had not set up a clear goal.

Beth and Claire had a similar goal to Hanna. Both of them needed to think through their target group and marketing channels to get their product "out there" (Beth, Interview, 11 Sept 2017; Claire, Interview, 13 Sept 2017). Claire, however, admitted that she would also be happy if she could just run her business as a hobby company which is a special type of company in Sweden (Interview, 13 Sept 2017).

Jane was clear about her goal. She explained that it is important to know other actors in her field in order to get a job. Thus, she wanted to "have a complete network" once she finishes the incubation year (Jane, Interview, 11 Oct 2017).

Irene was even more certain in her goal and said, "I want my company to be established by the beginning of summer so that I no longer need to say that I'm a new entrepreneur but that I have an established company. So that I feel that I can make a living

with this company" (Interview, 12 Sept 2017). It is important for Irene that she becomes known in her field and can live a good life thanks to her company.

These examples show that the incubator is expected to help people with both their personal entrepreneurial development and business development, something that was also discussed by Popova (2016). Although not all the incubatees had a clear goal in mind, they still wanted to move on to a new state. State in the rites of passage can refer to "any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized" (Turner, 1967/1970, p. 94). This state can be any "legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree" (ibid., p. 93). In this case, the state refers to a profession – that of an entrepreneur. Thus, the incubatees wanted to finish the transition and be knowledgeable about the "rights and obligations of a clearly defined and "structural" type" (ibid., p. 94). Moreover, they wanted to understand the "customary norms and ethical standards" according to which they are expected to behave as entrepreneurs (ibid).

Hence, the rite of passage was supposed to convey some skills and knowledge that would make the neophytes ready to take on the new state. The incubatees wanted to understand how to thrive in their businesses by the end of the year so that they could embrace their new state in the society – that of an entrepreneur.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis was set up to open up the "black box" of business incubators and show what happens once the venture owners have decided to go through the incubation process. My two aims were to provide a deeper understanding on how the overall business incubation process works and to analyse the influence that the incubator can have on the aspiring entrepreneurs. Three questions were posed to achieve these aims.

Firstly, the analysis showed that the incubation process should be seen as a rite of passage as described by van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1967/1970, 1969). Even though both van Gennep and Turner were mostly dealing with life-crisis rites among specific tribes, the business incubation processes had many similarities to them. The business incubation process was also set up as a rite of passage and divided into three phases: separation rites, transition rites, and incorporation rites (van Gennep, 1909/1960). The separation rites were mostly administrational, meaning that the future incubatees had to fill in an application and go through an interview with the incubation managers in order to be separated from the more general society.

The second phase which consisted of transition rites was the main focus of this thesis because it is during this phase that people gain new know-how and qualities and prove themselves to be worthy of being accepted in a new state (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). This is a liminal phase where the people undergoing the rite are no longer part of the previous group but not yet part of a new state either. In the case of the incubator, the incubatees find themselves in-between of no longer being an ordinary employee but not yet being an established entrepreneur either. This in-between state became apparent also when studying the linguistic expressions that the incubatees used to talk about their experience. As entrepreneurs are given a higher status in many societies, the incubation process worked as a status elevation rite where the people undergoing the rite were supposed to move from a "lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions" (Turner, 1969, p. 167).

This thesis showed that there were many different elements in the incubation process that were part of the general rite of passage, each having their own role. The incubator office, for example, functioned as a "seclusion hut" (Turner, 1969) where the incubatees were separated from the general society. They would go through different rites there and develop their businesses in order to become entrepreneurs. There were both collective and individual rites that were supposed to give the incubatees certain know-how or qualities in order to be ready for their new state. These rites were, for example, educational days, monthly breakfast meetings, and personal monthly meetings. One aspect of these rites was also to help to create a communitas – a sense of belonging in this group. The whole process was guided by two incubator managers who functioned in many ways as ritual elders. They were helping the incubatees to go through the rites and showed them what is necessary for them to do if they want to become entrepreneurs.

The business incubation process is supposed to end with incorporation rites to integrate the incubatees to their new state. Due to the limitation of the duration of this study, these rites were not analysed but instead I looked into what the incubatees would like to achieve and how the incubator could be beneficial for them. It became clear that they wanted to learn as much as possible about being an entrepreneur and running a business. Moreover, they wished to develop their know-how and gain practical skills of business management in order to thrive as independent entrepreneurs.

This analysis was similar to Popova's (2016) who conducted her study in a social venture incubator in the UK. Although we both adopted the view of a rite of passage, there were some crucial differences. Whereas Popova put a lot of focus on how to measure the

incubator impact and the venture success, my main focus was to show what is happening in an incubator and what affect it has on the incubatees. Moreover, Popova did not see the incubator managers as ritual elders but used social exchange theory to characterise the relations between the incubator managers and the incubatees. I, on the other hand, would argue that the incubator managers still should adopt the role of a ritual elder in the sense that they should guide the overall incubation process. They should make sure that everybody understands why each element is important and comply with the overall rules that guide the process. In addition, I found that this process was a mix of collective and individual rites which caused some tension. Due to the fact that the incubatees were in different stages of business development, the imposed collective rites were not always relevant for everybody. What is more, even if the rite was collective, for example the monthly breakfast meeting, the incubatees were not required to be at the same level but were just expected to have made some progress compared to the last meeting. The collective and individualistic manner also became apparent in the incubator office where some of the incubatees wanted to focus on their individual tasks whereas others wanted to discuss their matters with others.

Thus, this research adds some important findings to the overall incubation research. As Popova's (2016) study was done in a social venture incubator in the UK and mine in a business incubator for cultural and creative ventures in Northern Sweden, it would be valuable if similar research could be taken on in other business incubators to see if it relates back to these findings or if something was overlooked. After all, understanding the general ritual nature of incubators provides an infinite amount of approaches for improving them.

8. APPLICABILITY

This thesis gave insight into how the incubatees experience the whole incubation process. Thus, it could potentially spark a multitude of various ideas for incubation management. However, there are some overarching findings that should be taken into account when creating or leading a business incubator.

One of the main findings was that the incubatees are in need of certainty and clear guidelines when it comes to the incubation process itself. So far a lot of focus has been put on business development and not so much on the importance of being in the incubator and following its principles. That is why some incubatees still questioned the necessity of some of the rules and features in the incubator. Thus, the incubator managers should take into account that it is crucial to explain what and why is expected from the incubatees and what will happen if these guidelines are not followed. Moreover, the whole process should be followed

through which means that there should not be any exceptions for the set rules. Otherwise the incubatees can be left confused and frustrated about the changing demands.

Secondly, the incubatees are in need of a communitas, i.e. the tight and trusting relations between the peers. However, communitas is not quick to emerge and the people in this study admitted that they would have liked to see more initiative from the incubator in facilitating the creation of these tight relations. Thus, the incubator managers should put more time and energy at the beginning of incubation to getting the people together and developing trust between them.

Thirdly, it might be valuable to set the agenda and timeframe of the incubation year as much in advance as possible. This way all of the incubatees have the chance to participate in most of the events and nobody has to feel excluded just because they have other obligations on the side. Moreover, it should also be decided beforehand who are accepted into the incubator in the first place: only those who will commit full time to the development of the business or also those who have other assignments. This distinction guides the overall process design.

Finally, the incubation process is a mix of individual and collective rites. This means that there are some elements that apply to each and every incubatee but there are also aspects that need a more individual approach. For example, everybody in this incubator needed marketing skills in order to sell their products but they all had a different angle for how these skills should be applied in their respective business. Moreover, some people approach the process as a collective rite, meaning that they mostly want to spend time with others and share ideas, whereas others might be keener on individual rites, meaning that they need more time to work on their own and receive individual feedback. Thus, there is a kind of a tension – people are expected to gain all the necessary know-how of being an entrepreneur that should be the same for everyone but at the same time they have their own specific business ideas that need individual approaches. This tension should be kept in mind by everyone leading a business incubator. It is a matter of finding a balance between the rites and deciding which rites (or activities) support which needs.

These are just a few examples for applying the findings from this thesis and there are many more insights that can be drawn. Whatever actions one decides to take, it is crucial to have the most important task of the incubator at heart – helping the incubatees come through this rite of passage of becoming an entrepreneur.

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