

## Connecting entrepreneurship and education

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The aim of this research is to explore the contextual characteristics of a particular group of Dutch restaurant owners, the successful culinary entrepreneurs (SCEs), to examine how these contextual characteristics might be used in a hospitality education. This very small segment of the Dutch restaurant business (0.2–0.5% of the total restaurants) is known for its strong commitment to competitiveness, and delivering quality service and products. No previous research in the Netherlands has embarked on a search for connecting this specific category of practitioners to education. The main instrument for the research was in-depth interviewing. Six retired and four practising restaurant owners and a connoisseur of the business were interviewed. The transcripts of the recorded interviews were analysed, applying a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). The research generated a grounded theory on the SCE social construct and the central theme 'Living the business'. The grounded theory informs future practitioners, i.e. students, about how they can prepare for possible future business ventures in the culinary restaurant business. Furthermore, it confronts future practitioners with the notion of context and value systems that need to be considered in order to successfully engage in and sustain a career in the culinary restaurant sector. The findings from this research confirmed the importance of providing students in hospitality management education with input about professional development that is connected to a core segment in the hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** successful culinary entrepreneurs, contextual characteristics, grounded theory, hospitality management education

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### Introduction

This research seeks to identify what made a certain category of entrepreneurs successful in their business. From the analysis of the entrepreneurs' factual information and discourses, a contribution is generated for hospitality management programmes. The starting point of this research is grounded in the researcher's reflexive considerations while working in some of the leading Dutch culinary restaurants. There was a potential contribution to be made by exploring successful entrepreneurs' life stories and their perceptions of what brings them success, where they make important decisions, how they learn, and how a balance can be found between professional and personal life. The researcher's experience and learning generated by the years working for successful, small, upper segment culinary restaurant owners (SCEs) generated respect for the qualities they held. The SCEs are entrepreneurs in the restaurant luxury segment, in which providing hospitality and the enjoyment of high quality food and beverages is viewed as part of a special culture. In this culture 'hospitalableness' is one of the central themes. The philosopher Telfer (1996) refers to hospitalableness as depending on devotion and a spirit of generosity rather than on skill.

The following question initiated the research: 'Is it possible to research the upper segment restaurant entrepreneurs' worlds in order to explain some of the important contextual characteristics they share, and the way they deal with their environment and feed this information into the practice of hospitality management education?' A fair amount of scepticism towards the possible findings of such research was apparent. The contextual characteristics of entrepreneurs in

this restaurant practice and the way they deal with the people and issues around them might have been rooted in unethical foundations. Knowledge about the contextual characteristics of the successful entrepreneurs in the upper segment restaurants is very limited and mostly of a descriptive or anecdotal nature. Exploring the grounding principles that brought these successful entrepreneurs to the point they are now would be interesting and valuable. To define the category 'small upper segment culinary restaurants', the Michelin Guide, is considered to be the most important database in the Netherlands.

Michelin is the oldest restaurant assessing institution in Europe and has been publishing about restaurants and travel since 1900. Despite the growing number of restaurant quality assessing institutions, Michelin has kept its position of being the most reliable among them. Habets (2007) underlines that the Michelin awards still are the most trusted and desirable. In 2011, Michelin qualified 316 culinary restaurants in the Netherlands combining 98 with one to three stars, and another 218 that received a so-called Bib Gourmand (Restaurantgids Dinersite 2011). In Europe, quality gastronomy is synonymous with the Michelin Guide (Johnson et al. 2005), and it is a respected institution among chefs, restaurateurs, culinary experts and the dining public. Critical remarks about Michelin indicate that the institution has not always been consistent and objective and clear cases of mistakes have happened (Van Craenenbroeck 2011). Despite the criticism, Michelin is still the most prominent organisation for providing an external benchmark to measure the success of upper segment culinary restaurants in terms of product and service quality. The central

aim of the research is to explore how the contextual characteristics of successful small upper segment culinary restaurant owners (SCEs) potentially can be used in hospitality management education.

### Literature review

Lee-Ross and Lashley (2009, 69) assert that 'the hospitality entrepreneur does not have to be totally original to be creative ... most creative business ideas are simply modifications of others'. In addition, Bessant and Tidd (2007) refer to entrepreneurs' typical motivation as being a high need for achievement. Interestingly, most entrepreneurs cite making money as a secondary reason for starting their own business. Simon (2006) catches the spirit of opening a restaurant by saying that is more than 'just opening a restaurant' but much more a lesson about business and about life. The appeal is to be creative and to set oneself 'apart from the crowd', to take risk and to be passionate about what one does, whatever it is one does. For Cannon (2005), the restaurant entrepreneur should be a hospitality minded person that enjoys dealing with people and the relationship building that follows from that. Lee-Ross and Lashley (2009, 175) add to this: 'truly hospitality behaviour ... is motivated by genuine needs to meet the needs of others and hospitableness'. Sweeney (2004) asserts that a restaurant owner's best chance of success would be to focus on his or her own background, experiences, and generation. Looking at the value small restaurants can have for a society, Miller (2006, ix) postulates that a small restaurant is one of the few places where '... the owner's hard work and love of excellence show'. The entrepreneur's message should be about: giving friendship, calm and graceful service and artfully prepared food of the highest quality. Good theatre performance as a metaphor for successful restaurant operating fits with Goffman's (1959, 80) notion that 'The legitimate performances of everyday life are not "acted" or "put on"'. In order to be offering a legitimate performance in the restaurant as a theatre, the actor must be in full control of his role and perform it with the greatest dedication. Achieving emotional harmony, where behaviour is congruent with the actual emotions ('not bad acting') is the desired state (Lashley 2008).

There is scarce research specifically about the contextual characteristics of SCEs, although examples are present. Balazs (2001 2002) explained that French three Michelin star restaurant chefs, in most cases also owners, fulfil a multitude of roles in their restaurant. Balazs distilled 'leadership lessons' from the three Michelin star chefs, but, surprisingly, did not come up with the notion of applying them to hospitality management education nor inserted critical observations. Gillespie's notion about the essence of culinary restaurant entrepreneurship reconfirms that culinary restaurant entrepreneurs, 'most likely are not going to be remembered for their money and astute business sense, but for their productive, original and artistic contributions to the hospitality industry' (Gillespie 2001, 173). Entrepreneurs in small upper segment culinary restaurants operate their businesses in a very competitive environment as Johnson et al. (2005, 171) describe: 'belonging to the rare species of individuals who are able to take on the dual role of businessperson and creator at the same time'. Prices of the meals in culinary restaurants are high and the pressure to perform is extremely high. A part of the contextual

characteristics of successful entrepreneurs relates to personality traits, i.e. energy, health, emotional stability, intelligence and capacity to inspire. Another important part of the restaurant entrepreneur's contextual characteristics lies in the values domain, which consists of personal and ethical values. England (1967) found that personal value systems influence the way a person deals with business while conversely the personal value system is influenced by organisational life. Rokeach (1973, 7) defined human values as 'a prescriptive or proscriptive belief, wherein some means or end of actions is judged to be desirable or undesirable', and this affects the preferences on which people act. Schwartz (2006) identified that motivational types of values hold in many different nations and cultures. Age, life stage, gender and education have been identified as having an influence on peoples' value priorities. Personality traits and personal values are interrelated (Olver and Mooradian 2003), and the former are defined as endogenous basic tendencies tied to underlying biophysical response systems; they are strongly heritable, surprisingly immune to parental and social influences, and remarkably stable throughout adulthood. Personal values are considered to be learned beliefs and guiding principles. When looking at the relationship between personality traits and personal values, Olver and Mooradian conclude that personality and values both capture distinct and differential characteristics of the individual.

Concerns about entrepreneurship have certainly been raised throughout times. Kets de Vries (1985) warned that the same creative energy driving an entrepreneur comes from the destructive internal needs that can ruin a career or a company. Jones and Spicer (2009) warn that the broader context often used in current literature about entrepreneurship mostly does not extend much beyond related disciplines or fields of study. Jones and Spicer consider the entrepreneur to be one of the fantasies of economic discourse, which according to them may need to be unmasked. Closely connected to entrepreneurship is the negative influence on family and personal life stipulated by Wright and Zahra (2011). Entrepreneurs' drive to work hard and sustain the business create tensions in families, which multiply if they try to manage their family members in the day-to-day business. Dominant personalities in entrepreneurship are a potential threat to marriages and other personal relationships, whereas the pure labour intensive nature of entrepreneurship per definition leaves little time for personal lives. There is not a lot of evidence suggesting that successful small upper segment culinary restaurant entrepreneurs' contextual characteristics are currently used to enrich education. It became clear from the literature that in order to properly explain the potential influence that Dutch SCEs' contextual characteristics could have on hospitality management education, an original and grounded research approach would be needed.

### Research design

In this research successful small upper segment culinary restaurant owners (SCEs) and one respondent who knew the community of SCEs from close by were asked about their experiences and perceptions by means of in-depth interviews. Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory facilitated the construction of theory in combination with the reflexive position of the researcher. The research was in line

with Hammersley (2002), who defines the outcomes and importance of this type of highly context-specific research as providing 'moderate enlightenment'. It puts the outcomes of the research in a context of consideration, and takes away strong generalisation claims. The sample was chosen based on two variables to define success: (1) Recognition in terms of service and culinary achievement, and (2) Business achievement. For the first indicator of success, the most reputable quality assessing publication, the Michelin Guide, was taken. Business success would best have been assessed by looking at revenue, value generation and the realisation of profit objectives, but this was virtually impossible to assess because the owners would not allow insight into their figures. A related indicator of business success is sustainability of the company, and if it is able to be sustained for over ten years it would be appropriate to call it successful, business wise. The choice and size of the sample and the number of interviews followed the notion of theoretical data saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## Findings

In the analysis of the interview transcripts, simultaneously theoretical memos were written in which the contemplation materialised, triggered by the interviewees' story lines. Interviews of one to three hours with six retired and four practising SCEs and a connoisseur of the business were executed. Constant comparison between the interviews and with the literature brought saturation into the analysis. The SCEs were no clearly definable individual personalities but were people within their social context. Their lives were the result of a complex set of person-related factors, people around them (partner, family, staff and others), activities and circumstances. The choices they made were in many cases influenced by certain happenings or people. In the process of simultaneous data gathering and analysis, slowly but steadily the social construct of the SCE started to emerge. Also the influence that this phenomenon could have on hospitality management education started to make sense. Analysing the SCEs' personalities to see what made them who they were was an important element in the coding. The information obtained from the first eight individual interviews formed the basis for defining code labels and categories that captured the SCEs' worlds. After tentatively formulating the social construct of the SCE, three additional interviews were done more explicitly to engage in theoretical sampling (Birks and Mills 2011) in which the findings were compared and validated. Figure 1 shows the overview of codes and the overarching categories in which they were mapped.

Each of the categories, 'issues/happenings/themes', 'personality', 'activities', 'management related' and 'value system', is of a rather different nature but they all could be found in the stories of the entrepreneurs interviewed. The categories were then elevated to a more abstract level by looking at the core of the process. Clearly the SCEs came into this world and brought their, by 'nature given', characteristics. The category 'personality related' could then be seen as the individual, the starting point which conceptualised in the theme of 'constituting'. The second category captured the codes which signified that the SCE was continuously 'valuing' the world around him, while moving through life, and making decisions. The individual SCE

talked about how he engaged with the issues, happenings and themes around him, which fitted the theme: 'facing'. In this process of facing the world around, the individual used and further developed his value systems. In the dominant part of his life, running his restaurant and dealing with the people in that context, the SCE is involved in management; he is 'managing'. The themes, 'constituting', 'valuing', 'facing' and 'managing' characterise the essence of the SCE's 'being', which is active, moving and fluid. It is not a static, pre-defined format that can be replicated without careful reflection and contemplation. It is a dynamic process, but it can be analysed in order to learn from it, and to see what went right, what went wrong and what did not go at all. The process followed Saldana's (2009, 12) suggestion to progress from the coding to the eventual theory. The analysis via categories and themes, moved from the 'real' and 'particular' captured in the coding process to the more 'abstract' and 'general' in the theory of the SCE social construct and 'living the business'. In Figure 2, the abstracting from the codes to categories, and then to themes and theory is visualised.

## Constituting

The literature suggests that personality as a starting point for entrepreneurs significantly influences their decision making (Littunen 2000, Morrison 2001, Legohérel et al. 2004, Lee-Ross and Lashley 2009). Among the personality-related behaviours of SCEs is the enormous focusing by the entrepreneurs in this category. There seemed to be the capability to allocate enormous energy in order to achieve a particular goal, but as a consequence this can have effects such as anxiety and restlessness that potentially negatively impact the entrepreneur. Crucial in the perception of personality-related challenges is the way SCEs deal with them. The culinary restaurant segment puts a high demand on the people working in it, and may serve as a good 'environment' for people with high energy levels. It became clear that a range of personality-related elements could be put under the same heading referred to as 'drive', which is considered as the on-going urge of the SCE personality to establish a place in life through his profession, and to be good or preferably the best. As another distinctive characteristic, a strong personal work discipline was mentioned, as one respondent expressed it: '... I think that discipline, in many ways, has to be one of the major qualities. I think that SCEs are extremely disciplined in many respects ... they will not be swept away easily, they just cannot have that happen ...'. Furthermore, the SCE has a distinct need for freedom and independence. It was interesting to see that some of the entrepreneurs deliberately set out to have strong people with them in the key positions in their restaurants. They did so in order to be able to take on responsibilities outside the restaurant. One entrepreneur mentioned: '... freedom is vitally important for me ... plan your own day, implement your own priorities and of course you have tasks, meetings and responsibilities, things that have to be done, but freedom means reducing issues to accessible chunks, in the sense of "okay, that I can still handle", but you know it is about deciding yourself when to do something ...'. He admitted that if he not have been so insistent on his freedom and taken one of the key positions in the restaurant, it might have made his restaurant more successful and given him more profits. This finding conforms with what Rokeach (1973, 1979) found as one of

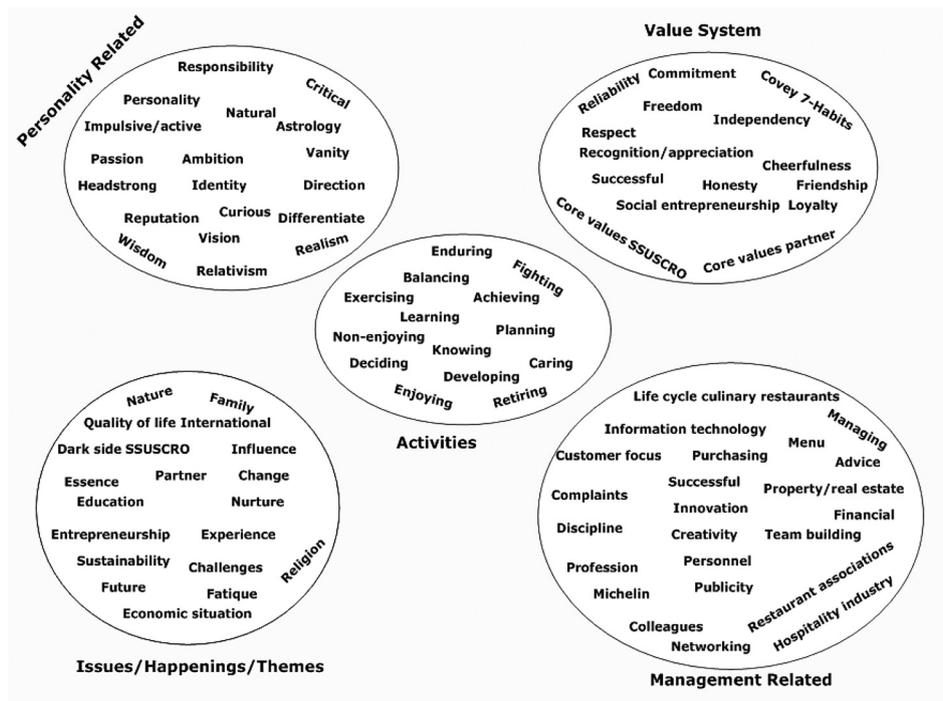


Figure 1: Semi-abstract map of codes and categories

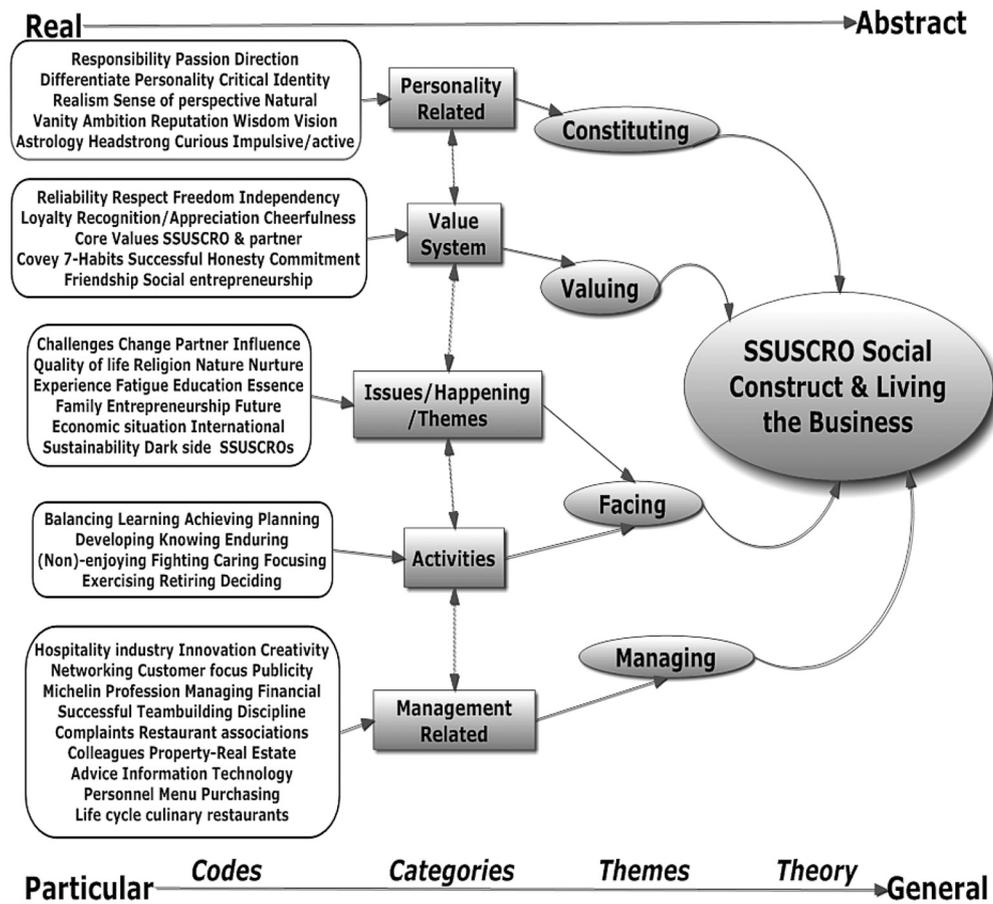


Figure 2: From codes to theory (SSUSCRO mentioned as the original term for SCE)

the dominant values of entrepreneurs in small businesses.

*Getting to grips with reality and choosing a critical perspective in the upper segment*

Another important aspect of the SCE is the insistence on 'keeping their feet firmly on the ground'. Despite this sense of level-headedness, many SCEs also seemed to like spending money which has an element of ambivalence to it. Where does this drive to spend money come from? Is it the luxury life-style that SCEs see from their clientele or is it more related to their personality? The notion of entrepreneurs spending money connects to Jones and Spicer's (2009) critical assessment of the tendency among entrepreneurs to have excessive patterns of spending and in many cases wasting more than average resources. Jones and Spicer assume that entrepreneurs feel to be entitled to such spilling of resources because that is part of their position as an entrepreneur. The successful entrepreneurs who know how to sustain their business over a long period of time are 'down-to-earth' with a strong sense of realism which can be found in their statements; as one said: '... very important in entrepreneurship in a Michelin star restaurant: some see it as having a star status. But if you see it like a star status, without a shadow of a doubt, you will fall flat on your face. Never forget, high trees catch a lot of wind ...'. Other SCE's personality characteristic are: a sense of putting things into perspective, cheerfulness and aspiring for quality of life. SCEs demonstrated a sense of perspective when it came down to their highly rated Michelin star restaurants, accommodating rich clientele. One, when asked what he would convey to future professionals, i.e. students, said: '... very important in our profession is the cheerfulness. It is obviously a feast. You really need to see the cheerfulness and the relativity of what we are doing ...'. SCEs are not only extremely focused and driven to perform, but as a balance should also possess the characteristic of putting the serious nature of their profession into perspective. The SCEs are critical individuals and express their critical stance towards many issues they deal with in business and life. Comments were made about successors, and the situation in the hospitality industry in general in terms of customer focus. Some entrepreneurs critically assessed colleagues who were financially not successful. The majority of the SCEs were criticising the needs and mentality of the contemporary younger generation who worked in their restaurants. They mentioned the perceived lower level of endurance and high aspirations by saying: '... they just want a big car and to be traveling around the world, even before they properly started working ...'

**Valuing**

Following one's values, overcoming challenges and keeping the business alive. Most SCEs talked quite openly about their values and acknowledged the impact these had on their lives and business. They knew what is important for them, and what not and were persistent in this, which fits findings of Lindsay et al. (2005), asserting that values tend to be enduring, do not easily change over time and are instilled in people from an early age onwards. The SCEs confirmed that particular values should be intrinsically present in hospitality professionals in order to be effective in the sector. These intrinsic values make it more relaxed and less forced for them to work in the sector. The interviewees mentioned: loving, caring, respecting

and being considerate, in line with what Lashley (2008, 13) calls 'hospitableness'. Emenheiser, Clay, and Palakurthi (1998) found that it is the perception of recruiters when hiring for upscale restaurants that service attitude is the most important characteristic for future staff. An important theme in the stories of the SCEs was 'challenges', and how they dealt with them. One entrepreneur talked about his dyslexia, which made him repeat classes at secondary school and forced him to leave a hospitality management degree programme after one year. He described as the learning effect: '... the good side of the situation was that I learned from the challenges how to fight and acquire a good sense of endurance ...'. Another one voiced his feelings about dealing with challenges in his culinary restaurant when referring to the diminishing market: '... to face this, you have to armour yourself. I am thinking continuously about where I can make changes. You cannot close your eyes for the situation. It is your responsibility, to make sure that everything turns out well in the end ...'. Facing and dealing with challenges is one of the essential contextual characteristics that sets the 'real' SCE apart from the entrepreneur that does not 'survive'. The SCE's capacity to do this is in line with what Parsa et al. (2005, 316) determine as why restaurants become successful or not: 'it is the restaurateur's responsibility to prepare for impending external "weather" conditions'. A realistic conclusion is that challenging economic conditions are re-appearing regularly, and therefore it is the SCE responsible to face the economic challenges.

*Influencing the SCE*

In the early years, and later on in life, the SCE is influenced by people around him. Some people from within the work context have a major influence on the choices SCEs make in their lives and businesses. Some influential people provide a desirable example, but others influence in a negative way. Several entrepreneurs referred to their family background, as having been of influence on their choices to go into the restaurant business, which Danda and Reyes (2007) refer to as 'familiness'. Another important and decisive format influencing the existence and life of the SCE, is the way in which the individual is connected to his partner. Without an effective symbiosis between two people, the phenomenon of SCE cannot be sustainable. The top-performing SCEs were examples of combinations in which entrepreneur and partner were cooperating effectively. There is some anecdotal evidence suggesting the value of 'partners as couple' in a culinary restaurant. Starchefs (2012) refer to this notion as: 'culinary couples – demonstrating that the whole is greater than its parts!' Kets de Vries (1985, 3) warns about the negative effects that obsessed entrepreneurial personalities may have on family relations such as marriage: 'Obsession with one's work and making the company successful leaves little time for family. Intense entrepreneurial personalities could also challenge marriages, frequently leading to their demise'. If there is no partnership between a couple as entrepreneurs present, an alternative could be found in the role of long staying loyal senior employees. In a number of culinary restaurants there were examples of these particular 'partnerships' in which employees fulfil a life-time role, socially contextualised in connection to the entrepreneur. A connected issue within the situation of having partners in restaurant entrepreneurship lies in the way they manage to achieve a work-life balance. For

future professionals i.e. students of hospitality management programmes there should be a thorough consideration of the work-life balance, preferably before they start in entrepreneurship. There is a distinctly dark side of SCE life involved, which does not surface in a lot of publications. Having grown up in a traditional SCE family, one of the entrepreneurs acknowledged not having always appreciated the situation by saying: '... *Look, I think we did not come out of our upbringing without any damage. I think, I am normal and my brothers are normal. Still, you notice that we did not have a normal family life ...*' . His wife added to this: '... *Well, not a lot of love, not a lot of parents ...*' . The perceived inadequacy of parents taking care of their children is not uniquely connected to the SCE construct but it is definitely present, and influences the perception and outcomes of it.

#### *Doing the right things right and getting towards the end.*

SCEs follow their value system as the main driver for their actions. There is not a homogeneous pattern of things the SCEs like to do, but there are commonalities. Going abroad both for work as well as for holidays was enjoyed by most. The entrepreneurs defined visiting their peers' Michelin star restaurants as a value adding activity. The primary aim of visiting these restaurants was to look for benchmarks, in order to compare their own business to, and to find new ideas for their restaurants. An extreme example was provided by one entrepreneur who, with his wife, wrote a book about their visits to all 54 three Michelin star restaurants in Europe. Some SCEs resented the, in their eyes, bureaucratic nature of the educational sector. One said: '... *so little is made of it. There are few teachers who have the "drive", who do something extra for their pupils. Something that irritates me, is when there is a meeting, the time is taken from the pupils ...*' . Another assessed the quality of the people in education as not being up to standard, and as a result education is always behind the real world. The dislike for education by restaurant practitioners makes it challenging to establish a connection. Five other code labels that connected to 'facing' by SCEs are: 'learning', 'developing', 'focusing', 'fighting' and 'enduring'. It became clear that there is a common awareness of fatigue when SCEs get to the end of their careers. One talked about it: '... *I said, when you get older the flexibility gets less ... specifically because of the complexity of all these emails, flowers and ... cooking. But, anyway, as long as I stay healthy, I will keep on doing this ...*' . A concern was raised here; if an entrepreneur does not have a plan for if he were to become ill or worse, it would leave all the people working in the restaurant without a job and harm them. Retiring is definitely an issue, and should be discussed in hospitality management education. When asked about the proper retiring moment and age, there were essentially two types of answers: (1) To plan a particular age for retiring and to work to realise this plan, (2) Not to have a particular plan and as a consequence to keep on working. Research about retiring of entrepreneurs like the SCEs is scarce. Noll (2012) confirms that many restaurant owners have shied away from retirement plans because of the cost, and Mealey (2012) adds that restaurant owners should figure out how they want to save for retirement.

## **Managing**

### *Managing costs and traffic and working, changing and sustaining.*

SCEs identified three major indicators of 'success': (1) Michelin's appreciation, (2) financial results and (3) delivering good entrepreneurship. One of the interviewees explicitly stated that the element 'financial results' was absolutely the most important indicator for success in business, despite possible appealing restaurant awards such as given by Michelin and others. The conclusion was clear that either by education or experience, entrepreneurs need financial management skills and knowledge in order to become and stay fully successful. An important question was: 'how can a viable and sustainable culinary restaurant venture be realised?' Some luxury international hotel chains, host Michelin star restaurants. Multi-national hotel corporations have the management structure and the finances needed to sustain operations like Michelin star restaurants. Another potentially viable format is the 'chef-owner working together with partner'. In this situation there may be hotel rooms attached to the culinary restaurant but no substantial hotel activity. There was the general perception that in the future it would no longer be possible to operate the two and three Michelin star restaurants without having sponsors.

### *Focusing on the big picture and the details and getting the money in and out*

Balazs (2001) came to the observation that the great three Michelin star chef-owners in France combine an overall 'helicopter-view' with a strong attention to detail. Balazs referred to this as follows: 'They are both "micromanagers" and "general managers", constantly on the lookout for minor details that need correction, while never losing sight of the "big picture"' (2001, 140). The SCEs confirmed that the nature of culinary restaurants success is most certainly in the details of the services and products offered. For the entrepreneur, it is tempting to be 'on the spot' to make sure the details are secured. On the other hand, there is the notion of an entrepreneur having to look at the 'big picture' of his restaurant. Some entrepreneurs benefited from financing by people who knew their qualities, and who showed commitment to invest in their businesses. The credibility of the entrepreneur before starting his own restaurant is leading in this process. One entrepreneur said about this: '... *We had very pleasant shareholders. They did not begrudge us and they also told us: "we have done this to help you and not to get rich from it" ...*' . Creating a network of friends who would also be the regular guests in the restaurant, is an important notion for future entrepreneurs, which could benefit them. Some contemporary applications of 'crowd funding' show resemblance to this creating of a network in order to finance a restaurant business.

### *Being successful or not and shining stars not always found*

It was interesting and important to take notice of the definitions and explanations mentioned about successful culinary restaurant entrepreneurship. One entrepreneur asserted that it would be better to take over a business that one can still develop instead of buying a successful culinary restaurant that is at the top of its life cycle. The investment in such an established successful business will be very difficult to earn

back. Owning real estate or property is important for SCEs. Some explained that it is not just about owning real estate, and stipulated that as an entrepreneur, one should have a solid return on investment from the daily operations. Many restaurant owners manage to survive for a long time with a very low return on investment because they 'live out of their business'. Daily revenues and return on investment are, however, crucial for sustaining, and in combination with owning the property contribute to operating a successful culinary restaurant. The SCEs, especially the older ones, explained that the culinary restaurant industry has changed dramatically over the past three decades. Being distinctive is much more difficult than some years ago. Chefs get their Michelin stars at a much younger age, products from all over the world can be acquired easily and television presents an array of culinary programmes, which have influenced the market. People know more about the process and products, and this has liberalised the culinary sector. Better educated customers put a higher claim on the capacities and knowledge of the entrepreneurs. From the testimonies of the SCEs, it became clear that Michelin stars are a desirable target to achieve. There is, however, a dark side to the SCE phenomenon and stars do not always shine. In the culinary restaurant business, people work long and irregular hours, and that has an impact on their personal lives. The dark side of the SCE construct is something to warn future professionals about.

#### *Being in a people business and profiling and connecting*

One respondent commented that Michelin should not only be assessing the quality of the food but also the way culinary restaurants deal with their staff. Another added that a Michelin star restaurant does not mean, the owner has a star status and that he should be respectful to his staff. Almost all interviewees confirmed the notion of staff being the important element in a successful operating culinary restaurant. There are two elements involved in the preference of staff to work in Michelin star restaurants. One is the CV-building effect, which aims at getting good restaurants on to one's résumé, in order to be more employable. The other element is much more profound, where it suggests that the practitioner has seen and experienced the benchmark of high quality standards. The assumption here is that having worked (and lived) in a high quality context raises the potential to evaluate and deliver high quality work output oneself. The importance for culinary restaurants to generate publicity and stay in the spotlight in order to attract customers was highlighted by the SCEs. If customers, however, expect the SCE to be active and visible in the restaurant, it will disappoint them if they don't see him because he might be out for external publicity generating activities. It became clear that there is a changing composition of SCEs in the profession from around 50% manager-owners to dominantly chef-owners. The connection between colleagues in the world of the SCEs is strong, when listening to the accounts they produce about each other. Virtually every interviewee knew colleagues and could describe their personality and contextual characteristics.

#### *SCE social construct and education*

The findings show that SCEs, rather than just being individual people, fit into a 'social construct' that is composed of several elements. The SCE social construct at the core has

the individual, the person, the entrepreneur mostly closely connected to a partner. The entrepreneur faces life and acts upon the experiences, happenings and issues in which process his value system is leading. He engages in the profession of managing the culinary restaurant. The SCE social construct has aspects to offer to hospitality management education and in that sense expands on the research of Balazs (2001, 2002) who first suggested to extract leadership lessons from the French three Michelin star SCEs. Looking at the findings, a central theme emerged: 'Living the Business', which is about people who commit a dominant part of their lives to building a world in which they can sustain. Their world is for a dominant part centered around the culinary restaurant in which they unleash their thinking power, psychical resources, creativity, and managerial competencies. Running a culinary restaurant can only be done if it is lived as a comprehensive existence, and not just as a means to get income. As one entrepreneur said: '... *when properly done, a culinary top restaurant is a goal in its own right ...*'. SCEs emphasised that it is crucial that somebody who works in a culinary restaurant 'lives' the values and behaves from 'within', meaning that there should be an intrinsic connection to the way the hospitality is delivered. Only by having this 'inner connection', it will be possible to execute the profession in a relaxed, non-forced manner and to sustain in it. In the conclusions section an explanation will be offered on how the SCE social construct and 'Living the Business' can potentially influence and benefit hospitality management education.

## Conclusions

The grounded theory built from the data in this research cumulated in the SCE social construct and its central theme of 'living the business'.

The personality related elements and the influence from the SCE's socialisation in life are the constituting factors. The phases of constituting and valuing are conceptualised by the term 'see', which symbolises the paradigm of the SCE. The phases of facing and managing are conceptualised in 'do' and follow how the SCE sees the world and his part in it. From 'see' and 'do', the SCE 'gets', to what is considered here the social construct of a successful culinary entrepreneur. The SCE social construct with its central theme of 'living the business' can potentially influence hospitality management education.

#### ***Special people in a special business***

The personalities of SCEs, although individually different, show common features. They are extremely active, which is beneficial for working in a sector such as culinary restaurants. People possessing enormous drive will be able to put more than average levels of energy into the process. It will, however, be of the utmost importance that there is a 'balancing factor' in the SCEs' life, such as a partner or (a combination of) other people to liaise with in their work environment. SCE personalities show a passion for their work, which is driven by an urge to achieve, and to be recognised for that. Contrastingly, most SCEs see the nature of success in perspective. They know very well that business comes and goes and they realise that basic processes affect the environment for their restaurant business. SCEs are critical people who like to evaluate the culinary restaurant business, their own restaurants, their colleagues'

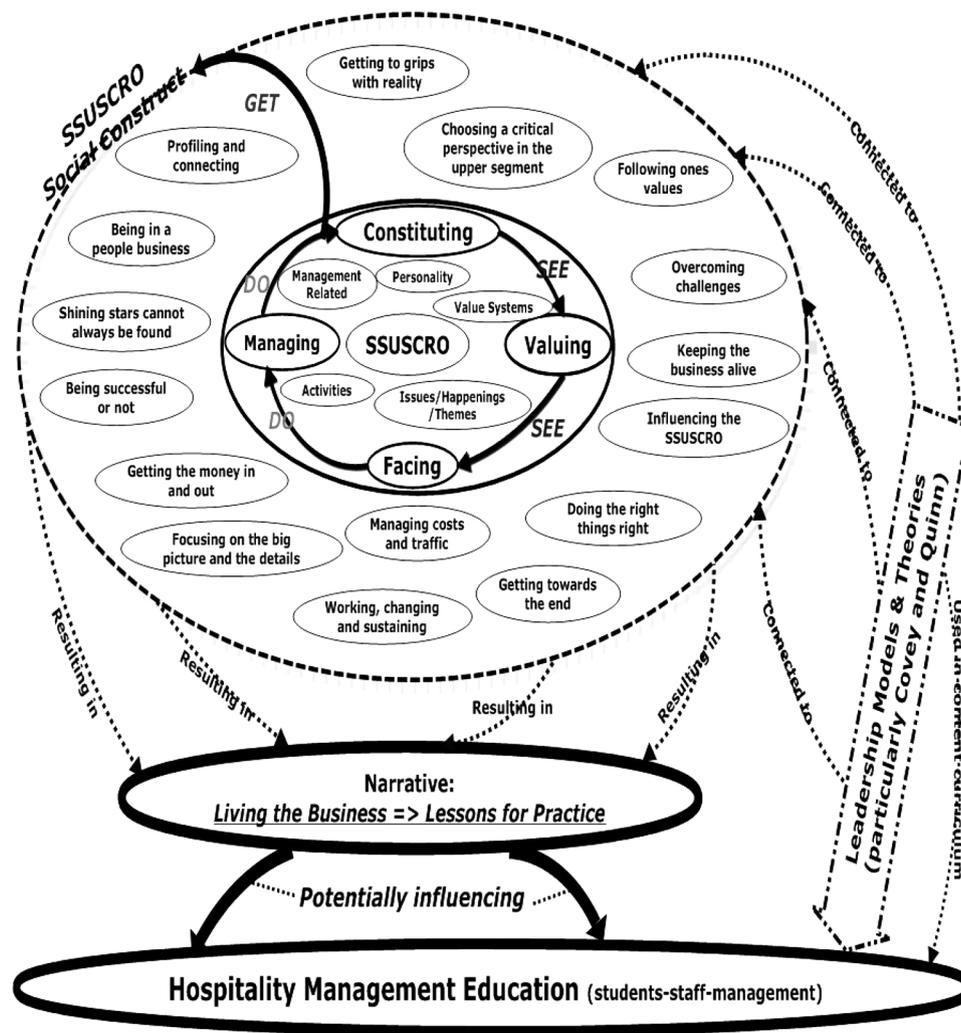


Figure 3: SCE construct and hospitality education (SCE and SSUSCRO account for the same concept)

personalities, and education in the field of hospitality. Creating a balance is one of the keys for sustainable entrepreneurship because there is in most cases a particular thin line between private and business life. The successful restaurant entrepreneurs came to grips with the ever existent tension between the private and work domain, but reaching a balance did not happen without sacrifices. The number of frightening examples in the SCE world of less successful entrepreneurs and staff members who destroyed their family lives was substantial. Enjoying a notion of freedom or independence is important for SCEs. They generate energy from the idea of not having an employer who will tell them what to do. SCEs trade gladly the perks of employment, such as a steady salary, vacation rights and pension, for independent entrepreneurship. Customers, or 'guests' in the upper segment of the hospitality industry, expect to see 'hospitalableness' in the person who is providing the 'hospitality experience'. Gehrels and Dumont (2012, 76) referred to this as a 'show' or 'wow-effect' that is needed to generate an unforgettable experience. Guests will expect great value, while 'value for money' has also become crucial in this luxury sector. There is no educational programme that

prepares people to become a SCE. Most of them have a mix of formal education, experience and 'learning by doing'. It is difficult for SCEs to delegate a majority of their responsibilities to their staff because by the nature of their profession they are expected to see and manage the details. This paying attention to both detail and the bigger picture was confirmed by Balazs (2001, 2002). Michelin and other restaurant assessing media are feared by the SCEs because getting the stars, and into the quality rankings is very important for the business. Michelin stars have an impact on the restaurant's potential to generate revenue, which is recognised by potential investors. Every SCE, in his own words, defined being successful as the combination of (1) financial rewards generated by their revenues, (2) getting the recognition and appreciation of the external quality assessing bodies such as Michelin, (3) the appreciation of loyal customers, and (4) knowing themselves to be good entrepreneurs. The findings of this research suggest that the direct involvement of SSUSROs in hospitality management education may be valuable.

### Recommendations for practice, education and further research

Hospitality management programmes educate students to be employed in a diversity of hospitality management related fields. Although the culinary restaurant sector only constitutes a relatively small proportion of the total Dutch hospitality industry, it is the segment where customer quality demands and prices are high. This means that practitioners, and particularly entrepreneurs, within the culinary restaurant sector are faced with a challenging profession. They need to perform at a high level in order to sustain and to be successful. The increasingly available information about culinary products and the media presence of chefs would make it tempting to choose a career in the culinary restaurant sector or one that is closely related. As a result of the growth in the number of Michelin star restaurants, it is becoming more important to provide information and learning materials about this segment to students on hospitality management programmes. Future practitioners, i.e. entrepreneurs, need to be knowledgeable beforehand about all the contingencies in seeking a specific career in the culinary restaurant sector. A SCE needs to properly understand the 'stage' on which the performance of providing hospitableness is set. It will be certainly easier to accept the role setting in which there is a distinction between the 'guest' and the 'host' if one has a full understanding of it before going into this type of business. Getting recognition, appreciation and the reward of successful business is realised by offering the ultimate guest experience and SCEs need to be unconditionally committed to getting their customers to pay for the meal and wines at their restaurant. Hospitableness is key for the SCE and connected to this is the concept of turning restaurant guests into friends. In line with Meyer (2006) was the indication that staff is another one of the crucial factors for successful culinary restaurants. With the right, extremely motivated and loyal people, great achievements can be made. An interesting and worthwhile expansion on the findings of this research would be to do similar research among other specific groups of practitioners in the hospitality industry to get more in-depth knowledge and understanding about their contextual characteristics and social constructs. Such research would provide a further understanding of practitioners in different industry segments, which could potentially influence hospitality management education. Another direction for further research, would be to undertake similar research with an equivalent sample in other countries in the world.

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