Restaurant wholesalers’ role and participation in a local food network

A comparative case study of two Swedish restaurant wholesalers

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Abstract

The implications of globalisation of food systems have led to a reconciliation of local food systems in modern times. As the local food systems have started to increase, it can still be seen that the conventional food supply chain is dominating the market. This is derived from the fact that local food systems are often inefficient due to the individualistic nature of the smaller, less complex local food collaborations. Presented solutions to break the inefficiency trend and harvest the benefits of local food systems is to use the efficient restaurant wholesale actor as a "trade vehicle". This, combined with local food networks that unite small-scale farmers and increase the product pool to ensure quantity while adding value to an otherwise homogeneous product by the concept of "local". This could potentially result in more local collaborations and thereby increase local food on the market.

By conducting two semi-structured interviews with two of Sweden's largest restaurant wholesalers and analysing the results with conventional content analysis, this study aims to generate more knowledge about the role and participation of restaurant wholesalers in a local food system. Therefore, a comparative case study was conducted to identify the studied cases' differences, similarities, and contrasts. Furthermore, this is achieved through a theoretical perspective involving supply chain and value chain theory, which is developed into a theoretical synthesis based on Chopra & Meindls (2013) theory of finding the strategic fit.

This study found that the collaboration between a restaurant wholesaler and local food networks is highly uncertain, whereas the conventional food supply chain is predictable. But also that there are differences in how responsive/efficient the studied restaurant wholesalers act within the same business environment. Finally, it was found that the restaurant wholesaler and local food networks do not directly have a strategic fit.

The research questions are discussed to fulfil the study's aim, which leads to the conclusions of the restaurant wholesalers' role and participation in a local food system. The significant findings are that the role of the studied restaurant wholesaler is not to meet customer niche needs but to create value through efficiency by operational activities related to distribution, logistics, and coordination among the involved supply chain actors. However, the wholesalers also exhibit responsiveness towards their customer preferences for local food in alternative ways even if it does not suit their business strategy. The results show that one wholesaler meets these customer preferences by conducting business that does not contribute to adding value and is therefore inefficient. In comparison, the other wholesaler participates in a complex network of other more specialised wholesalers that focus on meeting customer preferences.

Keywords: Competitive strategy, Local food network, Local food system, Restaurant wholesaler, Strategic fit, Supply chain, Supply chain strategy and Value chain.

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Abbreviations

LFN	Local food networks
LFS	Local food systems
MS	Martin & Servera
SG	Snabbgross

1. Introduction

This chapter first briefly introduces restaurant wholesalers within a local food system. In addition to a problem statement that leads to the study's aim and research questions. Finally, the applied delimitations and an illustration of the study structure is presented.

1.1 Background

Globalisation has extensively affected the food system in recent decades; consumers have access to international cuisine and exotic food in their everyday life (Jones, Comfort & Hillier 2004; Paciarotti & Torregiani 2021). The result of international trading has led to complex supply chains with several intermediaries between producers and consumers. The effects of the global food system are associated with a wide range of issues, including long-distance transportation, damage to biodiversity and ecosystems, and difficulty for the consumers to have full knowledge of the product's heritage and quality (Paciarotti & Torregiani 2021).

As a response to global food systems, local food systems (LFS) have re-emerged to create new, shorter, less complex chains of food supply, e.g., farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture, and food hubs (Marsden et al. 2000; Kneafsey et al. 2013; Betri & Mulligan 2016). The definition of an LFS is diffuse due to the interpretation of "local," but the European Joint Research Centre has defined it as;

> "a food system in which foods are produced, processed and retailed within a defined geographical area (within a 20 to 100 km radius approximately)" (Kneafsey et al. 2013:13).

Moreover, the last two decades have favoured the local food systems (Enthoven & Van den Broeck 2021). LFS are acknowledged as a potential transitional solution toward more resilient and sustainable food systems recognized by the general public, researchers, and policy-makers (Kneafsey et al. 2013; De shutter 2017). Multiple public initiatives are promoting local food by investing millions and/or billions of dollars/euros into projects like "know your farmer, know your food initiative" and the "from farm to fork strategy" (Enthoven & Van den Broeck 2021).

Furthermore, it is referred to as “the next hot thing” within the gastronomic world (Roy, Hall & Ballantine 2019).

The local food systems are trending, and much research focuses on improving the implementation of local food within the restaurant sector. The current state of the research focuses on motivations and challenges in developing and maintaining a connection between restaurant wholesalers and local producers (Roy, Hall & Ballentine 2019). Previous literature also shed light on barriers and enablers for connecting restaurant owners or chefs and the restaurant wholesaler (Roy & Ballantine 2020). But studies have also been conducted to examine the whole-chain perspective, to better understand a transition of local food sold within a conventional food system through experiences and perceptions from all involved actors as well as through a value chain perspective (Abate-Kassa & Peterson 2011; Bloom & Hinrichs 2011; Givens & Dunning 2019). The goal of this research is to involve the wholesale distributor in the farm-to-restaurant supply chain on a local level to harvest all the benefits that come with an LFS (Abate-Kassa & Peterson 2011; Bloom & Hinrichs 2011; Givens & Dunning 2019; Roy, Hall & Ballantine 2019; Roy & Ballantine 2020). While simultaneously reducing costs associated with transportation and marketing meanwhile getting premium prices for producers and a fresh and qualitative product for the restaurant (ibid.). However, the research is still nascent and needs further qualitative studies to explain the complex relationship between different solutions for local food systems and restaurant wholesalers (Roy, Hall & Ballantine 2019; Roy & Ballantine 2020).

Presented solutions for reaching these goals are through *local food networks* (LFN), *a concept within the local food system* to gain a higher market share (Clark & Inwood 2016). Given examples of local food networks are food hubs and mid-tier value chains (ibid.). As an alternative to fulfilling all activities individually, these local food networks create competitiveness by collaboration among small- and medium-sized farms (Berti & Mulligan 2016; Clark & Inwood 2016). Food hubs are an innovative way to reach the market by several small-medium scale farmers cooperating to have enough supply to offer the conventional food supply chain (Berti & Mulligan 2016). Similarly, the mid-tier value chain involves remaining family farms that are still competitive in the market but need to change direction from an efficiency-based strategy to a value-creating strategy (Stevenson et al. 2011).

While previous literature almost exclusively has focused on wholesalers selling to restaurants, that is the focus this study will investigate further (Abate-Kassa & Peterson 2011; Bloom & Hinrichs 2011; Givens & Dunning 2019; Roy, Hall & Ballantine 2019; Roy & Ballantine 2020). Additionally, previous research has identified empirical data and categorised themes for the collaboration between local food systems and farm-restaurant supply chains. This study wants to find support for what can be seen in the real world of wholesalers within a local food system through the lens of supply chain management and value chain theory. A literature review was conducted, and empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews to achieve that. A comparative case study is conducted to generate new insight into this field of restaurant wholesalers within a local food system.

1.2 Problem statement

The average Swedish household has an increasing part of their food consumption in restaurants (LRF 2018). Accordingly, the money spent on restaurant food in Sweden has increased (SCB 2016). A survey conducted by VISITA (2017) illustrated that more than every eighth (13%) of Swedish citizens consume a restaurant meal at least once a week. Furthermore, LRF, the well-known farmer cooperative, states that only 20 % of the meat served in Swedish restaurants is Swedish. And a report from Naturskyddsföreningen (2021) has collected data from the four largest Swedish restaurant wholesalers with the result that 55-90% of the meat sold to restaurants is imported. The restaurant wholesaler with the lowest import quota, Martin & Servera, had 55% of its meat being imported. In contrast, the highest import quota was Snabbgross, which imported 90 % of its meat (Naturskyddsföreningen 2021).

Even so, Livsmedelsföretagarna (2017) conducted a survey that found that 85% of the Swedish population considers the consumption of Swedish foods and drinks to be important. Furthermore, Ekelund, Fernqvist & Tjärnemo (2007) conducted a study to research Swedish consumers' perception of Swedish produced vegetables versus imported and ecological. The results showed, in accordance with previous literature that has been conducted in other contexts, that the participants preferred the domestically produced vegetable. Even if the empirical findings show promising results, food imports increase (ibid.). Sweden's national food administration and Sveriges Konsumenter have individually conducted investigations about the consumer knowledge of restaurant food, resulting in eighth out of ten Swedish citizens wanting to know where the restaurant’s food originated (Sveriges Konsumenter 2018; Livsmedelsverket 2021). There seems to be a gap between what is demanded by the customers, what is sold from the wholesalers, and what is supplied by the restaurants.

One potential solution for this would be for the restaurants to have a direct supply of food from the local producers (Paciarotti & Torregiani 2018). However, according to Roy & Ballantine (2020), chefs prefer to purchase their products from a restaurant wholesaler, mainly because of the time efficiency and that the requested volume is more reliably available. But also, since wholesaler pricing is more reasonable from the restaurant's perspective, there is a larger assortment to choose from and a convenient ordering process (ibid.). Another issue is that local food systems are criticised for being inefficient when it comes to logistics and coordination among the different activities within the supply chain of local food (Mount 2012). Mainly because LFS-actors operate as sole proprietors, trying to fulfil all activities individually and not specialising in anything. Meanwhile, the role of the wholesaler is explained as a “trade vehicle” for less efficient firms (Crozet, Lalanne, & Poncet 2013). Thereby, a matchup between local food systems' value-adding products and the wholesaler's efficiency in working together could potentially create a competitive collaboration (Roy, Hall & Balltine 2019; Givens & Dunning 2019).

To further investigate this potential relationship between LFS and restaurant wholesalers, Chopra & Meindls (2013) theory of finding the *strategic fit* is used in this study. As follows is a short explanation that will be further developed in chapter two. In finding the strategic fit, the uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand must be identified to understand the wholesaler's business environment. Followed by the supply chain capabilities, meaning that the actors' performance may vary within the same business environment depending on the wholesaler niche. And lastly, the most beneficial strategy for the wholesaler must match the uncertainty of the supply chain and the individually given capabilities within it. Therefore, the following aim and research questions are formulated.

1.3 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to generate more knowledge about the role and participation of restaurant wholesalers in a local food system. By using the lenses of supply chain management and value chain theory, this study addresses the following questions:

- How do restaurant wholesalers attempt to achieve a strategic fit within their business environment?
- In what way do restaurant wholesalers exhibit working with local food networks?

1.4 Delimitations

Delimitations made in this study are only to investigate the wholesaler's business aimed at conveying food to private restaurants. Therefore, the influence of the public sector and franchise restaurant chains was omitted to compare and analyse the empirical results more consistently to fulfil this study's aim. This study's definition of restaurant wholesalers refers to a full-assortment wholesaler that supplies a wide range of products, both foods and non-food, to offer complete service for private restaurants (Martinez 2017). Furthermore, the definition of restaurant wholesaler will followingly refer to a large-scale full-assortment restaurant wholesaler unless anything else is stated.

Moreover, the study is not meant to take a whole-chain approach and will thereby not involve every actor in the farm-restaurant supply chain. But instead, investigate the role of the restaurant wholesaler. Similarly, the study will not generate sufficient empirical data within the local food system context. Still, it will be built on assumptions grounded in a literature review of the potential fit between a local food network and a restaurant wholesaler. To clarify, the local food network is a part of the local food system and will be the reference of connection to the restaurant wholesaler in this study.

1.5 Outline of the study

This study is divided into seven chapters (see Figure 1). The first chapter presents the study's background and problem formulation, purpose, and research questions and then concludes with what delimitations are applied. Chapter Two presents the theoretical perspective, an understanding of the supply chain versus the value chain, and ends with a theoretical synthesis in the form of an illustration that will be used as an analysis tool in chapter five. After that, Chapter Three defines the study's applied method. Chapter Four comparatively presents empirical data obtained from interviews with two restaurant wholesalers since the study's methodological approach is a comparative case study and concludes with a summary table. Following in Chapter Five, the empirical result will be analysed using the illustration of the study's theoretical synthesis and support answering the study's research questions. After that, the results and analysis of the study will be discussed in Chapter Six. Finally, in Chapter Seven, the discussion will result in conclusions and suggestions for further research and a critical reflection of the study.

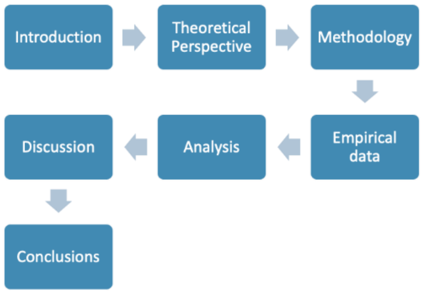

Figure 1. Illustrates the structure of this study.

2. Theoretical Perspective

The following chapter introduces the historical distinction between supply chain and value chain theories. After that, the two theories will be given contrasting attention to clarify distinctive features. Finally, the chapter will culminate in a theoretical synthesis that will form the basis for analysing the collected empirical data.

2.1 Supply Chain

In the 1950s and 1960s, the first signs of supply chain thinking could be noticed; companies were mass-producing and focused on cost-minimising production (Shukla, Garg & Agarwal 2011). As the 1980s emerged, the global competition changed the market structure; meanwhile, the same international competition and increased customer demand led product requirements to be low-cost, high quality, and high durability (ibid.). Which ultimately led to the concept of supply chain and supply chain management (Lambert & Cooper 2000; Mentzer et al. 2001; Shukla, Garg & Agarwal 2011). Over the years, researchers have defined the term supply chain in several ways. La Londe and Masters (1994) explained it as; several interconnected companies involved in manufacturing a product that will eventually end up with the end consumer. The authors also emphasised that all actors involved, such as producers, transportation companies, wholesalers, and retailers, just as the end consumer, are all involved actors.

As it follows, the concept of the supply chain was early on often related to logistics, meaning that it would involve the following process:

> "The process that plans, implements, and controls the efficient, effective flow and storage of goods, services, and related information from the point-of-origin to the point-of-consumption in order to meet customers' requirements." (Lambert & Cooper 2000:67).

Consequently, there will always be opportunities for improvement in reconsidering the tasks and functions within a company and how to improve the processes that generate efficiency. As a result, companies will require fewer resources, service will improve, costs will be reduced, and thereby, efficient strategies will be implemented (Feller et al. 2006).

Furthermore, Matopoulos et al. (2007) state from other researchers' conclusions that companies' ability to compete in the market goes hand in hand with how well they can collaborate with other companies. Moreover, the increased need for companies' ability to work together has contributed to an upsurge in adopting more long-term and closer relationships regardless of the level in the actor's chain. Altogether, to create more efficient and more adaptable supply chains (ibid.).

The definition of supply chain management can be partly considered on an operational level in the form of material and product flow and partly as a management process. Over the past 30 years, much more knowledge has become available about the supply chain management concept, contributing to its development and application to a greater extent (Mentzer et al. 2001). Besides, supply chain management connects with the globalisation of products, which has led to higher competition between companies. This results in attempts to find more efficient ways of running the business, including entire supply chain cooperatives and companies that try to coordinate quality and delivery time to achieve competitive advantages in the market (ibid.). However, simply delivering a faultless product quickly is not enough due to the uncertainty of the global market. As a way of dealing with this, it is proposed that supply chain relationships become more open and flexible to interact with other actors within the chain (ibid.)

2.2 Value chain

The concept of value chains was introduced by Michael Porter in 1985. The principle of the concept is to describe each individual activity from production to consumption in regard to the monetary value that each activity adds to a product or service (Porter 1985). The total value should increase with each activity in order for the concept to function (Zamora 2016). As such, the value chain can be seen as a tool to identify major business activities (ibid.). The structure of the chain is built by subsystems (actors), each with varying inputs, transformation processes, services, and outputs (activities) (Porter 1985; Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark 2011). Following this, success is determined by how well the value chain is carrying out the activities, thereby gaining competitive advantages.

Fearne et al. (2012) raise criticism that Porter fails to address social and environmental sustainability in gaining a competitive advantage. The author's findings show that limited attention has been put on the environmental and social consequences caused by companies and their behavior. As a result, there is a risk that values related to environmental factors and social welfare might be ignored (Fearne et al. 2012). From this perspective, it should also be taken into consideration what value is. According to Feller et al. (2006), value is perceived subjectively and contextually, when needs are met from products, services, or resources. Furthermore, value is influenced by the experience that flows from the final consumer back to the producer, which is customer value and a key feature of the value chain (Feller et al. 2006).

Another influence on how the value chain is composed is governance, which was explained by Gereffi (1994) with the phrase:

> "Authority and power relationships that determine how financial, material and human resources are allocated and flow within a chain" (Gereffi 1994:97).

The original distinction between the theoretical understanding of governance was between buyer-driven and producer-driven value chains (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark 2011). The buyer-driven value chain emphasises governance with powerful end chain control with actors such as large retailers, highly influenced by their customers. Due to power asymmetry, these actors can dictate how the chain operates by neglecting suppliers that do not reach a certain standard (ibid.). By contrast, the producer-driven value chains are more vertically integrated. This vertical integration means to constitute the chain to a higher degree, trying to capture more of the value by leveraging technological development or scale advantages of a consolidated chain.

Independent of what kind of governance is operative, the chain's value must increase organically between each involved actor step by step since every activity that adds value requires resource investments (Zamora 2016). The activities that do not contribute to added value are considered to cause inefficiency within the chain (Feller et al. 2006). The value chain approach to tackle this kind of problem is through innovation and marketing with the ambition to improve the product or the customer perception of the product or service (ibid.). The innovative activity could be explained by how, during the covid-19 pandemic, multiple companies chose to expand their online shopping presence. Whereas the marketing activity could be explained by picking up on a trend such as "zero sugar" and start branding the company's products towards the hype. Accordingly, the value chain should be considered a strategic concept in remaining competitive by adding value to the product (Porter 1985).

2.3 Supply chain versus value chain

Arguing the difference between supply chain and value chain, the theories differ in that the supply chain orientation is more anchored to strategies with operational efficiency. This implies maximising the chain performance at the lowest cost by coordinating the actors involved toward the same objective (Cox 1999; Feller et al. 2006; Fearne et al. 2012; Chopra & Meindl 2013; Holweg & Helo 2014). Unlike the value chain that uses a competitive strategic design where the aim is to maximise the added value of a product by either product development (innovation) or marketing (ibid.). However, both theories often create confusion because of the inconsequential meaning, formulation, focus, and terminology (Cox 1999; Ramsy 2005; Feller et al. 2006; Min 2015). According to Feller et al. (2006), the distinction between the two concepts was blurred as the global supply chain forum in 1998 revised supply chain management as:

> "The integration of key business processes from end-user through original suppliers that provides products, services, and information that **add value** for customers and other stakeholders" (Feller et al. 2006:4).

Which now meant that the supply chain also took the role of adding value. Meanwhile, Holweg & Helo (2014) claims that within the literature, there is a dichotomy between the value chain view and supply chain view that does not commonly interact with one another. The dichotomy is considered a fundamental gap between the two theories and the conceptual understanding of the strategic aspect of why one strategy works for one company but not the other. Furthermore, in Feller et al. (2006), in the final paragraph, the authors make the statement:

> "To continue to debate the importance of supply chain management versus the value chain concept would be folly. Instead, the next level of business performance will be achieved by companies that learn to integrate fully the concurrent flows of value and supply" (Feller et al. 2006:6).

2.3.1 Supply chain strategy vs competitive strategy

What can be seen as a solution to the debate about supply chains versus value chains can be seen in accordance with Chopra & Meindl (2013). The authors, as mentioned earlier, acknowledge the existence of the value chain by briefly mentioning it as a "competitive strategy" in contrast to the supply chain view that is mentioned as a "supply chain strategy". These strategies are to be understood just as previously explained in section 2.3 with respective theories. This interpretation allows academia and practising actors not solely to have to abide by one way of thinking but promote exchanging strategies depending on what is suitable for the situation (Chopra & Meindl 2013; Holweg & Helo 2014). An example of changing strategies is how computer manufacturer Dell was originally selling highly custom-made computers directly to the end customer (competitive strategy). As the business environment changed (in this case technological development), so did the most beneficial strategy (Chopra & Meindl 2013). This resulted in a supply chain strategy where Dell developed PCs suited for the new customer need. A more general computer could be sold in larger quantities and was now distributed by an intermediary actor to reach additional segments of customers.

2.3.2 Strategic fit

The previously mentioned Dell example is called a strategic fit, which implies that each given industry requires different strategies and must be continuously weighed between the supply chain strategy and competitive strategy (Cox 1999; Chopra & Meindl 2013). According to Fearne et al. (2012) and Chopra & Meindl (2013), agricultural and standardised products are often more bound to a supply chain strategy. In contrast, differentiated products with specific segmented markets are more oriented towards a competitive strategy. Finding the right strategy can be achieved by the strategic fit theory, which can be applied in three steps. Firstly, by studying the uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand. Secondly, by identifying the supply chain capabilities, and thirdly, how well the uncertainty matches the capabilities in relation to the chosen strategy (Chopra & Meindl 2013).

2.3.3 The uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand

Given that the uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand are put on a spectrum, the proposed business environment will differ, as illustrated in Figure 2. Where the salt at the supermarket will have a predictable supply and implied customer demand and therefore lead to low uncertainty, greater ability to forecast, and stabilise stock level (Fisher 1997; Chopra & Meindl 2013). In contrast, the new communication device will face supply and implied customer demand with high uncertainty, unpredictable forecast, and over-or under-stocking (ibid.). Furthermore, the high supply uncertainty is caused by unpredictable and low yields, poor quality, limited supply capability, inflexible supply capacity, and evolving production processes (Lee 2002).

Figure 2. Own illustration of the implied uncertainty (demand and supply) spectrum based on Chopra & Meindl (2013).

2.3.4 Supply chain capabilities

After studying the uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand, the acknowledgment of other actors within the same business environment is recognized. How an actor adjusts to the uncertainty within the business environment illustrates their supply chain capabilities (Chopra & Meindl 2013). The relationship between uncertainty and supply chain capabilities creates the supply chain structure, which is a spectrum of a company's responsiveness and efficiency within the given business environment. According to Chopra & Meindl (2013) the responsiveness of the supply chain is characterised by how well a company's ability is to:

- Respond to wide ranges of quantities demanded
- Meet short lead times
- Handle a large variety of products
- Build highly innovative products
- Meet a high service level
- Handle supply uncertainty

These abilities can be associated with the right-hand side of Figure 2, for example, the arising uncertainty of meeting a short lead time, which gives the company less time to put together an order. Or building highly innovative products without knowledge of the real demand. A supply chain with many of these abilities is considered responsive (Chopra & Meindl 2013). Nonetheless, responsiveness comes at a price; there are increasing costs to respond to a wide range of quantities demanded or handle a large variety of products. On the contrary, if cost is reduced, it is called supply chain efficiency and aims to cut costs from production to consumption. If the cost increases, the efficiency lowers, which means that the balance between responsiveness and efficiency is understood by a company's decision to strategically invest to increase the responsiveness (ibid.). This is illustrated in Figure 3. Furthermore, a company does not necessarily have to take part in the frontier shown in Figure 3. The lowest possible cost is based on the current technology, which means that supply chain actors with the best performance are operating within the frontier.

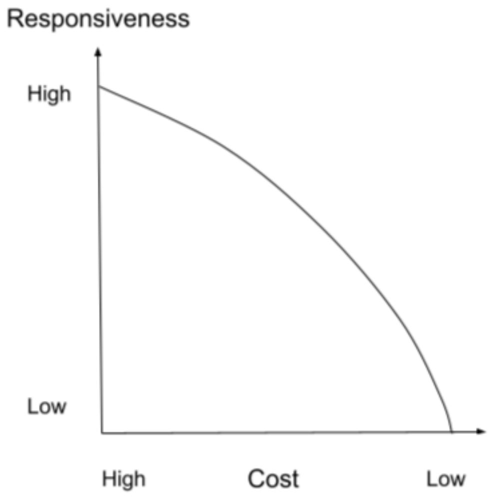

Figure 3. Own illustration of Cost-Responsiveness Efficient Frontier based on Chopra & Meindl (2013).

Every company within the frontier may focus on either being more responsive at the cost of being less efficient. Hence the optimal distribution depends on the company (Chopra & Meindl 2013). An example of a company that focuses on responsive capabilities is seven-eleven Japan which offers its customers a shifting assortment depending on the time of day and is highly available for the customer in a rush (ibid.). An example of efficient supply chain capabilities is supermarkets that use a remote location to keep prices down with a large fixed assortment that remains the same regardless of the time of day (ibid.).

2.4 Theoretical synthesis

This theoretical synthesis is developed to answer the study's research question by using it as an analytical tool in chapter five. By initially introducing both supply chain and value chain theory, the reader will obtain a basic understanding of how the two theories capture different types of views on the same phenomenon. Where the value chain focuses more on strategic decisions with the intention to improve the product or the perception of the product, which ultimately will lead to a competitive advantage by adding more value per product. Whereas the supply chain orientation is focused on strategic decisions with the intention of operational efficiency, which means coordinating all involved actors towards the same objective and having well-managed logistics—resulting in cost-minimising the produced product, leading to an alternative competitive advantage.

Followed by these two theories, it should also be recognized that the dichotomy between the theories has created significant confusion among scholars and practitioners (Cox 1999; Ramsey 2005; Feller et al. 2006; Holweg & Helo 2014; Min 2015). However, this is solved by taking an approach similar to Chopra & Meindl (2013). Intertwining the two theories and creating spectrums of relevant variables allows for greater analytical leverage to determine which strategy and, thereby, the role an actor should take within a specific business environment.

This is done in three steps. To start off, the supply and implied customer demand are studied to determine uncertainty within the business environment. An example of this is shown in Figure 2. After that, the supply chain capabilities are investigated by comparing top-performing supply chains and their respective responsiveness-efficiency ratio within different abilities related to responsiveness, as explained in Figure 3. The supply chain capabilities and the supply and implied customer demand uncertainty create the supply chain structure, which shows that companies within the same environment can differ in capabilities and, therefore, performance methods. And finally, in reaching a strategic fit, the fundamental strategy used by the company must match the supply chain structure. According to Chopra & Meindl (2013), the supply chain strategy or the competitive strategy has to match the uncertainty of the chain just as the capabilities have to match the strategic goals. This can be seen in Figure 4.

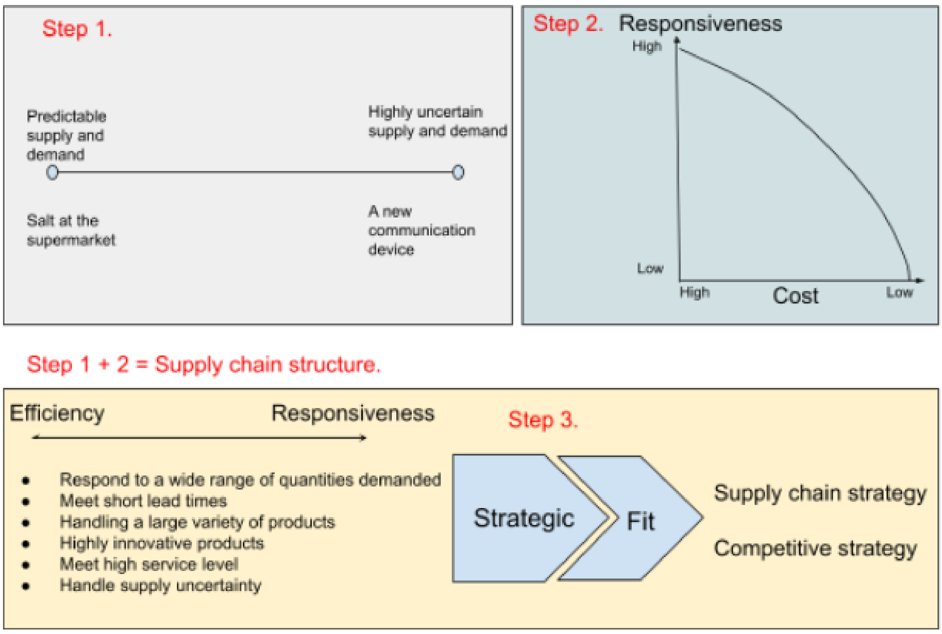

Figure 4. Own illustration of the theoretical synthesis based on Chopra & Meindl (2013).

3. Methodology

The ontological approach in this study is constructivism. Constructivism means that the social reality is dependent and changes in connection with participating actors. The epistemological orientation has had an interpretive approach as the purpose was to understand the role of restaurant wholesalers and their participation in a local food system. According to Bryman and Bell (2017), a study needs to define which ontological position is used. It is essential how the authors of a study perceive and interpret reality because assumptions or ideas largely govern research (ibid.). Our perception and version of reality constitute this study, which will only contribute to an increased understanding of social reality and, therefore, not the absolute knowledge of reality.

3.1 Research method

Qualitative research enables the social phenomenon to be identified and investigated in-depth in its natural context to contribute to creating depictions from the respondent's perspective (Golafshani 2003; Williams 2007). Therefore, this study considered a qualitative research strategy appropriate because we seek the meaning of words and actions rather than quantifying data. We are interested in collecting empirical evidence to describe and analyse data from the participants in this study's experienced perspective to connect empirical data with existing theory. A qualitative research strategy is used to collect data which can then be used to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem (Williams 2007). Therefore, this study was conducted with an inductive approach. An inductive approach means that the research initially performs observations to then be able to apply and connect theories that create the basis for the study. This approach was essential for our study type because we obtained the data and materials from the personal interviews when we conducted our observations. This made it possible for us to analyse and link the collected empirical data to existing theories. This study used an interpretive approach because our interpretations and understanding of empirics could potentially contribute to more understanding of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the qualitative method provides scope for interpretation and understanding of the premises for its performance when collecting empirical data

(Bryman & Bell 2017). In addition, a qualitative research method enables a broader perspective for Swedish restaurant wholesalers to be analysed to create a contextual understanding of their perceived reality than if a quantitative method had been applied in this study (ibid.). For that reason, it would have been challenging and not suitable to present and measure quantitatively when this study is based on the participants' perceived social reality.

3.2 Literature review

The literature review in this study has adopted a narrative approach in its implementation. The literature review is a tool to form an initial picture of the theme that one wants to understand better. There are two different approaches: systematic and narrative (Bryman & Bell 2017). A narrative literature review is applied to produce a comprehensive understanding and findings found in the relevant literature, leading the process further in the enrichment of knowledge and therefore distinguishing between a systematic literature review. A systematic literature review is based on more systematic, straightforward steps and is more thorough and detailed than a narrative and is therefore suitable for use when the researcher wants to investigate a specific research question. We considered that a narrative literature review was more beneficial for our study because there is limited literature within the field of local food systems and restaurant wholesalers. The narrative literature review led to a better understanding of the current state of research in the area that our study intends to enrich.

In this study, scientific articles, non-scientific reports, and books have been used to study literature. The information has been obtained from the search engines Web of Science, Primo, and Google Scholar. The keywords used to find relevant articles were “Farm-to-chef,” “Food Wholesalers,” “Local Food,” "Local Food Systems," "Restaurant wholesaler," "Supply chain," “Supply Chain Management,” "Value Chain," and “Wholesale distributors.” The keywords were also used in combination with each other.

3.3 Research design

One of the reasons for conducting a case study is to obtain in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated, as it may seem difficult to distinguish this from its context in a qualitative method (Alvesson 1996). Comparative case studies differ from traditional case studies because the comparative case study aims to identify similarities, differences, and contrasts between the cases examined (Campbell 2010). A comparative case study means that the context and characteristics of two or more organisations are studied in depth from specific phenomena. The discovered findings can then be used to either confirm the existing theories or contribute to the development of new theories. Furthermore, comparative case studies are not enclosed by boundaries in explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive goals but only by qualitative or quantitative orientation. In studies involving "the more characteristic" rather than the "extreme" case, a comparative case study is advantageous if the selected instances prove to be comparable in their business environment (ibid.). Comparative case studies also make it possible for the phenomenon to be described in more detail and on a deeper level to understand the underlying causes of the outcome from the observation in the study.

Restaurant wholesalers' role and importance in developing local food systems have received increasing attention. This is by identifying opportunities with the wholesale distributor's involvement in the entire supply chain, at the local level, to enjoy all the benefits of local food systems. Therefore, we chose to collect material from two different restaurant wholesalers to gain a deeper insight into the thesis' problem formulation and have the opportunity to provide answers to the questions of this study in a nuanced way.

As this research aims to study two restaurant wholesalers in-depth and identify their differences, similarities, and contrasts to generate more knowledge about their role and participation in local food systems, a comparative case study was considered an appropriate methodological approach. Consequently, this research can contribute with new insights and an increased understanding of the role of restaurant wholesalers within local food systems, even though generalisation of the results can be challenging to achieve.

3.4 Collection of empirical material

The empirical material was collected through personal interviews with two Swedish restaurant wholesalers (see Table 1). The professional role of the respective respondents was the qualities that they had significant insights, and to some extent, great influence, on the restaurant wholesalers' daily and long-term operations.

The two restaurant wholesalers were identified as the unit of analysis and the two participating respondents as the unit of observation in this study. It is vital to demonstrate the identity of whom the material collected reflects, as it also defines the unit that the study intends to enrich with newfound knowledge. The material contained in this study contributes to a new understanding of the role of restaurant wholesalers and their participation in local food systems, and whether their business strategy is suitable for these types of collaborations.

Based on the purpose of this research and with references to Williams (2007), we chose personal interviews as a data collection method to take part in two restaurant wholesalers' experiences, knowledge, and views on the specific subject. We considered that empirical collection in applying interviews is most appropriate for our study, partly to obtain as large a share of the respondents' answers, partly because we saw more benefits of conducting personal interviews than other methods such as surveys. This is because we believe that one of the advantages of interviews is that a personal meeting with the respondent facilitates the work of immersing oneself in the subject.

This study applied a semi-structured interview form according to appendix 1. The structure for semi-structured interviews is flexible as the prepared questions allow participants to answer the same questions and give their points of view. Depending on their answers, the interviewer may have the opportunity to invite potential follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell 2017). Any follow-up questions that arise can also contribute to new insights into the subject and thus provide a deeper understanding of the subject studied (ibid.). Furthermore, the interview questions were emailed to each respondent in advance to let the participants familiarise themselves with the questions which can lead to a more rewarding and content-enriching interview.

The interviews were conducted with an interview guide (see appendix 1) with five primary themes with sub-questions developed based on a literature review. The interview guide was used as a guideline to ensure that the themes and questions were addressed based on the purpose of the study (Bryman & Bell 2017). At each interview, the order of the questions was adjusted to enable the respondents to speak freely where we could ask appropriate follow-up questions. This approach was considered appropriate because it opened up to discuss additional topics while answering the more guiding questions to meet this study's goal.

Table 1. Presents participating restaurant wholesalers in the conducted study, the interviewed respondents' respective professional roles within the company, and finally, the total time that the interviews lasted.

Respondent	Professional role	Duration of interview
Axfood Snabbgross	Business developer	1 hour and 38 minutes
Martin & Servera	Purchasing and assortment manager	1 hour and 49 minutes

3.4.1 Selection of companies

According to Bryman & Bell (2017), research questions are the central starting point in qualitative research methods and lays the ground for selection of respondents. This study chose the two wholesalers because they sell foods to private restaurants, have a geographical spread, and belong to Sweden's largest restaurant wholesalers. Meaning a purpose-directed selection was applied where the respondents were selected strategically to fulfil the study's purpose (Denscombe 2010). Martin & Servera were selected because their total sales of meat to their restaurant customers were the lowest import quota, with 55% imported meat. Axfood Snabbgross was chosen because their corresponding sales figure was 90% imported meat. Therefore, we considered this sufficient as they represent the wholesaler with the lowest share of imports and the wholesaler with the highest. To form an initial opinion about the companies before conducting the interviews, we reviewed Snabbgross and Martin & Servera's websites.

3.4.2 Analysis of collected empirical data

Collected qualitative data is represented by a significant amount of information (Malterud 2001). One method in qualitative research for analysing both verbal and visual data is content analysis (Harwood & Gerry 2003; Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Elo & Kyngäs 2007). This is useful within qualitative research because it makes it possible to divide the phenomenon and delimit the content into specific categories, providing better conditions for further analysis (Harwood & Gerry 2003). The analysis method enables an in-depth analysis to systematically generate new knowledge and possibly be replicated. Content analysis can be divided into three approaches: summative, targeted, or conventional (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). What distinguishes the methods from each other is mainly threats to credibility, coding schemes, and the origin of the codes. In conventional content analysis, codes and categories are generated directly from collected text data. Summative content analysis is based on calculations and comparisons of content or keywords, interpreted based on the underlying context. The targeted approach differs from the other two because the analysis is based on either relevant research results or a specific theory as a guide for the codes (ibid.).

In this study, we used conventional content analysis. The analytical method is advantageous when the study intends to describe a phenomenon with limited research and qualified theories (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). In this method, the researcher plans to allow categories to arise due to reviewing the collected data and acting without preconception. Accordingly, the method can be categorised as inductive because new insights can emerge by paying close attention to the collected empirical material (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Elo & Kyngäs 2007; Azungah 2018).

All interviews were recorded to verify what was stated to be able to transcribe the collected data and to have an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with the data before processing it. The approach to the analysis was based on four steps in this study based on Hsieh & Shannon's (2005) conventional analysis. The first step meant that the transcribed material was read repeatedly verbatim to get an idea of the whole and contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic. From there on, an opinion was formed to deduce codes from data. This meant that specific words and passages that seemed to exhibit concepts or fundamental thoughts were highlighted. In the second step, from the highlighted text, we made notes based on our first thoughts and reactions. The third step in the analysis was to find categories based on all markings. Finally, these categories were divided and sorted and formed main categories based on the recurring topics that were observed from the restaurant wholesalers.

3.5 Reliability and authenticity

Quality criteria differ depending on the research type, but the requirements indicate the study's quality and reliability (Bryman & Bell 2017). In quantitative research, reliability and validity are well-used criteria. However, in qualitative research, credibility and authenticity are used as quality criteria (Golafshani 2003; Bryman & Bell 2017). Credibility consists of four sub-criteria reliability, transferability, dependability, and confirmation. Reliability in qualitative research is how probable or liable the results obtained are (but not statistical probability). In qualitative research, reliability is used more to prove how well the study has generated an understanding of the phenomenon. Transferability is fulfiled if the produced results can be applied in other contexts. In this study, the results were based on a small number of observations, in a specific context and at a single specific time point. For this reason, there may be difficulties with an application at other times and contexts. However, this study may be used as a guideline for wholesalers with the same type and size as the observed restaurant wholesalers.

Dependability is achieved by clearly outlining the study's approach and ensuring complete content. The two respondents were given the transcribed material from each interview that was of significant importance to fulfil the study's purpose. This is a way to ensure that we perceive and interpret the participants truthfully against what was discussed during the interview, whereupon Bryman & Bell (2017) refer to it as respondent validation. Any comments from the respondents regarding misinterpretations have been taken into account and revised. Furthermore, the results were presented with several quotes from the two respondents. Empirical material that was explicitly personal opinions or of a sensitive nature was excluded from this study. The empirical material collected, recorded, and then transcribed is well processed and reasoned, thus creating a thorough account. Therefore, we believe that a complete performance and approach have been achieved.

The last sub-criterion for credibility is confirmation or verification, achieved if the researcher has mastered their values to avoid angling and significantly influencing the study (Bryman & Bell 2017). Since the interview questions (see appendix 1) that the respondents had to answer were promoting and inviting to a discussion, the participants would be less affected by the researcher's biases, leading to higher credibility due to unfiltered answers from the respondent.

Authenticity in qualitative research is synonymous with credibility and focuses on recreating a fair and accurate picture of reality portrayed and analysed. The restaurant wholesalers who participated and provided information in this study should be retold appropriately and give an honest portrayal of their perceptions and opinions. The subject we have chosen to study should not be sensitive and be relatively transparent. Due to this, authenticity can be proven in our study.

3.6 Ethical aspects

When conducting a qualitative study, it is essential to include ethics, mainly when contacting those involved, conducting the interviews, and processing the participants' service of information (Bryman & Bell 2017). Since it is primarily the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the participants' information, misinterpretations can occur when conducting a qualitative study (Bryman & Bell 2017). Therefore, we informed the respondents of the purpose of the study at the first contact. Furthermore, we explained to the respondents what we expected from their participation. By clarifying their part, it can reduce the risk of misunderstanding (ibid.). At the same time, as previously mentioned, we conducted a respondent validation where the respondents were allowed to take part in the material that reflects their participation in this study. In addition, oral consent was obtained from both the respondents.

Furthermore, we have chosen not to anonymise the two restaurant wholesalers in agreement with participating respondents. The decision not to anonymise the wholesalers for the collection of empirical material has both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that the information that the respondents contribute can be seen as correct and truthful because the company supports and gives consent to be represented in the study. Whether respondents who agree not to be anonymous provide "the real truth" can be speculated.

However, we do not see this as a disadvantage for our study. It would have been uncomplicated to know which restaurant wholesalers participated in the study since the wholesalers constitute two of the four largest restaurant wholesalers on the Swedish market. Each wholesaler has unique business concepts, which means that they can thus be easily identified based on collected data. We also did not consider that the respondents needed to be anonymised to fulfil the study's purpose.

3.7 Method discussion

A qualitative research method is often used when complex and social phenomena are investigated, interpreted, and explained (Bryman & Bell 2017). Criticism of qualitative research methods is directed at being too subjective because an utterly objective approach is challenging to achieve in interpretive contexts (ibid.). This is in line with case-study critique, a study can potentially project subjective content due to the lack of empirical sources. A further complaint is directed at analysing and compiling collected data because it is difficult to reproduce and convey all notified information (Alvesson 1996; Bryman & Bell 2017).

Empirical data obtained in this study cause difficulties in reproducing all information and conveying all the content that the respondents have provided in the interviews conducted, which means that it becomes more of a summary where we decide what is relevant to answer the study aim. However, we considered that implementing a comparative case study and the methodological approach with conventional data analysis brought strength to the thesis because the empirical data is based on explicit descriptions from the respondents. The study was concentrated on two companies and two individuals with relevant knowledge to answer questions related to the assortment in collecting empirical data. Therefore, the chosen research method may lead to difficulties with generalisation to other companies and industries and problems with replication of the study to apply in a larger context. However, the results could arguably be applicable to similar actors from a restaurant wholesale context. The two restaurant wholesalers observed in this study are leading actors in the Swedish market, indicating that generalisation to other similar restaurant wholesalers seems appliable.

4. Empirical data

In the following chapter, a short company description of the two participating restaurant wholesalers will be presented. The structure of the headings in 4.3-4.7 is based on the main categories that emerged from the conventional content analysis. The main categories have been adapted based on recurring topics from each interview to facilitate the presentation of the results (see table 2). Since the methodological approach of this study was a comparative case study where the purpose was to identify differences, similarities, and contrasts between the studied cases (Campbell 2010), the results are presented comparatively. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary table illustrating the companies' differences, contrasts, and similarities.

4.1 Presentation of respondents

4.1.1 Axfood Snabbgross

Axfood is one of Sweden's most prominent grocery and wholesale trade actors. Snabbgross is part of the Axfood group (see Figure 5), which focuses on wholesale sales to private restaurants, cafés, and fast food. Dagab handles sourcing products, logistics, and product range development for the entire corporate group, including Snabbgross.

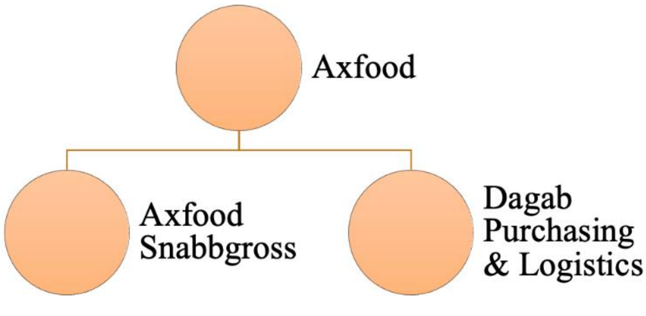

Figure 5. Presents studied business structure at Axfood Snabbgross.

4.1.2 Martin & Servera

Martin & Servera is one of the largest restaurant wholesalers in the Swedish market and is aimed at restaurants and the public sector such as schools and hospitals. Martin & Servera is the head company in the corporate group which also contains a logistical partner and smaller more specialised wholesalers that will be further presented in the results (see Figure 6).

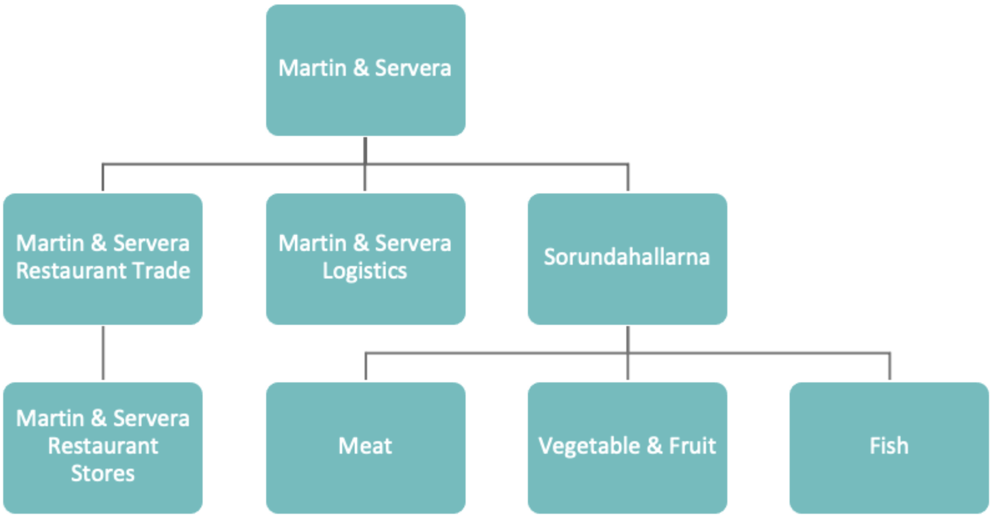

Figure 6. Presents studied business structure at Martin & Servera.

4.2 Analytical process

Table 2 illustrates two examples of the analysis process. The data extract was considered to be of significant importance for the essay's research questions and purpose. The initial notes and thoughts complemented this; these notes resulted in sub-categories based on the study's theories. Finally, these categories were sorted out and formed main categories based on recurring themes that emerged during the interviews.

Table 2. Shows two examples of the analysis process.

Respondent	Data extract	Notes	Sub-categories	Main-categories
Martin & Servera	*"We like Swedish… we like this with locally produced, it is close to our hearts."*	Values domestic products	Value chain theory Business environment	Local food
Snabbgross	*"We do not even reach fine restaurants because they require a lot of niche items that we would not be able to stock for them. We are stores, our products must be able to be stored and served off the shelf."*	Do not target all segments of restaurants Large volumes, no room for niche items in small quantities	Supply chain management Supply chain strategy	Assortment & Pricing

4.3 Availability and communication

During the interview, it was revealed that Snabbgross has 29 stores located around the country, from South to North, to constitute accessibility, which is the company's main value proposition. Focusing on cash and carry stores enables easier access to the wholesaler for the customers.

> "… Then we might be better at showing ourselves available, you can come in and squeeze and feel, we are open on the weekends so if the restaurant is out of food on the weekend you just have to go shopping at Snabbgross."

The shops' opening hours differ from place to place, but they are generally open from early morning until late evening every day of the week. Employees on-site in the stores provide service and are trained to assist the visiting customers and their specific wishes, both product-wise and financially helpful. In addition, the respondent stated that several of their customers visit Snabbgross' stores on a daily basis. Furthermore, the stores form a social gathering place for their customers, leaving room for interaction with colleagues and acquaintances in the restaurant industry.

> "You go in and do your lap and then you have a coffee and sit and talk a bit with a colleague, many know each other in the industry. So, it will be a bit like a meeting place to come to Snabbgross and we are very happy about that."

Snabbgross's communication strategy to their customers occurs via their physical stores and advertisement magazines every two weeks.

> "Compared to our competitors, we do not have salespeople who are out processing our customers, but we have our campaigns that process the customers. We want to get them into the store and there we can talk to them."

On the other hand, Martin & Servera's communication with its customers differs from Snabbgross. The company's primary strategy for processing and communicating with its customers is through its sales department. Their indoor and outdoor salespeople both visit and provide customer service support for the company's customers. In addition to this, Martin & Servera also has two restaurant wholesale stores located in the Stockholm area. Furthermore, the respondent stated that their four warehouses and nineteen rearrangement centres complement the sales and stores in terms of accessibility as they together form a large geographical spread in Sweden.

> "With high availability, there are over three thousand employees in total if we include logistics, sales, purchasing, all administration, and everything. I think we are somewhere around 500 salespeople in total if we count those who are out in the field, those who sit inside and receive the phone calls and arrange orders, and who work with sales in general."

Finally, the respondent emphasised that Martin & Servera uses its website to communicate with its customers. This is, above all, to facilitate search functions and clearly show which products in the assortment have a specific label or origin from a specific farm.

> "... some products are farm-specific, which we also point out, that the meat comes from there or that the fish is fished in this area outside Norway or where ever it can be found. So that the origin can always be found, and it is an important communication channel."

4.4 Customers and service

Snabbgross defined its main customer clientele as private restaurants, cafés, and fast food. Their customer base is broad but does not include private restaurants belonging to the "fine restaurants" category but consists of the lower and middle layers.

> "Café, fast food, restaurant, erase the finest top segments and we have Snabbgross' customers."

The respondent for Snabbgross pointed out that the company offers its customers service through all stores. This is in the form of providing competent and accommodating employees in each store. A large part of the customer clientele visits the company daily.

> "A lot of customers are with us every day and shop."

Unlike Snabbgross, Martin & Servera's customer base consists of all representatives from the lunch restaurants to Michelin restaurants.

> "All in all, I would say. We have Michelin restaurants as a customer every now and then, yes we have, also like these lunch restaurants that run out fifteen hundred lunches, and everything in between."

Internal collaborations within the corporate group is common within Martin & Servera. They try to satisfy their customers with what they demand as much as possible. The internal collaboration between Martin & Servera and Sorunda hallarna is mainly because they are specialists in meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables. This is used as a way to be able to offer customers a complete solution from a food perspective.

> “Micheline customers after all, have such incredibly high demands on their raw materials and everything. There we have, for example, Sorunda as specialists who come in and help us.”

Furthermore, it emerged that the company focuses on offering its customer's customised solutions and services.

> "We offer them a complete solution… you should not really need another supplier."

They have developed their digital platform to be responsive, which means that the user gets a website that automatically adapts to the type of visitor device applied. In addition to regular customer support, Martin & Servera has created a platform for customers available online that enables the customers to lay orders, see purchase statistics, improvement suggestions to purchase cheaper products with the same quality, and a calculation tool to determine pricing on the restaurant menu. Martin & Servera also provides its customers with discounted services from third-party actors that cover, for example, legal advice, payment terminals, but also various trade fairs, and training.

> "We have salespeople who are out processing our customers all the time. Follow-up, sales statistics. We give them the right tools to be able to shop more smoothly via our e-commerce with well-functioning customer service if something arises."

4.5 Assortment and pricing

The interview revealed that Snabbgross' assortment consists of about thirteen thousand fixed items. Furthermore, it was discovered that Dagab handles logistics, warehousing, and the sourcing of products.

> "Dagab is our logistics partner in this, they are the ones who make our product sourcing, they are the ones who stock our goods and drive them to our stores."

The respondent from Snabbgross stated that their incentive to include products in their assortment is based on what their customers need and, in turn, demands as a value-creating activity.

> "At Dagab there are different category managers and their role is to set the assortment for the different chains… Snabbgross and so on. But there we have a lot of saying, we are very much involved and influence which assortment to enter our stores because it is we who have contact with the customers and it is the customers who to a very large extent control our assortment."

The respondent stated that it is advantageous to be part of a large organisation. This is because it leaves room to influence various factors and be able to buy in larger volumes and thus achieve a more favourable price per item, which influences the assortment that they offer their customers.

> "... at least if you look at the segment we are working towards, you are still chasing price quite a lot to be able to keep your image of what you expect is an expected price level… if I raise the price, all customers will go somewhere else."

The respondent pointed out that Snabbgross aims to have the goods that make up the assortment available to customers every time they visit one of the stores. The company has custom products made for the restaurant kitchen that is sized and with properties such as pasta that can be double-cooked or heated without being destroyed. Snabbgross' philosophy is to be a cash-and-carry wholesaler, so they choose to have a tailor-made restaurant assortment available and suitable for all its customer clientele.

> "We do not even reach fine restaurants because they require a lot of niche items that we would not be able to stock for them. We are stores, our products must be able to be stored and served off the shelf."

The interview revealed that Snabbgross broadly relates to the regulations and standards that prevail internally within the Axfood group. Snabbgross acts following the guidelines and collaborations for which the entire corporate group is responsible. The respondent stated that it is an advantage to be part of a large organisation because it leaves room for pressure and that they can be involved and influence the market.

> “This with profitable sustainability, we take on what Axfood decides, we do not sell red-listed fish, although we have a lot of customer groups that demand it, we choose not to do it because we want to be profitable in a sustainable way. So it is great to be in a big group that can put its foot down, and say that these are important issues.”

Martin & Servera has about 60 thousand items in their assortment. Half of the items are fixed stock items that are constantly in stock. The other half consists of items that require an active order from customers. Martin & Servera, on the one hand, has extensive imports from both Europe and Asia. However, on the other hand, a large part of their assortment consists of Swedish-produced goods. The respondent stated that the customers' requests for unique products are tried to be fulfiled to the greatest extent in the cases where it is financially viable to handle.

> "... internal system where the sellers via our intranet fill in an assortment questionnaire and what it is for a product and which supplier, which customer category, estimated volume and they fill in as many facts as they have. They send it for evaluation to a common inbox where we pick it up, study, assesses, act and give feedback."

Another aspect that emerged during the interview is that all their partners must sign Martin & Servera’s code of conduct, which states that, for example, that the producers' employees need to have good working conditions with a fair salary and the right work clothes regardless of where in the world.

> “Our suppliers need to write on our code of conduct, where we have the basics with no child labor, fair wages, and the whole thing. We do not do business with someone who does not write on it, no matter how good an article they have, no matter how cheap it is, groundbreaking in the market, if they do not write on it, we do not do business with them. We want freely backward.”

4.6 Transportation

In the interview with Snabbgross, the respondent had to reason about transportation. It turned out that the company did not actively work with their transportation and delivery to their customers. The main focus for Snabbgross is to be a cash and carry restaurant wholesaler with extensive availability via the 29 physical stores, which means that their customers are primarily responsible for transporting the goods from the store. However, the company offers transportation options for customers at a specific order size or a fee.

> "Our philosophy is that, to begin with, you have to shop for a lot of money to get free transport otherwise you can of course pay for it."

Whereas Martin & Servera has a different approach to transportation than Snabbgross, about 70-80% of the company's total sales are made through its e-commerce. As a result, approximately 6,000 deliveries are handled daily.

> "Our digital orders are somewhere around 70-80% and constantly increasing."

Martin & Servera adapts its deliveries to their customer's orders to offer them additional service. In line with that, coordination of deliveries where products from the central warehouse of Martin & Servera and their partners' Sorunda hallarna are packed and transported together. The company believes that transport and logistics are also an incentive to minimise the environmental impact and costs because delivering goods in half-full trucks are expensive. In combination with the City of Stockholm, an environmental project has been started, which means that deliveries by fossil-free electric trucks are made after arrangements with customers by night when there is usually less traffic. In addition to offering customers delivery at night and making various products available directly in refrigerators and freezers for their customers, the company has equipped the trucks with rubber mats as an extra interior base to reduce noise from the cages with goods.

> "We have our own keys to some of our customers, then you roll the whole freezer cage into the freezer. Then the customers have to sort it up themselves in the freezer. In the morning the stuff is delivered and ready for the customer. And the truck has time to go back, load new orders, and take off again. Then we have won 4 -5 hours a night."

Finally, the respondent pointed out that Martin & Servera's goal is to switch to completely fossil-free deliveries by 2030.

4.7 Local food

At each interview, the respondents were asked to answer questions about local food, trends, and whether they have any local collaborations or products in their assortment. The results showed that Snabbgross did not actively work to provide local products unless there was a great demand from their customers. However, there is an opportunity for Snabbgross to meet local customer needs if that need arises.

> “I think everyone, at least we larger wholesalers, are very inclined to meet local customer needs that come up. If it is like in Gotland, we work with like local meat producers or Gotland eggs and stuff because that need is there and then we happily work with it.”

Furthermore, the wholesaler has not experienced that locally produced goods are something they currently see as a necessity in their normal assortment.

> "If we are to connect it to locally produced, well, we do not notice it that much, and it may have to do with what customer clientele we have ... while our customers are not really at that level and do not really have those needs."

The respondent from Snabbgross also mentioned difficulties with trying to take in products that their customers did not demand.

> “We can have beef fillet from this and that and that country, but then there is demand for beef fillet from another country, and that is the need we want to meet. It is very much what the customers have for an idea about their business that is placed in our hands.”

Snabbgross is aware that they have difficulties forming an opinion about whether their customers demand locally produced products. At the same time, the co-workers within Snabbgross stores are supposed to report customer requests to higher instances within the organisation.

> “It can be more difficult to identify the local needs if we sit in an office here and try to see megatrends in society. Maybe there is a small trend in Uppsala where a particular demand for a product grows. And then it is a bit up to us if we look at our reality and if the store should perceive it based on customers coming in and asking for it. A need like that can sometimes certainly be missed by us because we do not really have an ear for that particular rail.”

However, they instead see an increased demand for vegetarian alternatives to meat products. Another aspect that the respondent stated during the interview was that consumers in restaurants initially expect an experience.

The interview with Martin & Servera, on the other hand, showed that they are actively working to provide local but also regional foods in their assortment because their customers demand it to a large extent.

> "We like Swedish… we like this with locally produced, it is close to our hearts."

> "Local, regional, Swedish, we try to work with it as much as possible."

However, the respondent pointed out that domestic production faces several challenges in expanding to a greater extent. According to the respondent, this is because Sweden does not currently provide the necessary facilities and thus a less developed infrastructure. The problem is not a shortage of food production but rather the handling and processing of the products within Sweden's borders. Furthermore, the effect and value are considered lost if a product is harvested in Sweden and then transported, processed, and packaged in another country to be finally transported back, sold, and consumed in Sweden.

> "Beans and kidney beans are available crops in Sweden. The problem in Sweden is that no one has the infrastructure to refine beans and similar crops. Without the infrastructure, I might be able to scrape together Swedish beans, but then I would have to send them abroad to get them processed and packaged. It hurts a little to get Swedish beans sent down to Europe somewhere and then be sent back to Sweden ... which leads to a high transportation cost... and lose this ecological function with domestic production."

Even so, the Martin & Servera wholesaler representative stated that the company has a specific collaboration with Nordisk Råvara, which is a local producer.

> "I was involved in bringing in a company here a few years ago called Nordisk Råvara… they have resumed the old legumes that we grew in Sweden 100-150 years ago… and small scale so far but, really it would have been a case for Sorunda because it is not these volume products… I liked this with picking up the Swedish so we brought them in, and we worked with them… then unfortunately they have had a bit of bad luck with their harvests so they have not gotten those volumes out as they had expected… but we keep going and we develop."

Regardless of whether the volumes were there or not, Martin & Servera still took the collaboration with Nordisk Råvara.

> "Nordisk Råvara does not have that budget … indirectly, we offer to help them get started, to promote these Swedish crops and get back a little of that form of cultivation in Sweden … we market their products without them paying extra for it… we want to protect and we want to promote this particular form of small local producers."

However, it was pointed out that this type of collaboration was more suitable for Sorunda hallarna, which is usually their way of handling smaller volumes and meeting specific customer needs that arise.

> "... we work quite a lot with large production with large volumes and such, Sorunda hallarna are more specialists. We have our own fruit and vegetable department where we sell a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables and so on, but they are more specialists so if you want this unique truffle from Italy, for example, as it may only go 50 kilos in a year, that is nothing that we take into the house because it would not be profitable for us. Then it is Sorunda who then have contact with a small producer in Italy where they get this truffle from, they work more specialist oriented."

Working with local collaborations and foods such as Martin & Servera relationship to Nordisk Råvara, means a high degree of uncertainty as neither volumes nor continuity can be guaranteed.

> "Guarantee of volume is always very difficult because it has to do with the harvest and what the outcome is. Also, I would rather not launch a product that might start selling… to then 3 weeks later, when the customer wants to make a repurchase, say it's out of season, it comes in September next year. It's not good either. Because then we have, as it were, opened up something for the market, and then when the customers want to buy it, there is none."

Finally, the respondent stated in accordance with Snabbgross that they see an increasing trend for vegetarian and vegan food products.

4.8 Compilation of comparisons

To facilitate for the reader, the empirical result that lays the ground for the analysis is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Illustrate points of comparison used in the analysis in chapter 5.

	Snabbgross	**Martin & Servera**
Availability and communication	Availability is reflected in their 29 stores, which have a large geographical spread in Sweden. Furthermore, all stores and advertisement magazines are used to communicate with customers.	Offers availability with two physical restaurant stores in Stockholm, four distribution centres, and 19 rearrangement centres, and through their sales department. Salespeople are also used as their communicators. Additionally, their website is used as a tool to communicate with customers.
Customers and service	The customer segment consists of the lower and the middle level of private restaurants. All stores are used as the primary source to provide service by being available to their customers.	The customer segment consists of all types, from pizzerias and lunch restaurants up to Michelin restaurants. Offers its customers service through customised transport, a compatible e-commerce platform with, for example, financial aids and follow-up as well as help from their sales staff.
Assortment and pricing	The assortment consists of 13,000 fixed stock items. They have the opportunity to adapt the assortment if it is in high demand by customers.	A total of 60,000 items are in the assortment. Half consists of fixed stock items, and the remaining half consists of orderable goods. They try to adapt and satisfy customers' demands if it is financially feasible.
Transportation	Offers transport against payment and free delivery for specific order amounts. However, this is not something that they are actively striving towards. They intend to be a "cash and carry" wholesaler for customers to visit and shop in the stores	Coordinates transport with Sorunda hallarna to optimise the transport when customers have made an order. Furthermore, offering transport during specific hours when there is generally less traffic to customers who have left access

	and then be responsible for transporting the goods themselves.	to their key to enabling deliveries by night.
Local food	Does not work actively to offer local products in the fixed assortment since most customers do not demand these types of products. However, they have the opportunity to be able to meet local customer needs when the demand arises for economic benefits, for example, in Gotland, where they offer customers locally produced eggs and meat.	Through its collaboration with Nordisk Råvara, they have partly offered local products. At the same time, they have extensive collaboration with Sorunda hallarna, which offers both local and regional food. Sorunda hallarna also enables Martin & Serveras customers' niche needs to be met to a great extent.

5. Analysis

The empirical results from the previous chapter have been analysed in the following chapter based on the theoretical synthesis (see Figure 4*) first presented in section 2.4 to lay the ground for answering the research questions of this study. Initially, the business environment of local food is identified to illustrate the connection between local food networks and the restaurant wholesaler. Thereupon detecting the wholesalers' supply chain capabilities and thereby their strategic actions to explain the practice of the wholesalers. After that, the strategic fit is explained by the supply chain structure and what strategies are exhibited for working with a local food network.*

5.1 The uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand

Step one in Figure 4 starts by identifying the business environment and, therefore, the uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand (see section 2.3.2). Since the study covered participation in a local food network, the interview results cover the topic of cooperating with local producers, which will also be included in step one. According to Chopra & Meindl (2013), the uncertainty of a product is determined by whether the supply and implied customer demand are predictable or not. Martin & Servera emphasised the difficulty of being an actor that promotes national production and wants to supply local food as much as possible, but also has to consider the customer. They share the insight with Snabbgross that it is of no convenience for them to take in products that the customers do not demand. The respondents highlighted that customers are fundamental to their assortment and that their customers dictate what is sold in the restaurant wholesale. Along with that, it would be hard to remain competitive if they did not fulfil customer demand.

Furthermore, Lee (2002) mentions that high supply uncertainty is caused by low or unpredictable yields, limited supply capability, and inflexible supply capacity. This applies well to what the respondent from Martin & Servera mentioned about the collaboration with Nordisk Råvara, where the yields did not meet expectations and therefore left a supply deficiency. In addition to the issues with working with local products, the quantity is insufficient to sustain an acceptable frame of availability. Moreover, attention is put on Swedish infrastructure. Even if Martin & Servera hypothetically wanted to cooperate with local producers producing beans, the infrastructure to manage the processing is not sufficient within the country.

In determining the business environment, the supply and implied customer demand uncertainty is weighted between the conventional food supply chain and the farm-restaurant supply chain, which is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Own illustration of the uncertainty (demand & supply) spectrum in the restaurant wholesale context based on Figure 2.

Furthermore, Figure 7 shows that the supply and implied customer demand for local food is uncertain. Chopra & Meindl (2013) explains that for a company to participate in an uncertain business environment, the actor must focus on being highly responsive.

5.2 Supply chain capabilities

Step two in the theoretical synthesis interprets the empirical results by identifying the abilities and, therefore, the supply chain capabilities of the two restaurant wholesalers. This is done with the guidance of what makes a company responsive. According to Chopra & Meindl (2013), these responsive abilities are related to:

• Respond to wide ranges of quantities demanded
• Meet short lead times
• Handle a large variety of products
• Build highly innovative products
• Meet a high service level
• Handle supply uncertainty

To determine responsiveness and efficiency of the wholesalers the cost-responsiveness efficient frontier is used to illustrate the availability and communication as well as transportation example (see section 2.3.3). Since both the respondents are a part of top-performing conventional food supply chains, the comparison between the wholesalers is to be put on a spectrum with either more responsive or efficient tendencies (Chopra & Meindl 2013). From there on, the analysis will continue in text and be summarised in section 5.3.

5.2.1 Availability and communication

Snabbgross focuses on their availability, and throughout Sweden, 29 active stores enable the customers to purchase restaurant food on their own during reasonable times of the day. Snabbgross uses its stores as a forum for communication when engaging with customers. Employees are trained in accordance with their assortment category to answer questions related to the food. And a recurring advertisement magazine is sent to all members to attract and reach out to their customers. Martin & Servera has two physical stores supplemented by having four distribution centers spread out to be geographically efficient and 19 rearrangement centers where orders are compiled and sent to their customers. Martin & Servera has 500 active salespeople who take care of product recruitment, orders, and related issues in communication with customers. Another way of communicating with its customers Martin & Servera offers a user-friendly website where customers can place orders at any time.

The level of responsiveness seen in Figure 8 could be motivated to keep a similar level while the wholesalers use different methods to accomplish the same goal. Twenty-nine stores give features such as meeting high service levels by the availability for the customer. But also handling supply uncertainty if the restaurant runs out of products needed during the lunch, restaurant staff can access Snabbgross quickly. Martin & Servera has two stores; the presence is located nearby Stockholm and uses distribution centres and sales associates instead. Which also requires a high service level, taking care of customers with 500 assigned sales associates. But also, being able to respond to a wide range of quantities demanded due to orders that have their origin from distribution centres inventory rather than via cash and carry stores.

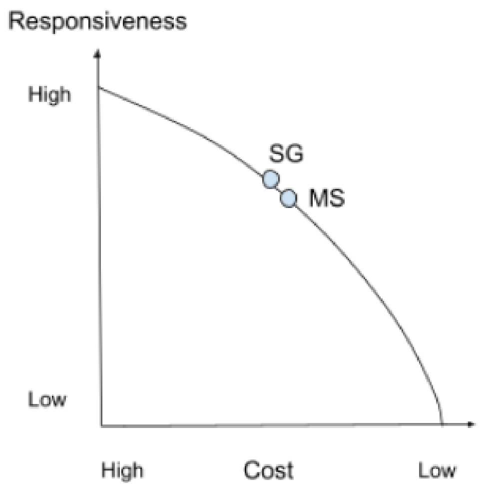

Figure 8. Own illustration of Cost-Responsiveness Efficient Frontier considering Availability and communication within Martin & Servera (MS) and Snabbgross (SG) based on Figure 3.

5.2.2 Customers and service

Snabbgross customer segment varies between lunch restaurants and dinner restaurants but does not capture the upper segment of restaurant customers. And the highest level of service offered is the high availability and their competent employees. Martin & Servera describe their customer segment to range all the way from lunch restaurants to price-winning Michelin star restaurants. And the service that the customers are offered can be seen from efforts made in transportation and sourcing out the assortment after economically viable requests. Additionally, Martin & Servera has created a platform for customers available online that enables the customers to take part in a service tool with several financial businesses facilitating activities.

Snabbgross takes a lower level of responsiveness by not actively trying to attract the upper customer segments. Martin & Servera focuses on reaching a high level of responsiveness by working on the entire spectrum of customers, with plenty of activities to create customer benefits.

5.2.3 Assortment and pricing

Snabbgross has a stable assortment of 13,000 products. In acquiring new products, the product should first be requested by customers. Secondly, Dagab is taking care of the contracting with a supplier, and then Snabbgross can launch the product. The assortment of Martin & Servera contains 60,000 products, where 30,000 are available in stock and the rest from order. They offer high flexibility in extending their assortment after customer demand. If a customer requests a product, Martin & Servera will do an economic calculation and respond with the result. Since international collaboration is part of their daily work, requests are more dependent on the order size from the restaurant than the ability to get a hold of the product.

By the very nature of responsiveness and efficiency, it can be seen that Snabbgross is efficiently outsourcing product sourcing to Dagab within the Axfood group. Meanwhile, Martin & Servera is responsive for working actively with the sourcing to fulfil the customer demand. Besides that, it is evident that Martin & Servera handles a wider variety of products than Snabbgross.

5.2.4 Transportation

Snabbgross offers delivery for payment or at a certain level of customer orders but does not prioritise transportation due to the high store presence. Martin & Servera offers to drive the products during the night to lower traffic disturbance and have the food available for the restaurants in the morning. Meanwhile, Martin & Servera is coworking with Sorunda hallarna to coordinate packing the trucks as efficiently as possible and focus on innovative ways of working towards being fossil-free due to 2030.

As illustrated in Figure 9, Snabbgross is doing the bare minimum when it comes to their transportation activities being very efficient. Figure 9 would also imply that Martin & Servera's higher responsiveness is motivated by the actions taken at the cost of efficiency with investments and extra service for their customers.

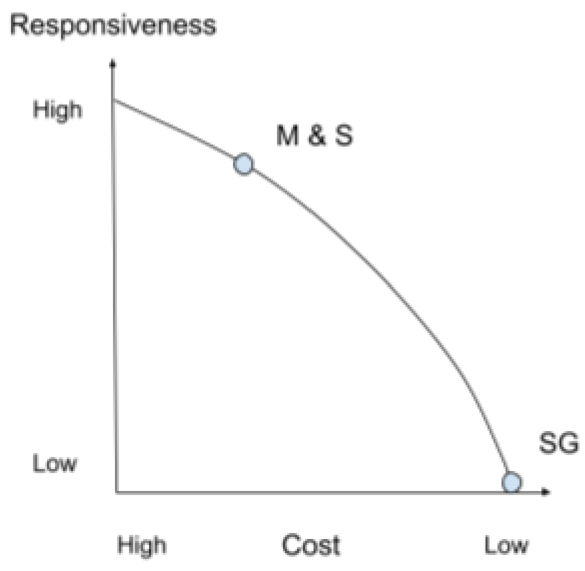

Figure 9. Own illustration of Cost-Responsiveness Efficient Frontier considering transportation within Martin & Servera (MS) and Snabbgross (SG) based on Figure 3.

5.2.5 Local food

Both Snabbgross and Martin & Servera mentioned that the assortment is driven by the customer's demand within the restaurant wholesaler sector. However, both actors also said having local collaborations, where Snabbgross sells local eggs and meat in Gotland, whereas Martin & Servera collaborated with Nordisk Råvara.

These are both responsive actions that fulfil customer needs and therefore meet a high service level.

5.3 Supply chain structure

Following Figure 4, the supply chain structure is formed by merging the uncertainty of the supply and implied customer demand with the supply chain capabilities (Chopra & Meindl 2013). Figure 10 has been developed to summarise what would otherwise be five different frontiers presented with an estimation of the relation between responsiveness and efficiency. In this supply chain structure, the business environment is predictable due to the sensitivity of the restaurant wholesalers' approach to implied customer demand. Which, according to Fisher (1997), is a sign of low uncertainty, greater ability to forecast, and a stable stock level, which describes why both of the actors have taken a level of efficiency in all activities. With one exception, that the "local food" activity is analysed to be in a highly uncertain business environment that requires high responsiveness.

Efficiency ⟵⟶ Responsiveness

	Cost minimising	RRQD	MSLT	HLP	HIP	MHSL	HSU
Availability & Communication	SG & MS	MS				SG & MS	SG
Customers & Service	SG & MS					SG & MS	
Assortment & Pricing	SG & MS			MS		SG & MS	
Transportation	SG & MS				MS	MS	
Local food						SG & MS	

- RRQD = Respond to a wide range of quantities demanded
- MSLT = Meet short lead times
- HLP = Handling a large variety of products
- HIP = Highly innovative products
- MHSL = Meet high service level
- HSU = Handle supply uncertainty

Figure 10. Own compilation of the supply chain structure of Martin & Servera (MS) and Snabbgross (SG).

5.4 Strategic fit

Step three in the theoretical synthesis is to make sure that the chosen strategy fits the structure of the supply chain (Chopra & Meindl 2013). And therefore, the most suitable strategy for the restaurant wholesaler must be studied in accordance with section 2.3.1. According to Fearne et al. (2012) and Chopra & Meindl (2013), agricultural and standardised products are more often than not related to a supply chain strategy. The products that flow in and out from the wholesalers are often sold in large quantities and are highly standardised. Snabbgross explained that they primarily coordinate the product flow within the Axfood group, which means that large volumes of standardised products are purchased and can therefore be sold at a lower price. Whereas differentiated products with segmented markets are more oriented toward a competitive strategy (ibid.), which requires more responsiveness and is related to a more uncertain supply and implied customer demand (Chopra & Meindl 2013). Martin & Servera explains the collaboration with Nordisk Råvara as a loss-making business due to yield difficulties and stresses that this would be a more appropriate collaboration for an actor within their corporate group, a smaller wholesaler (Sorunda hallarna) specialising in meeting customer demand.

In conclusion, from the analysis of the empirical results, the restaurant wholesaler in a supply chain similar to Martin & Servera and Snabbgross should have a supply chain strategy. This conclusion reinforces that there is not a strategic fit between the local food network and the observed restaurant wholesalers.

6. Discussion

In chapter six, the research questions are answered to fulfil the study's aim. The discussion is based on an interpretation of what can be seen in the analysis of finding the strategic fit between restaurant wholesalers and local food networks. This is achieved by using the lenses of supply chain management and value chain theory meanwhile maintaining a terminology based on Chopra & Meindl (2013).

6.1 How do restaurant wholesalers attempt to achieve a strategic fit within their business environment?

In section 6.1 the attempt to achieve a strategic fit within a conventional food supply chain where the restaurant wholesaler is participating will be further discussed.

In the theoretical perspective, supply chain and value chain were explained as two concepts that are usually separated within the field of business administration. However, Feller et al. (2006) and Holweg & Helo (2014) state an analytical aspect loss if the theories do not coexist. In this study, we share that view and will highlight the connections between the theories by illustrating how the restaurant wholesaler attempts to achieve a strategic fit within a conventional food supply chain.

According to Zamora (2016), the value chain can be used to identify the major business activities. Several actors are involved within the conventional food supply chain, all of which have different activities, transformation processes, and services (ibid.). Therefore, some actors have highly responsive roles in marketing and product development activities to create customer value and use a competitive strategy or a value chain approach (Feller et al. 2006). Actors like the restaurant wholesaler take a highly efficiency-based role in distributing large volumes of products at reduced prices. This creates another type of value from a supply chain strategy point of view, which is obtained from distribution, logistical solutions, and coordination among actors within the conventional food supply chain. However, from what is shown in Figure 10, the restaurant wholesaler still has to act within the responsiveness spectrum, implying that the wholesaler has to take sufficient notice of customer value which places the wholesaler in a value chain principle within the supply chain. The value must increase linearly among the actors and follow customers' demands for wholesalers to create value from efficiency as it is their primary role within the conventional food chain.

The finding that customer value dictates the conventional food supply chain supports that it is a buyer-driven value chain. According to Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark (2011), the wholesaler is a powerful end chain actor that can decide which suppliers to cooperate with but is influenced by the customers. This indicates that the customer's experience is crucial for creating value within the restaurant wholesale sector. To add to that, from what can be seen in our results, Snabbgross mentions profitable sustainability, which for them meant taking a stance on issues within sustainability while keeping their prices down. Furthermore, Martin & Servera mentioned the importance of suppliers working under their code of conduct, covering social and environmental issues. Consequently, the sustainability aspect is a shared interest and leaves room for speculation that gradual improvements within the sector develop as something becomes the new standard within the conventional food supply chain. Perhaps this could lead to a shift towards more local food initiatives with less complex chain structures if the end consumer creates the need for it. Furthermore, this could facilitate the construction of infrastructure to handle food that could be grown but not processed within a Swedish context.

Our results show that even if the restaurant wholesalers wanted to take in local products to a larger extent, as the case with Martin & Servera collaboration with Nordisk Råvara or Snabbgross limited products sold in Gotland; they would not be able to do so in the long run. Hence it opposes the supply chain strategy that is the most beneficial for the restaurant wholesaler. The wholesaler does not efficiently create value within the supply chain by being too responsive. Moreover, while trying to be both responsive and efficient in the long run, the wholesaler accomplishes nothing other than possibly being outcompeted by their competitors.

The bottom line is that the wholesalers' purpose is not to meet niche customer needs but to satisfy the larger mass and distribute large quantities with a low margin of added value per sold product. Not like locally produced food where the products are sold in smaller quantities for a higher price and will also be sold to the final customer at a higher price. This goes against the role of the restaurant wholesaler; even so, our results have found that the wholesalers still want to supply customers with local food and thereby satisfy their niche needs.

6.2 In what ways do restaurant wholesalers exhibit working with local food networks?

As shown by Figure 10 of the supply chain structure, the restaurant wholesalers' capabilities can vary in relation to their joint business environment, where Martin & Servera clearly takes a more responsive approach. This illustrates that a company's capabilities can differ while remaining competitive. Meanwhile, the uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand may vary depending on the product. Where the conventional food supply chain requested goods are predictable because of the already created collaborations between the involved actors. Although a new product, or as asked for in this study, products redistributed from a local food network will require much more effort for the restaurant wholesaler. In section 6.1, we found that the restaurant wholesalers are responsive to the consumer demand for local food. However, there seem to be different ways for how the two restaurant wholesalers meet the customer demand.

Our results have found that Snabbgross has a local collaboration that displays high responsiveness to meet customer needs within a small geographical area. And that the future outlook does not necessarily involve local products within the standard assortment. This implies that Snabbgross is working with local products to remain relevant and create customer satisfaction. Without making any real profit, having a high turnover of products, or being able to negotiate to obtain better prices. Thus, the business does not contribute to any efficiency within the supply chain but allows Snabbgross to maintain its customers. Whereas Martin & Servera is collaborating within a network with smaller, more specialised wholesale actors, focusing mainly on being responsive with a competitive strategy and prioritising customer needs before efficiency. Martin & Servera has identified the customer need for local products and therefore opened up for a collaboration with Sorunda hallarna, which has the opportunity to offer smaller quantities of unique products at a higher price. Furthermore, with a higher demand for local products, Martin & Servera would be able, in collaboration with Sorunda hallarna, to meet the increased need and become more efficient and adaptable. This result underlines Matopoulous et al. (2007) discovery that competitive advantages in the market are linked to actors' ability to collaborate with other participants in the chain and create adaptable and efficient supply chains.

These findings show two different ways in which restaurant wholesalers face customer demand with varying levels of responsiveness while acting within the same business environment. Where Snabbgross illustrates doing the bare minimum, Martin & Servera and Sorunda hallarna have created a strategic partnership, showing how Martin & Servera is trying to support customers´ niche-needs by allying with niche-oriented partners. This could hold theoretical implications showing how restaurant wholesalers can work with an efficiency strategy while partnering to be responsive. However, this explains little or nothing about the studied restaurant wholesalers' participation within a local food network but confirms that these restaurant wholesalers have no extensive role within an LFN.

7. Conclusions

Firstly, chapter seven begins by presenting the conclusions of the analysis and discussions drawn from the aim of this study. This study aims to; generate more knowledge about the role and participation of restaurant wholesalers in a local food system by using the lenses of supply chain management and value chain theory. Secondly, proposals for further research are presented, and at the end of the chapter, a critical reflection of the study is presented.

7.1 Our conclusions

From the discussion, we concluded that there are advantages in analysing from a dual view of supply chain management and value chain theory, which aligns with Feller et al. (2006) and Holweg & Helo (2014). This enabled the finding that the restaurant wholesalers' role is to create value through efficiency within the supply chain. Simultaneously, each actor must add value from production to consumption; otherwise, the efficiency does not add any value. This is why restaurant wholesalers that attempt to take a highly responsive role to create value for the customer and sacrifice efficiency will not be able to compete within the large-scale restaurant wholesale sector because it is dominated by efficiency. Therefore, a supply chain strategy is more suitable than a competitive strategy for the restaurant wholesaler.

However, it was additionally found that the restaurant wholesaler is responsive to the customer preferences. The two wholesalers have different approaches on how to handle their customers' preferences. Where one fulfils the customer request to maintain customer satisfaction, even if there is not necessarily any significant profit involved, and the other collaborates within a more complex network involving additional smaller and specialised wholesalers to satisfy customer needs.

The analysis exhibits that a direct strategic fit between a restaurant wholesaler and a local food network does not match. The uncertainty of supply and implied customer demand is too high for the wholesaler to proceed with a local collaboration that is not highly demanded. Furthermore, due to the restaurant wholesaler's efficient role, direct participation within a local food network is not viable. At the same time, there is an opportunity to establish alliances with specialised partners who can be responsive to customers' specific demands.

7.2 Critical reflection

The theoretical synthesis is based on Chopra & Meindl's (2013) book about strategies, planning, and operations within supply chain management but still involves the value chain view. However, other authors have written similar books on value chain and supply chain theory and have taken value chain as the primary theory. This creates implications not only from a terminological point of view but also when the fundamental view of the concepts differs. By using Chopra & Meindl's (2013) vocabulary to introduce the dual logics of value chain and supply chain this study has taken a stance on what is believed to be the ultimate approach to understanding the real world from a theoretical standpoint.

7.3 Further research

The study showed that restaurant wholesalers do not have a strategic fit with local food networks. However, it was found that there are smaller and specialised restaurant wholesalers that could have a potential role in a local food network. Therefore, a similar study investigating specialised smaller restaurant wholesalers could contribute to a deeper understanding of the field of restaurant wholesalers and LFS.

Because of the nascent research state of the subject of restaurant wholesalers within local food systems, additional research gaps should be investigated by further conducting a comprehensive qualitative study. Further studies should involve more interviewed respondents with restaurant wholesalers of varying types and sizes.

Our results have shown that there is no reason to devote more resources to a local food collaboration from the wholesalers' current business environment. For this reason, a study that covers the perspective of producers, wholesalers, and restaurants; in which local production, distribution, and consumption could increase and which factors are relevant would be interesting to examine.

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Popular science summary

A globally growing population contributes to several challenges, not least regarding food security. Today's society and consumption patterns differ from 50 years ago. International trade between the world's countries has led to consumers having access to food, regardless of the season, all year round. Increased trade in food has also led to the involvement of several actors between producer and consumer. To reduce the number of actors involved and contribute to more robust and resilient food systems, local food systems have gained momentum in recent years. The local food systems are seen as a potential solution for a more sustainable food production than conventional food systems. However, the local food systems are criticised for being inefficient in coordination and logistics. Therefore, our thesis aims to investigate whether a restaurant wholesaler, which contributes to efficiency in the supply chain, could have a role in the local food network.

The empirical material was collected through qualitative, semi-structured interviews with two of Sweden's four largest restaurant wholesalers. The restaurant wholesalers were selected because they represent the wholesaler with the lowest proportion of imported meat and the wholesaler with the highest proportion of imported meat, according to a report with compiled data from Sweden's four largest restaurant wholesalers. The theories on which the thesis is based are supply chain management and value chain.

The results showed that the role of restaurant wholesalers in the supply chain is to be the efficient actor that satisfies customers with extensive, reliable, and in-demand volumes of products. Therefore, the restaurant wholesaler can not be part of a direct local food network. Because it is based on food supply with smaller volumes and uncertain customer demand, which is not suitable for an actor like the restaurant wholesalers’ efficiency-based role.

However, there is still the opportunity for major restaurant wholesalers to meet local customer needs by strategically collaborating with smaller, more specialised wholesalers in the chain.

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Appendix 1

Intervjugiude med X

Uppvärmningsfrågor:
1. Berätta om din roll inom företaget.
2. Berätta kortfattat om verksamhetens affärsidé.
3. Vilka är era kunder? Olika kundsegment (förklara)?
4. Vilket sorts värde försöker ni erbjuda era kunder?
5. Vilka processer/aktiviteter finns för att uppnå dessa värden?
6. Var kommer era produkter ifrån?
7. Finns det olika sorters leverantörer för att få dessa produkter (förklara)?

Process för sortiment:
1. Hade ni kunnat beskriva utifrån ett större perspektiv vilka aktörer som är inblandade för att ni ska kunna sälja era varor? (Från produkt till konsumtion)

2) Hur ser det ut när en produkt tas in i ert sortiment?
2a) Vilka faktorer är viktiga?
2b) Varför är dessa faktorer viktiga?

Strukturen för sortiment:
3) Finns det någon aktör som har stort inflytande på vad som finns i ert sortiment?
3a) Vilken roll spelar följande för det som finns i ert sortiment?
i) Producenter
ii) Konsumenter
iii) Nära relationer
3b) Vad kan mer tänkas ha inflytande på ert sortiment?

Lokala samarbeten:
4) Vad är din definition av lokal producerat?
4) Hur ser ni på lokala samarbeten?
4a) Finns det några produkter i ert sortiment som är ett lokalt samarbete?
4b) **Om ja**, hur uppnådes dessa sammarbeten?
4c) Vad var anledningen till att starta det specifika samarbetet?
4d) **Om nej**, varför har ni inte dessa sammarbeten?
4e) Vad hade kunnat ändra på detta?

4f) Ser ni några möjligheter med närproducerade/nationella livsmedel?

Hur ser ni på er verksamhet:
5) Anser ni att ni har några direkta konkurrenter inom sektorn?
5a) Vad driver konkurrensen nuförtiden?
5b) Har den förändrats genom åren enligt Er?
5c) Vilka krav finns på marknaden idag anser Ni?
5d) Har de förändrats de senaste åren?
5e) Om ja, varför då tror ni?
5f) Vad är er roll som grossist om vi har producenter på ena sidan och privata restauranger på andra sidan?
5g) Hur beroende anser du att ditt företag är av andra företag?
5h) Vad skulle hända om ett specifikt samarbete upphör imorgon?
5i) Vad skulle det isåfall medföra för konsekvenser och hur snabbt kommer dessa isåfall övervinnas?
5j) Hur ser ni på förtroendet gentemot era leverantörer och kunder?
5k) Har detta förändrats genom årens gång?

Warm-up questions:
1. Tell us about your role within the company.
2. Briefly tell about the business concept of the business.
3. Who are your customers? Different customer segments (explain)?
4. What kind of value are you trying to offer your customers?
5. What processes/activities exist to achieve these values?
6. Where do your products come from?
7. Are there different suppliers to get these products (explain)?

Process for assortment:
1. Could you describe from a larger perspective which actors are involved for you to sell your goods? (From product to consumption)
2. What does it look like when a product is included in your assortment?
2a) Which factors are important?
2b) Why are these factors important?

The structure for assortment:
3. Is there any player who greatly influences what is in your assortment?
3a) What role does the following play in what is in your range?
i) Manufacturers
ii) Consumers
iii) Close relationships
3b) What else is likely to influence your assortment?

Local collaborations:
4. What is your definition of locally produced?
5. How do you view local collaborations?
5a) Are there any products in your assortment that are a local collaboration?
5b) If so, how were these collaborations achieved?

5c) What was the reason for starting the specific collaboration?
5d) If not, why do you not have these collaborations?
5e) What could have changed this?
5f) Do you see any possibilities with locally produced / national foods?

How do you view your business:
6) Do you consider that you have any direct competitors in the sector?
6a) What drives competition nowadays?
6b) Has it changed over the years according to you?
6c) What requirements do you have on the market today?
6d) Have they changed in recent years?
6e) If so, why do you think so?
6f) What is your role as a wholesaler if we have producers on one side and private restaurants on the other side?
6g) How dependent do you think your company is on other companies?
6h) What would happen if a specific collaboration ends tomorrow?
6i) If so, what would be the consequences and how quickly will these be overcome?
6j) How do you view the trust in your suppliers and customers?
6k) Has this changed over the years?

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