




Evaluating normative entrepreneurial identity: The Barcelona case

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Abstract

This study examines the extent to which digital ventures in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (MAB) have adopted the normative entrepreneurial identity promoted through the Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona (SMPB). Since 2010, governmental institutions have sought to align entrepreneurship with sustainability, technology, and global engagement. However, the degree to which ventures have internalized these values remains unclear. This study addresses this gap by conducting a mixed-method analysis of 200 digital enterprises, combining content analysis of institutional documents with statistical evaluation of espoused values. The findings indicate a low-to-moderate adoption level of the normative entrepreneurial identity, with sustainability and efficiency emerging as the most widely accepted dimensions, while cosmopolitanism remains the least embraced. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurial identity formation by demonstrating how institutional frameworks shape but do not fully determine entrepreneurial values. The study provides insights for policymakers to bridge the gap between institutional goals and entrepreneurial practices meanwhile foster a more inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Identity; Normative Institutions; Sustainability; Values.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in economic growth and sustainability transitions, attracting significant scholarly and policy attention (Köhler et al., 2019; Satalkina & Steiner, 2020). Institutional frameworks shape entrepreneurial identity by embedding values that align with long-term societal goals, including sustainability, innovation, and global engagement (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Loorbach, 2007). A clear example of this is the Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona (SMPB), which positions entrepreneurship as a key driver of sustainability and technological innovation, identifying digital ventures as critical actors in this transformation. Digital ventures operate at the intersection of technological innovation and institutional change, making them particularly responsive to institutional legitimacy demands (Scott, 2014) as they navigate evolving regulatory, technological, and societal landscapes (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Unlike traditional firms, digital ventures must continuously balance institutional pressures with market-driven priorities, strategically shaping their entrepreneurial identity (Watson, 2008).

The institutionalization of discourses related to sustainability, innovation, and global engagement, alongside the re-evaluation of values and essential qualities for the future (Loorbach, 2007; Satalkina & Steiner, 2020; Morais Mourato & Bussler, 2019), has established a normative framework under the SMPB (March & Olsen, 1984) for the Barcelona context. However, while the SMPB envisions a digital entrepreneurial ecosystem aligned with these values, empirical research on how digital ventures adopt, reject, or reinterpret these institutional prescriptions remains scarce (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

Entrepreneurial identity is increasingly conceptualized as a socially embedded construct, shaped by institutional expectations and legitimacy concerns (Anderson, Warren, & Bensemann, 2019; van Dijk, 2006). Existing literature explores institutional influences on entrepreneurial ecosystems (Scott, 2014; Stryker & Burke, 2000) but tends to focus on macro-level institutional narratives, rather than how firms themselves internalize and negotiate these norms (March & Olsen, 1984; Scott & Davis, 2003). This study addresses this gap by examining how digital



ventures construct their normative entrepreneurial identity within institutional constraints and market imperatives, shedding light on their role in materializing—or contesting—the broader strategic vision set forth by the SMPB.

Integrating insights from institutional theory (Scott, 2014), entrepreneurial identity formation (Watson, 2008), and legitimacy theory, this study develops a framework for understanding normative entrepreneurial identity adoption. Normative entrepreneurial identity is conceptualized as the intersection of institutional goals and entrepreneurial identity, serving as a lens to assess how ventures align their priorities with the institutional vision. Understanding the values underpinning entrepreneurial identity and their adoption within the business community provides crucial insights into the legitimacy of sustainability goals. After a preliminary analysis of the SMPB, the normative entrepreneurial identity emerges, structured around three interconnected dimensions: (1) Innovation and Technology, (2) Sustainability and Efficiency, and (3) Cosmopolitanism.

By empirically examining how digital ventures engage with these dimensions, this study elucidates the degree of alignment—or resistance—between institutional imperatives and entrepreneurial praxis. Methodologically, this study employs a descriptive analytical approach, examining 200 digital enterprises operating within the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (MAB). The data collection process involved extracting espoused values from publicly accessible corporate documents, including mission statements, websites, and reports. These values were analysed using Bourne et al.'s (2017) framework, ensuring methodological rigor and comparability across firms. Espoused values serve as a symbolic representation of social and operational priorities (Bourne et al., 2017a; Bourne & Jenkins, 2013). These values are particularly sensitive to institutional change, offering a diagnostic tool for assessing how entrepreneurial communities internalize institutional goals.

The findings reveal that while sustainability and efficiency have been widely embraced among digital ventures, cosmopolitanism remains underintegrated. Larger firms, particularly those with later-stage funding and international reach, tend to align more closely with institutional values, whereas micro and early-stage enterprises prioritize market survival, often showing lower adherence to prescribed norms. Entrepreneurs exhibit selective adoption of institutional norms, favouring values that provide economic and operational advantages while resisting those perceived as less immediately beneficial. A notable disconnect emerges between institutional narratives and entrepreneurial priorities, particularly regarding global engagement values, illustrating that while policy-driven identity formation exerts influence, it does not determine entrepreneurial behaviour outright. These insights reinforce existing research that highlights how firms internalize institutional values in varying ways, contingent on resource availability, industry dynamics, and stakeholder expectations.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, linking entrepreneurial identity, institutional influences, and sustainability transitions. Section 3 outlines the research design, detailing data collection methodologies and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents the empirical findings, highlighting patterns of normative entrepreneurial identity adoption. Section 5 discusses the theoretical and policy implications, while Section 6 concludes with recommendations for future research and institutional policy refinements.

2. Literature Framework

2.1. Conceptualizing Normative Entrepreneurial Identity

Entrepreneurial identity can be understood as the role expectations associated with being appropriately entrepreneurial within a specific institutional context (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This conceptualization recognizes the cognitive aspects of identity construction while emphasizing the social and institutional structures that shape entrepreneurship (Fletcher, 2006; Anderson et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial identity is not formed in isolation; rather, it is embedded within broader historical, cultural, and political frameworks (Watson, 2008). As a result, entrepreneurs are subject to institutional pressures that shape their decision-making processes, market strategies, and public narratives (Anderson & Gaddefors, 2016).



Institutional theory provides a valuable lens for examining how normative frameworks influence entrepreneurship (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014; Selznick, 1996). Institutions, particularly normative institutions, establish rules, values, and expectations that define the boundaries of legitimate entrepreneurial behaviour (March & Olsen, 1984; Scott, 2014). These frameworks are not neutral but are strategically shaped by political and economic actors to align entrepreneurship with broader societal goals (Meyer et al., 2011; Peng, 2003). In this sense, institutions actively construct entrepreneurial identity by embedding specific values and behaviours into policy narratives, funding priorities, and regulatory frameworks (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; Anderson, Warren, & Bensemann, 2019).

Within this institutionalized landscape, entrepreneurs are both subjects and agents of institutional logics (Scott, 2014; Suddaby, 2010). While institutional discourses define the characteristics of an “ideal entrepreneur” by embedding specific values into policy narratives and regulatory frameworks (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; Meyer et al., 2011), entrepreneurs interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist these frameworks based on strategic interests and market conditions (Watson, 2008; Anderson, Warren, & Bensemann, 2019). This dynamic interplay highlights the complexity of normative entrepreneurial identity, in which individuals balance external expectations with their own strategic goals while navigating evolving institutional pressures (Stryker & Burke, 2000; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

A key way in which entrepreneurs communicate their alignment with institutional expectations is through espoused values—the publicly articulated principles that organizations prioritize (Bourne et al., 2017; Jonsen et al., 2015). Espoused values serve as legitimacy signals, reflecting the intersection between institutional pressures and entrepreneurial self-conception (Scott, 2014; Kabanoff et al., 1995). These values act as both internal identity statements and external adaptation mechanisms, helping businesses craft their reputations while navigating institutional constraints (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Suchman, 1995).

Building on institutional theory, we define normative entrepreneurial identity as the expectations associated with being appropriately entrepreneurial under a given set of institutional values (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Meyer et al., 2011). Normative identity emerges when institutional frameworks actively promote specific values and behaviours, embedding them into entrepreneurial discourses and business practices (March & Olsen, 1984; Scott, 2014). These values act as guidelines for business strategy and organizational positioning (Kabanoff & Holt, 1996), influencing how entrepreneurs define their roles and market orientations.

Given their public nature, espoused values are highly responsive to external pressures, making them a useful analytical tool for assessing how entrepreneurial ventures internalize institutionalized identity expectations (Brummette & Zoch, 2016; Olkkonen & Luoma-Aho, 2015). In this study, espoused values serve as an indicator of normative entrepreneurial identity adoption thus they offer a means of tracing the embeddedness of institutional discourses within entrepreneurial ecosystems and evaluating whether ventures conform to, selectively adopt, or resist prevailing institutional norms. A critical aspect of normative entrepreneurial identity is the espoused values—the symbolic manifestations of the qualities organizations publicly prioritize (Bourne et al., 2017; Jonsen et al., 2015; Kabanoff et al., 1995). Espoused values serve as building blocks of legitimacy, reflecting the intersection between institutional expectations and entrepreneurial practices (Bourne, Jenkins, & Parry, 2017). They provide a lens through which to trace the adoption of normative entrepreneurial identity, symbolizing perceptions of what entrepreneurship “should be” in alignment with institutional goals. The contrast between institutional values and those espoused by entrepreneurial organizations offers insights into the sustainability transition’s progress and legitimacy within the entrepreneurial community. This research assesses the normative entrepreneurial identity of one of Europe’s most dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems: the Strategic Metropolitan Area of Barcelona.

2.2. The Strategic Metropolitan Area of Barcelona and The Normative Entrepreneurial Identity

Barcelona stands as one of the world’s most admired cities, renowned for its creativity, innovation, culture, and quality of life. It ranks among Europe’s leading cities—alongside Berlin, Paris, and London—for its reputation as



a hub of global talent and innovation (Belloso, 2011). The city’s transformation into a world-class metropolis can be traced back to the 1980s and culminated in the 1992 Olympic Games, marking a pivotal moment in its redefinition as a centre for economic, social, and cultural innovation (Belloso, 2011; Compte-Pujol et al., 2018). This transformation reflects decades of collaboration between public and private stakeholders, aligned with evolving global challenges.

The Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona (SMPB) positioned entrepreneurship at the heart of the city’s economic and social development strategy. By 2020, the SMPB envisioned Barcelona as a hub for three interconnected types of entrepreneurship: technological, digital, and sustainable (Table 1). These forms of entrepreneurship were seen as essential to addressing the city’s economic, environmental, and social challenges, requiring the incorporation of new values into the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The SMPB emphasized a redefinition of the existing entrepreneurial model, aiming to integrate values such as innovation, talent, creativity, and sustainability into business practices. These values were framed as tools to foster social cohesion, reduce exclusion, and promote global competitiveness (Associació Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona, 2010). The overarching goal was to position Barcelona as one of Europe’s most attractive regions for global talent and a leader in sustainability and innovation (Associació Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona, 2010).

Table 1: Overview of the source document: Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona Vision 2020.

Institutional framework	Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Metropolitan area of Barcelona
Regulative framework	Law 31/2010, of 3 August, created the Metropolitan Area of Metropolitan area of Barcelona (AMB)
Competences	The economic and social development of the AMB. In particular ‘promoting a metropolitan strategic plan which, with the participation of the economic, social and institutional agents, will favour modernisation, research and innovation’.
Vision of AMB 2020	The strategic proposal or Vision 2020 entails consolidating the AMB as a world-class metropolis: one of the most attractive and influential European regions for global innovative talent, with a model of integration and social cohesion of quality.
Challenges	1. Sustainability and climate change.
	2. Position the AMB as a benchmark in the new global framework: greater presence in countries which lead the world and capitality of the Mediterranean.
	3. Global leader in some growth-driving sectors of knowledge.
	4. Getting beyond the ‘bio’ companies. Updating and strengthening traditional industry and sectors.
	5. Being among the most attractive European regions for innovative talent.
	6. Being an interesting and socially balanced city: a social response to the crisis.
Levers of change	2.1. A powerful university and education system that strengthens its position of excellence and transversal awareness, which is a factor in attracting talent and which favours a closer relationship with the productive and business sectors.
	2.2. An administration which acts with criteria of efficiency, which facilitates economic activity, company creation and project development.
	2.3. A governance that brings innovative criteria to the management of strategic projects and strengthens public-private co-responsibility in leadership.
	2.4. Future values which complement and reinforce the basis of present and traditional values, which contribute a new character to the city and its citizens.
	2.5. An extensive knowledge of languages which facilitates internationalisation, the attraction of talent and full incorporation into world markets. An international airport and the Metropolitan area of Barcelona brand.



This institutional emphasis on entrepreneurship aligns with broader discussions on normative entrepreneurial identity, particularly regarding how institutional actors embed values into the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The conceptualization of normative entrepreneurial identity in this study provides a framework for understanding how the values embedded in the SMPB—such as innovation, sustainability, and global engagement—shape entrepreneurial expectations and identity formation within Barcelona’s ecosystem.

In Barcelona, these expectations are particularly pronounced due to the SMPB’s deliberate effort to establish the city as a leader in sustainable and technological entrepreneurship. The interplay between institutional legitimacy and entrepreneurial agency in this context is crucial, as entrepreneurs must navigate the tension between institutional prescriptions and market-driven realities. In line with the goals, the Metropolitan area of Barcelona vision of entrepreneurship by 2020 is oriented “to develop an entrepreneurial culture [...] [based on] the new technologies” (Associació Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona, 2010), transforming into “the most attractive and influential metropolis for global and innovative talent” ((Associació Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona, 2010, p. 11) and putting “the philosophy of sustainability [...] [as a] great opportunity for business and growth”.

To systematically examine normative entrepreneurial identity in the Barcelona entrepreneurial ecosystem, we propose a conceptual model structured around three core dimensions each representing distinct yet interconnected values that organizations espouse to align with institutional goals and societal expectations (Table 2):

1. Innovation and Technology—Captures values related to technological progress, agility, creativity, and market expansion. It reflects how businesses position themselves as pioneers of innovation within Barcelona’s economic development strategy (Bourne et al., 2017).
2. Sustainability and Efficiency—Encompasses values associated with environmental and social responsibility, reflecting institutional expectations that businesses should contribute to sustainability transitions (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018).
3. Cosmopolitanism—Represents values related to global engagement, inclusivity, and diversity, emphasizing the role of entrepreneurship in fostering internationalization and multicultural collaboration (Woodward et al., 2008).

Table 2: The normative entrepreneurial identity.

	Dimensions	Espoused Values
Normative Entrepreneurial Identity	<i>Innovation and Technology</i>	Innovation, agility, growth, entrepreneurship, creativity, pragmatism, technology, learning, individuality, leadership.
	<i>Cosmopolitanism</i>	Being global, humility, respect, diversity, inclusion, openness, integrity, life quality, trust, resilience, tenacity, can do, attitude, democracy, fairness, transparency, communication.
	<i>Sustainability and Efficiency</i>	Care for the environment, social responsibility, health, efficiency responsiveness, continuous improvement, excellence, expertise, diligence, professionalism, ownership

2.2.1. Innovation and Technology

This dimension encompasses values associated with organizational competence and the ability to achieve growth through innovative outputs and actions (Bourne et al., 2017). These values emphasize an organization’s agility,

adaptability, and forward-thinking approach in navigating competitive markets. Core values within this dimension include:

- *Innovation*: The pursuit of novel ideas and methods to improve processes or products.
- *Agility*: The ability to respond rapidly to market demands and changes.
- *Growth*: A focus on scaling operations and achieving economic expansion.
- *Entrepreneurship*: Demonstrating initiative and resourcefulness in value creation.
- *Creativity and Pragmatism*: Balancing visionary ideas with practical applications.
- *Technology*: Leveraging digital and technical advancements as drivers of business solutions.
- *Learning and Leadership*: Encouraging continuous knowledge development and strong leadership that inspires organizational and sector-wide progress.

These values collectively represent a performance-oriented ethos, highlighting how organizations position themselves as innovative leaders capable of addressing complex challenges.

2.2.2. *Cosmopolitanism*

Reflects a global mindset and interpersonal openness, emphasizing values that shape the character and social responsibility of entrepreneurs. It is rooted in the idea that entrepreneurial practice must align with broader societal and cultural inclusivity. As Kendall et al. (2009) note, cosmopolitanism embodies attitudes, behaviours, and practices that promote openness to entrepreneurship and global interconnectedness. Significant aspects of cosmopolitanism include:

- *Diversity and Inclusion*: Embracing varied perspectives and fostering equitable participation.
- *Respect and Humility*: Valuing others' contributions and maintaining ethical engagement.
- *Social Tolerance and Democracy*: Supporting freedom, fairness, and equality within organizations and communities.
- *Openness and Integrity*: Encouraging transparency and trust in entrepreneurial practices.
- *Resilience and Tenacity*: Cultivating perseverance in the face of global challenges.
- *Being Global*: Aspiring to operate internationally while respecting local cultural nuances.
- *Communication and Life Quality*: Prioritizing clear engagement and enhancing societal well-being.

This dimension is critical for entrepreneurs navigating cross-cultural environments and addressing the interconnected nature of global challenges, including human rights, environmental protection, and social equity (Woodward et al., 2008; Jack et al., 2004).

2.2.3. *Sustainability and Efficiency*

This dimension focuses on values that promote resource efficiency and corporate social responsibility, aligning organizational goals with societal and environmental well-being. Sustainability and efficiency emphasize the interconnectedness of organizational success and broader ecological and social systems (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018).

Key values include:

- *Care for the Environment*: Committing to practices that minimize ecological footprints and promote environmental health.
- *Social Responsibility*: Recognizing the organization's role in addressing societal challenges.
- *Efficiency and Responsiveness*: Optimizing resource use while remaining adaptable to societal and market needs.
- *Continuous Improvement*: Striving for ongoing enhancement in processes, products, and services.
- *Excellence and Expertise*: Ensuring high-quality outputs through skilled execution.
- *Professionalism and Ownership*: Maintaining ethical and accountable practices in all operations.
- *Health and Safety*: Prioritizing the well-being of employees, customers, and communities.

This dimension also introduces the concept of a sense of 'the other', which transcends self-interest to consider the needs and impacts on broader communities (Bourne et al., 2017). It captures the dual responsibility of



entrepreneurs to foster business growth while contributing positively to global sustainability goals. Together, these three dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the normative entrepreneurial identity. They illustrate how organizations align with institutional visions by espousing values that balance innovation and technical proficiency, global openness and inclusivity, and sustainable practices. This framework not only reflects the expectations placed on entrepreneurial organizations but also reveals the pathways through which entrepreneurship can contribute to sustainable transitions and global societal progress.

3. Methodology

The objective of this research is to explore the espoused values associated with the normative entrepreneurial identity in the context of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. To address this objective, we designed a study that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as this mixed-method approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how institutional narratives shape entrepreneurial identity formation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The qualitative content analysis provides depth in identifying and interpreting institutional discourses embedded in policy frameworks, allowing for the examination of how entrepreneurial identity is framed by institutional actors (Bowen, 2009). Meanwhile, the quantitative descriptive analysis offers empirical validation by assessing the extent to which these normative values are reflected among entrepreneurial ventures, ensuring that findings are not solely based on subjective interpretation (Bansal & Corley, 2012). This combination enhances the robustness of the findings by capturing both institutional intent and entrepreneurial response, ensuring methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012) and increasing the reliability of the study's conclusions by reducing potential biases associated with single-method approaches (Jick, 1979).

The sample of 200 ventures was sourced from the Crunchbase Database and the Start-up Hub Barcelona directory, ensuring that only active digital ventures founded between 2010 and 2019 were included. The selection criteria required that firms maintain an official website, as corporate websites have been recognized as a reliable source for analysing organizational identity due to their role in external communication and stakeholder engagement (Chun, 2019; Bansal & Kistruck, 2006; Jonsen et al., 2015). The majority were micro-enterprises (57%) in the pre-seed funding stage (41.5%), operating in industries such as fashion, biotech, and fintech. Approximately 42% of the ventures engaged in international operations, while 58% operated exclusively within the domestic market.

For data collection, we conducted a second content analysis, this time analyzing the mission statements and value declarations published on corporate websites. Previous research has demonstrated that organizations use these sections strategically to project their identities and align with external expectations (Bourne et al., 2017; Jonsen et al., 2015; Kabanoff & Daly, 2000). We extracted values from sections titled "About Us," "Who We Are," "Our Values," or "Company Information" to ensure consistency across firms. To systematically assess the adoption of normative entrepreneurial identity, this study employs a structured analytical approach using espoused values as the primary metric. Espoused values serve as explicit indicators of organizational priorities, allowing for the identification of alignment between institutional expectations and entrepreneurial practices (Bourne et al., 2017; Jonsen et al., 2015). The selection of espoused values as the central variable is supported by previous research demonstrating their reliability in capturing organizational identity and legitimacy within institutional contexts (Kabanoff et al., 1995; Suchman, 1995). These values provide insight into how ventures symbolically communicate their commitment to institutional norms, making them an appropriate measure for assessing normative identity adoption.

3.1.1. Qualitative Study

The first phase of this research focused on identifying the normative entrepreneurial identity within the institutional framework of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. A qualitative content analysis of the SMPB was conducted to systematically extract the values associated with entrepreneurial identity as promoted by institutional actors. The official document (available at <https://pemb.cat/en/publications/metropolitan-area-of-Barcelona-vision-2020/25/>) served as the primary data source for this analysis.

The SMPB provides a structured vision for entrepreneurship in Barcelona, emphasizing innovation, sustainability, and global engagement as foundational pillars of its economic strategy. As one of Europe’s most internationally recognized entrepreneurial hubs, Barcelona has undergone significant transformation, particularly following the 1992 Olympic Games, which served as a catalyst for economic modernization and institutional alignment between public and private stakeholders (Belloso, 2011; Compte-Pujol et al., 2018). The SMPB continues this trajectory by embedding strategic values into its policy framework to shape the future of entrepreneurship in the region.

To conduct the content analysis, we employed the Bourne et al. (2017) espoused values inventory, a widely recognized framework for analysing organizational values. This methodology was chosen because it integrates existing theoretical frameworks on organizational values while accounting for emerging trends in corporate identity. The framework classifies 73 values into 12 categories and four overarching value families, providing a comprehensive lens for assessing the institutionalized values shaping entrepreneurial identity in Barcelona.

A manual coding process was employed to enhance context sensitivity, as certain values were not explicitly stated but rather implied within broader institutional narratives. Sentences were used as the unit of analysis to ensure that values were properly contextualized. The coding process was iterative, involving multiple rounds of validation to ensure accuracy and consistency. To further enhance reliability, a content dictionary was developed using the Oxford Business Dictionary, ensuring consistency in the interpretation of key terms across different linguistic contexts.

After refining the coding structure, the analysis focused on sections of the SMPB most relevant to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including policies on business development, innovation promotion, and sustainability. Although the SMPB explicitly outlines future values for Barcelona’s entrepreneurial vision, we conducted a deeper analysis of the entire document to capture implicit value constructions. This approach aligns with the perspective that narratives are subjective and serve as mechanisms for constructing and communicating identity (Markowska & Welter, 2018). The findings of this qualitative analysis provide the foundation for understanding the normative entrepreneurial identity in Barcelona. The next section presents the identified values and their classification under the Innovation and Technology, Sustainability and Efficiency, and Cosmopolitanism dimensions, which define the expectations surrounding entrepreneurship in this institutional context. (Table 2).

Table 3: Example of coding and transformation.

Illustrative quotes	Transformation on Bourne’s (2017) framework	Espoused Values Units	Dimensions of the Normative Entrepreneurial Identity
The AMB is magnificently placed to become one of the world’s icons of innovation, if things go well. We must be clear that we cannot innovate alone, and that we need large multinationals to set up research laboratories in the AMB to interact with our best talent.	Innovation		
This shared project looks to work with people and companies to learn how to give a quicker and more effective response to change.	Agility	Enterprise	Innovation and Technology
On the way to global growth, creativity is today’s driving force, giving continuity to knowledge, information, industry and agriculture due to its transversely, essential for developing synergies between the different economic sectors.	Growth		
Develop an entrepreneurial culture, adapting university programmes to the knowledge variables the market demands, for example, knowledge	Creativity		



Illustrative quotes	Transformation Bourne's (2017) framework	Espoused Values Units	Dimensions of the Normative Entrepreneurial Identity
related to state-of-the-art Internet and the new technologies, with the participation of recognised experts.			
for changing the course of things and doing them different			
One of the most important changes spreading throughout the world is the perception of time and the importance of living and acting in real-time.	Pragmatism		
The places where most knowledge and innovation have always been found: the hub territories of a globalised world economy.	Innovation Technology		
The AMB has a series of infrastructures, technological and scientific platforms, universities, and innovative entrepreneurs.	Technology	Quality	
we see strategic learning as the constant synchronisation between idea and action, without prejudice to the vital feedback between the two	Learning	Recognition	
taking advantage of what makes us different may be the key.	Individuality		
Leadership: Contributing ideas on 'how things should be'.	Leadership		
Becoming one of the most attractive European regions for innovative talent The AMB: hub for entrepreneurs.	Being global	Global citizens	
The cultural identity of the city and its metropolitan area must be enhanced, setting its sights on internationalisation, with greater ambition and better communication of its linguistic diversity.	Humility Respect Diversity	Tolerance	
The basic traditional metropolitan values are being open and welcoming, enterprising and creative, inclusive and offering solidarity	Inclusion Openness		
Reinforce the basis of present and traditional values, which contribute a new character to the city and its citizens	Integrity	Equality	
For the eleventh consecutive year, Metropolitan area of Barcelona was the metropolis with the highest quality of life in Europe. This indicator is, undoubtedly, one of the main assets for its residents, but also for attracting companies and professionals from elsewhere.	Life quality		Cosmopolitanism
The current state of the information and communication technologies (ICT), high definition and 3D makes this the ideal moment for the AMB to invest in these sectors.	Trust	Collaboration	
The successful cities have two things: planning and management systems which bring their citizens together to agree on goals, and the capacity to adapt to change and to innovate.	Resilience		
We can do it. Very few metropolises in the world have the tools that we have to tackle globalisation and its challenges: airport, high-speed trains, scientific, technological and creativity parks, innovative companies and people, pioneering projects. We must learn to make the	Tenacity Can do Attitude		



Illustrative quotes	Transformati on Bourne's (2017) framework	Espou sed Values Units	Dimensions of the Normative Entrepreneuri al Identity
most of them with greater coordination and efficiency. Stimulating, not holding back.			
The AMB has fallen behind in recent years, although currently a positive trend is being seen, encouraged by the new technologies, towards the appearance of creative companies			
Sustainability and climate change. In 2020, a territory's competitiveness will be measured by its capacity to develop sustainable models. The AMB can become a benchmark for sustainability for warm-climate cities.	Care for environment	Sustai nabilit y	
A market must be created for developing new products, supported by the regulating power of the public administrations, which aids the setting up of a powerful framework of companies with impact on the GDP.	Social responsibilit y Health		
We are entering a stage of the scarcity of raw materials which will require innovation, talent and creativity to change the present productive model and optimise the use of natural resources.			
The 'Metropolitan area of Barcelona optimises' line is focused on energy, introducing 'energy rehabilitation' of existing buildings, reduction of energy demand in new buildings, and promotes the functional and energy rehabilitation of the city.	Efficiency		
With over 30% of school drop-out in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, it is difficult to aspire to being a balanced society. This must be the objective to tackle	Responsiven ess		Sustainability and Efficiency
Track T: fast-track window for company creation.	Speed		
It must incorporate new material and the new constructive technologies which are sweeping a new broom through the construction and improvement processes, especially as regards end quality	Continuous improvement	Qualit y	
REINFORCE FE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE with company creation programmes.	Excellence		
More than 220 entrepreneurs and experts took part (managers, academics, scientists, consultants, journalists and social agents) in each of the sectors analysed and 50 meetings were organised.	Expertise		
The AMB has a series of infrastructures, technological and scientific platforms, universities, and innovative entrepreneurs. A situation is difficult to find in any other metropolis.	Diligence		
Given the potential of the AMB, quality, high-level education must contribute to attracting global talent.	Professionalism		
Metropolitan area of Barcelona is the fifth favourite city in Europe for setting up a business and among other assets, has a wide range of centres of technology, research and innovation	Ownership		



3.1.2. Quantitative Study

The second phase of this study aimed to examine how the normative entrepreneurial identity is reflected among entrepreneurial ventures operating in the region. To achieve this, we conducted a statistical descriptive analysis of espoused values among 200 digital ventures in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona's entrepreneurial hub. The focus on digital and technological ventures was determined based on the qualitative findings, which identified these sectors as central to the institutional vision outlined in the SMPB.

To ensure a systematic classification, ventures were grouped based on the distribution of their espoused values across the three dimensions of normative entrepreneurial identity: Innovation and Technology, Sustainability and Efficiency, and Cosmopolitanism. The categorization of normative identity adoption into low, medium, and high was derived from an empirical framework that combines qualitative insights with quantitative validation. Espoused values serve as an established metric for assessing organizational identity and legitimacy (Bourne et al., 2017; Jonsen et al., 2015). The classification process was guided by previous research demonstrating that firms use espoused values as a signalling mechanism to communicate alignment with institutional norms (Kabanoff et al., 1995; Suchman, 1995).

This method aligns with prior studies that employ value-based classifications to assess strategic positioning and legitimacy-seeking behaviour in organizational research (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Scott, 2014). The classification was further validated using chi-square (χ^2) tests of independence, which assess the relationship between categorical variables and ensure that differences in normative identity adoption levels are not random but systematically linked to organizational characteristics (Agresti, 2018). Additionally, the classification was cross-validated through descriptive statistical measures, including mean values, standard deviations, and interquartile ranges, which have been widely used in entrepreneurship and organizational research to establish empirical thresholds for grouping firms (Hair et al., 2014; Janssen et al., 2018). These methodological refinements ensure that the categorization process is theoretically and statistically robust, reducing potential arbitrariness and increasing the reliability of the study's findings.

4. Results

The results indicate three levels of adoption of the normative entrepreneurial identity: high (26%), medium (42,5%) and low (31,5%). In general, the sampled digital ventures show a low-moderate (74%) alignment with the MAB's vision of entrepreneurship. Drawing on Table 6, we observed differences in how organizations adopt each dimension. Meanwhile, sustainability and efficiency are moderate-high adopted by the 59% of the organizations, only the 6% of them highly embrace the cosmopolitanism. Surprisingly, innovative and technology is under adopted (32%) despite its emphasis in through the institutional narrative.

Table 4: The Values of the Normative Entrepreneurial Identity in the Metropolitan area of Barcelona.

Level of adoption	Normative Entrepreneurial Identity ($m=0,94$; $SD=0,75$) f (%)	Sustainability and Efficiency ($m=0,90$; $SD=0,84$) f (%)	Cosmopolitan ($m=0,28$; $SD=0,58$) f (%)	Innovation and Technology ($m=0,38$; $SD=0,59$) f (%)
Low	63 (31,5)	82 (41)	156 (78)	136 (68)
Moderate	85 (42,5)	56 (28)	32(16)	52 (26)
High	52 (26)	62 (31)	12 (6)	12 (6)
Total	200	200	200	200

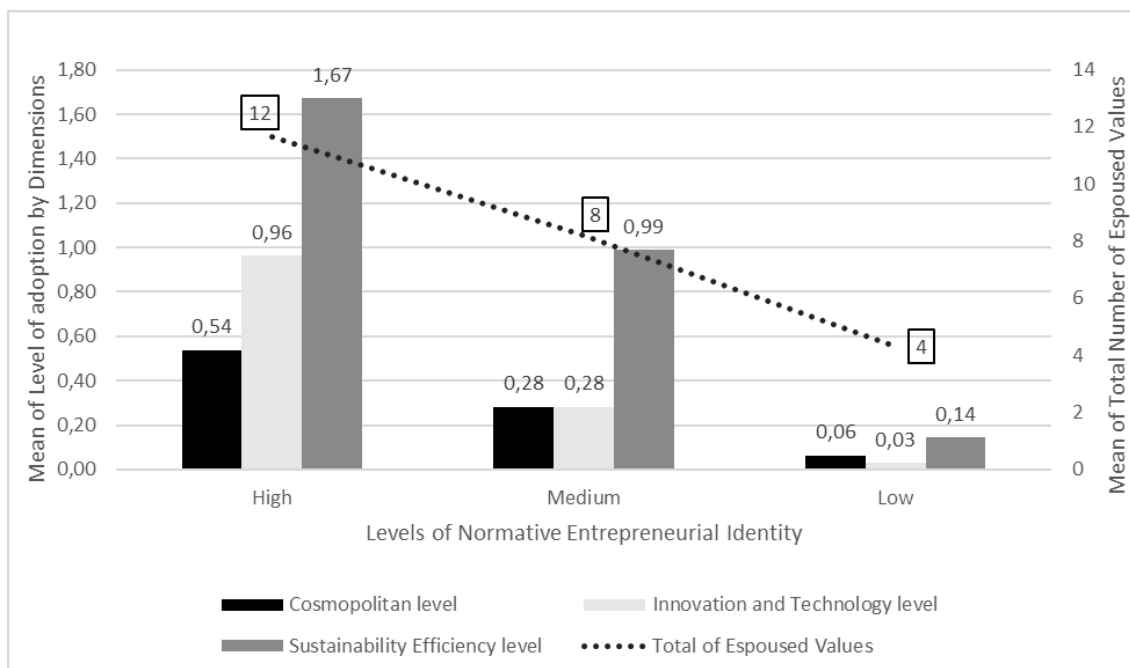
Figure 1 compares how normative entrepreneurial identity is structured depending on the level of adoption reported for organisations. On average, digital ventures espouse 8 values; however, this number varies according to the level of adoption. Digital ventures with a higher level of adoption tend to espouse a higher number of values ($m=12$); this number falls progressively by one-third as the level of adoption does. This means that 68,5%



of the organizations espouse more than six values, which is considered a typical and reasonable range (Jonsen et al., 2015).

Also, sustainability and efficiency were found to be the dominant dimension overall, while cosmopolitanism had the fewest presences, particularly in organisations with higher levels of normative entrepreneurial identity. Surprisingly, innovation and technology were found to be the least dimension among digital ventures with lower levels of adoption of normative entrepreneurial identity.

Figure 1: Level of adoption: Normative entrepreneurial identity by dimension.



Pearson’s chi square test reported statistically significant differences between the value dimension and the levels of adoption of the normative entrepreneurial identity (Table 7). The evidence shows an association regarding innovation and technology ($\chi^2= (4) 79.240$; $p=0,000$), cosmopolitan ($\chi^2= (4) 21,179$; $p=0,000$) and sustainability and efficiency size ($\chi^2= (4) 105,892$; $p=0,000$). The test also reported association between the level of normative entrepreneurial identity and organisational size ($\chi^2= (6) 22.649$; $p <0,001$), fundraising stage ($\chi^2= (8) 19,818$; $p <0,05$), international activity ($\chi^2= (2) 12.497$; $p <0,05$) and total of espoused values ($\chi^2= (8) 19,818$; $p <0,05$). However, age did not indicate it.

Table 5: Levels of adoption by organisational characteristics.

Organizational characteristics	Level of Normative Entrepreneurial Identity									X ² test of independence
	Low (n=63)			Moderated (n=85)			High (n=52)			
	f (%)	M	SD	f (%)	M	SD	f (%)	M	SD	
Year of business creation		2014	2,90		2013	2,80		2012	2,43	X ² = (1) 30,627 N.S
Business Age		4,83	2,90		5,72	2,80		6,52	2,43	X ² = (1) 30,627 N.S
Business Size		0,29	0,58		0,51	0,57		0,79	0,80	X ² = (6) 22,649 P<0,001



Organizational characteristics	Level of Normative Entrepreneurial Identity									X ² test of independence
	Low (n=63)			Moderated (n=85)			High (n=52)			
	f (%)	M	SD	f (%)	M	SD	f (%)	M	SD	
Micro	48 (76,2)			45 (52,9)			21 (40,4)			
Small	13 (20,6)			37 (43,2)			23 (44,2)			
Medium	1 (1,6)			3 (3,5)			6 (11,5)			
Large	1 (1,6)						2 (3,8)			
Fundraising stage		0,93	1,30		1,63	1,40		1,84	1,52	X ² = (8) 19,818 p<0,05
Pre-seed	36 (57,1)			30 (35,3)			17 (32,7)			
Seed	9 (14,3)			5 (5,9)			3 (5,8)			
Serie A	9 (14,3)			27 (31,8)			13 (25)			
Serie B	4 (6,3)			13 (15,3)			9 (17,3)			
Serie C	5 (7,99)			10 (11,8)			10 (19,2)			
International operations		0,24	0,43		0,51	0,50		0,5	0,51	X ² = (2) 12,497 p<0,05
W/O international operations	48 (76,2)			42 (49,4)			26 (50)			
With international operations	15 (23,8)			43 (50,6)			26 (50)			
Total of Espoused Values		4	2		8	2		12	4	X ² = (40) 161,469 P=,000
Values dimension										
Innovation and Technology		0,03	0,18		0,28	0,45		0,96	0,71	X ² = (4) 79,240 p=,000
Cosmopolitanism		0,06	0,25		0,28	0,55		0,54	0,75	X ² = (4) 21,179 p=,000
Sustainability Efficiency		0,14	0,35		0,99	0,78		1,67	0,55	X ² = (4) 105,892 p=,000

An interesting point can be made regarding the organisational characteristics associated with the levels of adoption.



Low level of adoption: These organizations represent the 31,5% of the sample. They are micro business (M=0,29,SD=0,58), created on 2014, in a pre-seed stage of fundraising (M=0,93,SD=1,30), without international operations (M=0,24,SD=0,43). The most representative digital ventures sectors on this category are proposal values oriented to fashion beauty and lifestyle (12,7%). They espouse a mean of four values (SD=2) with the heaviest emphasis on sustainability and efficiency (M=0,14,SD=0,35), followed by cosmopolitanism (M=0,06,SD=0,25). However, the most used value is technology (M=0,46,SD=0,50), followed by care for environment (M=0,16,SD=0,37) and expertise (M=0,16,SD=0,37).

Table 7: Ranking of the most used espoused values in low adoption level.

	Espoused Values	Dimension of Normative Entrepreneurial Identity	M	SD
1	Technology	Innovation and Technology	0,46	0,50
2	Care for environment	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,16	0,37
3	Expertise	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,16	0,37
4	Leadership	Innovation and Technology	0,14	0,35
5	Innovation	Innovation and Technology	0,13	0,34
6	Individuality	Innovation and Technology	0,13	0,34
7	Being going global	Cosmopolitanism	0,13	0,34
8	Excellence	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,11	0,32
9	Agility	Innovation and Technology	0,10	0,30
10	Speed	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,08	0,27

Medium level of adoption: These organizations represent the 42,5% of the sample; the major category. They are majorly small business (M=0,51,SD=0,57), created after 2013, in Serie A,B or C stage of fundraising seed (M=1,63,SD=1,40), with international operations (M=0,51,SD=0,52). The most representative digital ventures sectors on this category are proposal values oriented to biotech, pharma and healtech (12,9%) and adthec, marketing, public relations (10,6%). They espouse a mean of eight values (SD=2) with the heaviest emphasis on sustainability and efficiency (M=0,99 ,SD=0,78), followed by cosmopolitanism and innovation and technology in the same proportion (M=0,28,SD=0,55; M=0,28,SD=0,45). The most used value is technology (M=0,51,SD=0,50), followed by excellence (M=0,45,SD=0,50) and leadership (M=0,45,SD=0,50).

Table 8: Ranking of the most used espoused values in moderate adoption level.

Values	Dimension of Normative Entrepreneurial Identity	M	SD
Technology	Innovation and Technology	0,51	0,50
Excellence	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,45	0,50
Leadership	Innovation and Technology	0,34	0,48
Expertise	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,32	0,47
Being going global	Cosmopolitanism	0,32	0,47
Innovation	Innovation and Technology	0,26	0,44
Speed	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,24	0,43
Efficiency	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,22	0,42
Agility	Innovation and Technology	0,20	0,50

High level of adoption: These organizations represent the 31,5% of the sample. They are small and medium business (M=0,79,SD=0,80), created on 2012, in series A, B or C stage of fundraising (M=1,63,SD=1,40), with international operations (M=0,24,SD=0,43). The most representative digital ventures sectors on this category are proposal values oriented to biotech, pharma and healtech (15,4%) and tourism, travel and hospitality (11,5%). They espouse a mean of twelve values (SD=4) with the heaviest emphasis on sustainability and efficiency



($M=1,67,SD=0,55$), followed by innovation and technology ($M=0,96,SD=0,71$). However, the most used value is excellence ($M=0,62,SD=0,40$), followed by expertise ($M=0,52,SD=0,51$) and innovation ($M=0,46,SD=0,50$).

Table 9: Ranking of the most used espoused values in high adoption level.

Esposued Values	Dimension of Normative Entrepreneurial Identity	M	SD
1 Excellence	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,62	0,49
2 Expertise	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,52	0,51
3 Innovation	Innovation and Technology	0,46	0,50
4 Leadership	Innovation and Technology	0,46	0,50
5 Technology	Innovation and Technology	0,42	0,50
6 Professionalism	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,35	0,48
7 Being going global	Cosmopolitanism	0,35	0,48
8 Efficiency	Sustainability and Efficiency	0,33	0,47
9 Growth	Innovation and Technology	0,33	0,47
10 Individuality	Innovation and Technology	0,31	0,466

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the adoption of normative entrepreneurial identity among digital ventures in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona is not a passive process of institutional conformance but rather an active and selective adaptation of institutional narratives. While institutional frameworks establish expectations about entrepreneurial behavior, organizations engage in a process of filtering, integrating, or rejecting these norms based on their strategic priorities, resource availability, and market positioning. This challenges the assumption that institutional logics exert a top-down imposition on firms, instead highlighting entrepreneurial agency in shaping identity through an iterative process (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Scott, 2014; Suchman, 1995).

The institutional vision embedded in the Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona (SMPB) sought to position entrepreneurship within a structured framework of innovation and technology, cosmopolitanism, and sustainability and efficiency (Associació Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona, 2010). However, the extent to which these values have been embraced varies significantly across firms, revealing that identity adoption is contingent upon the perceived utility of institutional narratives in achieving business objectives. The study demonstrates that while sustainability and efficiency have been widely adopted, innovation and technology exhibit lower-than-expected alignment, and cosmopolitanism remains the least integrated dimension. These discrepancies underscore the gap between institutional aspirations and firm-level realities, suggesting that ventures selectively adopt identity elements that provide tangible competitive advantages while deprioritizing those perceived as misaligned with their operational needs (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; Meyer et al., 2011).

The strong emphasis on sustainability and efficiency can be attributed to both regulatory pressures and the increasing market demand for environmentally responsible business practices (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Bansal & Roth, 2000). However, rather than embracing sustainability as a transformative philosophy, digital ventures predominantly frame it as a technical and operational challenge. This reframing leads to a focus on efficiency-driven innovations, such as energy optimization and waste reduction, rather than a holistic commitment to ecological responsibility. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that organizations are more likely to integrate sustainability when it is linked to financial and strategic benefits rather than as a normative obligation (Murillo et al., 2015; Villena-Manzanares & Souto-Pérez, 2016).

Conversely, the under-adoption of innovation and technology raises important questions about the role of institutional discourse in shaping entrepreneurial identity. Despite being a central pillar of the regional strategy, technology is not universally perceived as a fundamental driver of competitive advantage across all ventures. Many firms appear to prioritize incremental improvements over disruptive innovation, reflecting the high costs, uncertainties, and sectoral variations in technological adoption (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015; Zahra & Wright,



2011). This suggests that while institutional frameworks emphasize technology as a cornerstone of entrepreneurship, its practical implementation is shaped by industry-specific factors and the risk tolerance of individual firms. The lack of uniform adoption also indicates that innovation is not a monolithic construct but rather a nuanced and context-dependent strategic choice (Autio et al., 2014).

The most striking deviation from institutional expectations is observed in the cosmopolitanism dimension. While the policy vision promotes a globalized, inclusive, and collaborative entrepreneurial ethos, firms reinterpret cosmopolitanism through a market-driven lens. Rather than embedding inclusivity and diversity as core organizational values, digital ventures prioritize international scalability and global market reach as markers of success. This redefinition suggests that institutional aspirations for fostering a cosmopolitan entrepreneurial culture have not translated into firm-level practices, as organizations focus on economic expansion rather than people-centric global engagement (Anderson et al., 2019; De Clercq & Voronov, 2009). This finding reveals the limitations of policy-driven identity frameworks that assume a direct transference of values into practice, overlooking the strategic recalibrations entrepreneurs undertake in response to competitive pressures and resource constraints.

A deeper analysis of firm characteristics provides further insights into the factors driving selective identity adoption (Figure 2). The study finds that larger firms, those in later fundraising stages, and those with international operations exhibit a higher degree of alignment with institutional values, particularly in sustainability and efficiency. This suggests that as organizations grow and mature, they become more embedded within institutional structures, leading to greater integration of normative entrepreneurial identity (Scott & Davis, 2003; Peng, 2003). The relationship between international activity and identity adoption highlights the role of global markets as legitimizing forces, incentivizing firms to align with institutional narratives that enhance their credibility in international contexts. However, the absence of a significant correlation between business age and identity adoption suggests that the integration of normative values is not merely a function of longevity but is instead driven by strategic positioning and external engagement (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Shepherd et al., 2009).

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of entrepreneurial identity as a dynamic and negotiated process. Rather than viewing identity adoption as a linear progression dictated by institutional pressures, this study emphasizes the agency of entrepreneurs in selectively integrating, modifying, or resisting normative expectations. This aligns with theories of institutional entrepreneurship, which argue that organizations actively shape and redefine their institutional environments rather than passively conforming to them (Maguire et al., 2004; Battilana et al., 2009). It also extends discussions on entrepreneurial legitimacy by illustrating how firms strategically manage their identity to align with market imperatives while simultaneously navigating institutional demands (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; Suchman, 1995).

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that institutional efforts to shape entrepreneurial identity must account for the heterogeneity of firms and their evolving priorities. A one-size-fits-all approach to fostering normative identity adoption may be ineffective, as ventures integrate values at varying rates and in different ways. Policymakers should consider flexible identity frameworks that accommodate sectoral differences and firm-specific growth trajectories (Bruton et al., 2010; Zahra et al., 2014). Additionally, the weak adoption of cosmopolitan values points to the need for targeted initiatives that bridge the gap between institutional aspirations and firm-level realities, ensuring that global engagement is fostered beyond economic expansion. Supporting mechanisms that facilitate cross-cultural integration, knowledge exchange, and international collaboration may encourage a more comprehensive adoption of cosmopolitan identity elements (Jack & Anderson, 2002).

Ultimately, this study underscores the complex interplay between institutional logics and entrepreneurial agency, revealing that normative entrepreneurial identity is not a fixed or imposed construct but a fluid and evolving phenomenon. Entrepreneurs actively negotiate their identity by filtering institutional expectations through the

lens of strategic pragmatism, selecting values that enhance their competitiveness while discarding or modifying those that do not. This highlights the need for future research to further explore the conditions under which institutional narratives gain traction within entrepreneurial ecosystems and the mechanisms through which firms internalize or resist normative expectations over time.

5.1. Low Level of Adoption: The Liability of Smallness

A low level of adoption is predominantly observed in digital ventures at the early stages of growth, often referred to as the “existence stage” (Lester et al., 2003). These ventures are primarily focused on survival and viability, striving to identify sufficient customers and generate the resources necessary to sustain operations. Decision-making and ownership in these organizations are typically centralized, resting in the hands of a single individual or a small founding team. At this stage, the external environment is often perceived as chaotic or unanalyzable, limiting the ventures’ capacity to engage with institutional frameworks or broader normative expectations (Lester et al., 2003).

Consequently, the value priorities of these organizations tend to diverge from the political and institutional designs set forth by policymakers. Instead, their primary focus is on enacting their own environments, often centring their efforts on securing funding and demonstrating the viability of their products or services (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; M. Scott & Bruce, 1987; Shepherd et al., 2009).

Moreover, early-stage ventures face heightened vulnerability due to the “liability of smallness,” which reflects the challenges of limited resources, nascent business connections, and immature technical or administrative structures (Ivanova et al., 2012; Brüderl & Schüssler, 1990). These organizations are largely self-centred, grappling with existential questions about their identity and purpose while simultaneously adopting opacity strategies to shield themselves from external scrutiny. This opacity is driven by the assumption that stakeholders are less likely to judge them during these formative stages (Brüderl & Schüssler, 1990). Alternatively, some ventures exhibit organizational myopia (Castellano & Ivanova, 2017), narrowly focusing on immediate customer needs and short-term survival.

In this context, sustainable values are reframed in pragmatic terms, with a strong emphasis on technological solutions aimed at addressing environmental challenges, such as waste reduction or energy efficiency. However, these efforts are typically aligned with operational benefits rather than a deeper commitment to the normative philosophy of sustainability.

5.2. Moderate and High Levels of Adoption: Organizational Growth and Credibility

In contrast, moderate and high levels of adoption are characteristic of small and medium-sized organizations that have progressed beyond the early stages of growth. These ventures benefit from increased visibility to external publics, including governance bodies and other institutional actors (R. Scott, 2014). At this stage, organizations demonstrate a higher degree of specialization in activities such as marketing, engineering, and accountability, and they often expand their operations internationally. This increased complexity necessitates a stronger alignment with institutional narratives to build organizational credibility, which becomes a critical foundation for sustained growth (M. Scott & Bruce, 1987).

Digital ventures at these levels of adoption show a clear orientation toward enhancing the quality of their technologies and positioning themselves as leaders in their respective fields. For ventures at the moderate adoption level, this translates into a prioritization of values such as excellence and leadership, which are essential for gaining legitimacy in competitive markets. However, our findings reveal a surprising trend: values associated with sustainability and efficiency are not as prominent among ventures at this stage, despite their centrality to institutional narratives. This suggests that while these ventures acknowledge the importance of sustainability in principle, their practical focus often shifts toward technological innovation and market leadership.

5.3. Reinterpreting Sustainability and Institutional Priorities

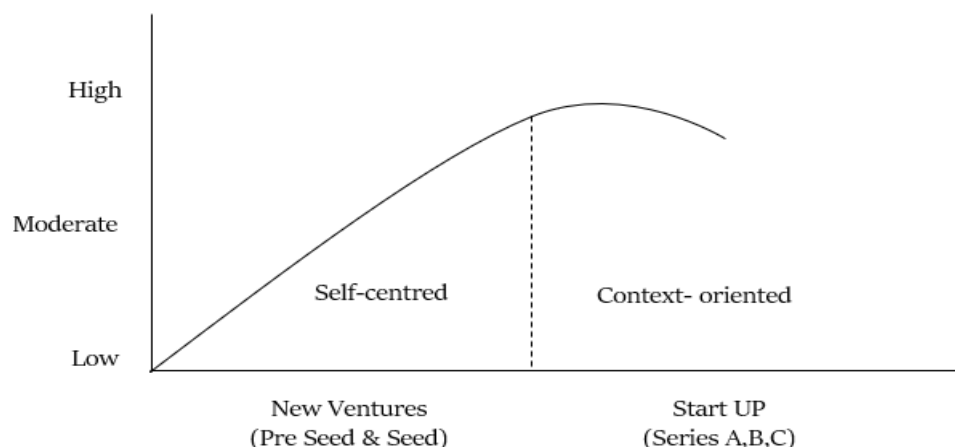
Particularly noteworthy is the underrepresentation of sustainability-related values among ventures with moderate to high levels of adoption, despite sustainability being a focal point of institutional and political interests (Murillo et al., 2015; Villena-Manzanares & Souto-Pérez, 2016). This misalignment reflects the challenges of embedding global trends on social and environmental concerns into the operational realities of digital ventures. For many organizations, the sustainability philosophy promoted by institutional frameworks is overshadowed by the immediate demands of market dynamics and competitive pressures.

5.4. Illustration of Adoption Across Growth Stages

Based on these findings, we can conceptualize the relationship between the adoption of normative entrepreneurial identity and the growth stages of digital ventures. Early-stage ventures exhibit a limited alignment with institutional values, focusing instead on survival and resource acquisition. As organizations grow and mature, their adoption of normative values becomes more prominent, albeit selectively aligned with their strategic priorities and operational capabilities. The interplay between institutional narratives and organizational growth is illustrated in Figure 2, emphasizing how ventures navigate these evolving dynamics over time.

This stage-related adoption highlights the complex and non-linear nature of integrating institutional values into entrepreneurial practices. It underscores the need for tailored support mechanisms that address the specific challenges and priorities of ventures at different stages of growth, fostering a more seamless alignment between institutional visions and organizational realities.

Figure 1: Model of Normative Entrepreneurial Adoption.



6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how digital ventures in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona adopt, reinterpret, or resist the normative entrepreneurial identity shaped by institutional frameworks. By integrating identity theory and institutional theory, we analysed the extent to which ventures align with the expectations established in the Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona, particularly regarding innovation and technology, cosmopolitanism, and sustainability and efficiency. The findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial identity adoption is not a passive process dictated by institutional narratives but rather an active negotiation in which ventures selectively integrate values that align with their strategic imperatives while discarding or reinterpreting others.

One of the key contributions of this study is the demonstration of the selective nature of identity adoption, challenging the assumption that institutional logics exert a top-down imposition on firms. Instead, digital ventures exhibit agency in shaping their identity, filtering institutional expectations through the lens of pragmatism and market relevance (Stryker & Burke, 2000; De Clercq & Voronov, 2009). This study expands on existing identity research by illustrating that entrepreneurial identity is dynamic and context-dependent, evolving in response to resource availability, firm growth trajectories, and external pressures.



In comparison with previous studies on institutional entrepreneurship, this research provides empirical evidence of how entrepreneurs strategically engage with institutionalized norms rather than fully conforming to them (Battilana et al., 2009; Maguire et al., 2004). While prior research has explored identity formation as an organizational-level process, this study extends the discussion by illustrating how institutional narratives gain (or fail to gain) traction within an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Scott, 2014; Meyer et al., 2011). This is particularly evident in the observed divergence between institutional aspirations for a cosmopolitan entrepreneurial culture and firms' actual emphasis on international expansion as a market-driven rather than value-driven strategy.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that institutional efforts to shape entrepreneurial identity should account for sectoral differences, firm size, and growth stage. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to yield the intended results, as ventures integrate institutional values at varying rates and in different ways. Policymakers should consider targeted initiatives that incentivize deeper engagement with sustainability beyond technical efficiency, particularly through funding mechanisms that support long-term ecological commitments rather than immediate operational optimizations. Additionally, the limited adoption of cosmopolitan values suggests a need for more structured support for cross-cultural collaboration and international networking opportunities.

The findings also have implications for the broader theoretical discourse on entrepreneurial legitimacy. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of legitimacy-seeking behaviours in venture success (Suchman, 1995; De Clercq & Voronov, 2009), this study reveals that legitimacy is not a uniform construct but is selectively pursued based on firm priorities. Entrepreneurs actively construct legitimacy by aligning with institutional narratives that enhance their competitiveness while downplaying or reframing elements that do not offer immediate strategic benefits.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the use of espoused values as a proxy for normative identity adoption provides insights into the symbolic commitments of firms but does not fully capture operational practices. Future research could incorporate qualitative interviews or longitudinal studies to examine how identity adoption evolves over time. Second, the statistical analysis used in this study is primarily descriptive, and while it provides meaningful insights into patterns of identity adoption, future studies could benefit from employing more robust inferential techniques, such as regression models or structural equation modelling, to explore causality. Third, this study is contextually bound to the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, limiting its generalizability to other entrepreneurial ecosystems. Comparative research across multiple regions or institutional contexts would provide a deeper understanding of how different policy frameworks influence entrepreneurial identity adoption.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on entrepreneurial identity, institutional influence, and strategic agency by illustrating how ventures selectively engage with normative expectations. By shedding light on the interplay between institutional narratives and entrepreneurial pragmatism, these findings offer valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to foster more adaptive and context-sensitive entrepreneurship ecosystems.

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