



# Interaction of COVID-19 and sustainable supply chain management

Author Isabel Sophie Knittelfelder

## Background

COVID-19 led global economies to a standstill and downtime by also exposing the vulnerability of global and connected supply chain management (Roberts, 2020). Therefore, COVID-19 can be seen as the trigger for the need to change and to reflect on how entrepreneurs have operated so far. The media pointed out and questioned if the global trade connections brought disadvantages and if a shift to more localized supply chains were the desired response (Boyd, 2020). All businesses experienced supply chain issues due to COVID-19. The outcomes are production slowdowns and transportation restrictions which harm the productivity of businesses (Boyd, 2020).

## Aim

Supply chain disruptions and unforeseen risks can arise at any time due to economic tensions or environmental challenges, such as the current COVID-19 crisis.

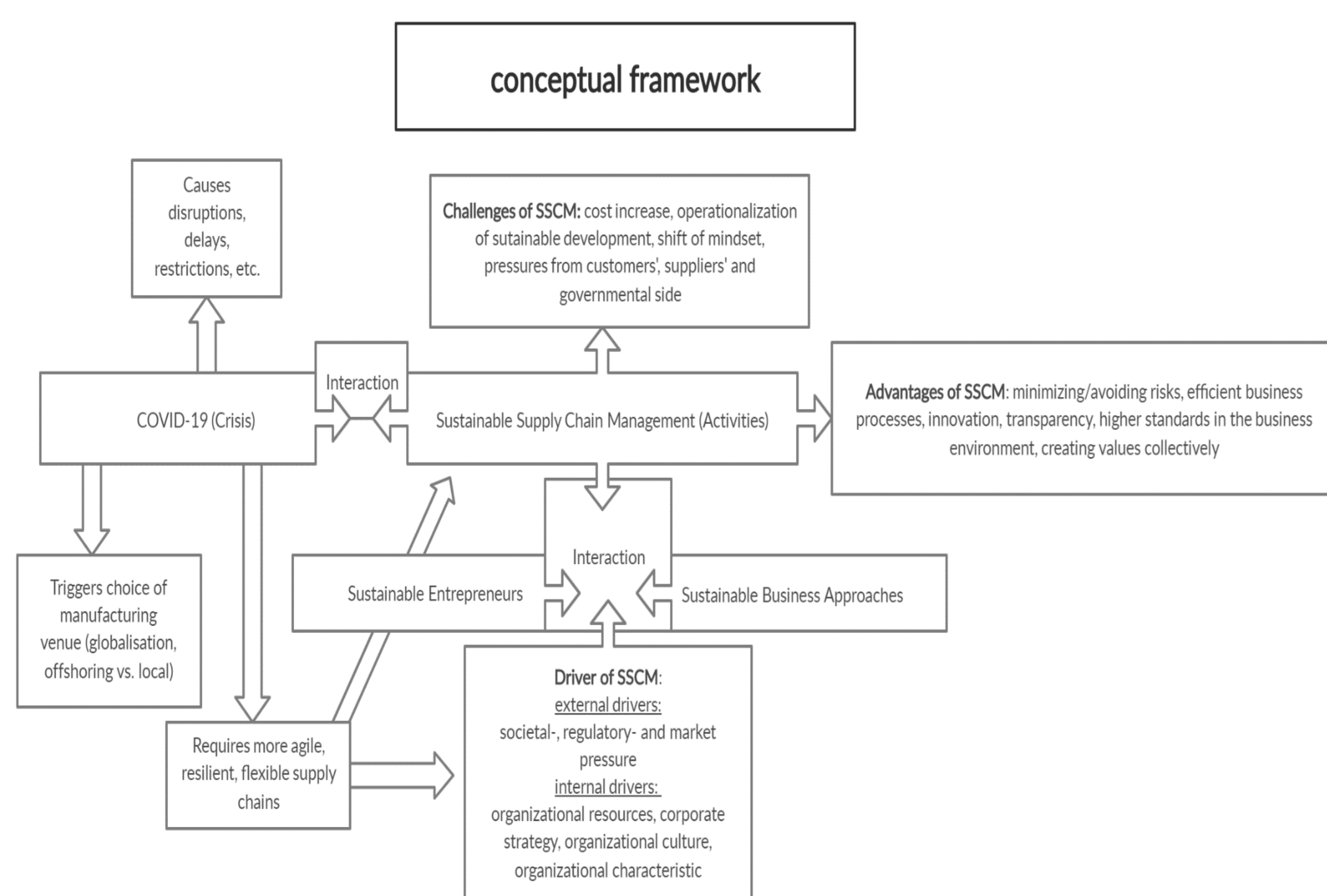
The aim of this thesis is to understand and answer the research question: "How does COVID-19 interact with sustainable supply chain management activities?" with a focus on the following sub-questions:

"What are the benefits of SSCM for dealing with COVID-19?"

"What are the benefits of COVID-19 for SSCM?"

"What are the challenges sustainable entrepreneurs of start-ups and SME experience in these times?"

## Theory



## Methods – qualitative approach

- conducted between April 9th and May 18th, 2020
- pool of participants represented experienced practitioners, managers, and directors in a supply chain management role
- focus on the fashion and lifestyle sector (comprised in this research, entrepreneurs operating in the field of shoe-, backpack/bag- and (sports) clothing production and distribution start-up or SME)
- thirteen interviews were conducted to achieve saturation
- semi-structured interview style

## Results

Six key findings from this research stood out:

- sustainable supply chain managements are advantages to overcome crises more easily
- sustainable supply chain managements may even benefit from a crisis
- communication and thinking ahead is crucial in supply chain managements
- the importance of working together rather than building a hierarchy
- all different parties are needed and equally important for being able to create a product
- transparency and monitoring is necessary to ensure sustainability
- in times of crisis, all entrepreneurs face challenges

This research can be seen as an instruction paper:

- directed to all start-up and SME entrepreneurs, regardless of the sector/field
- to improve traditional start-ups or SME to create and establish more resilient, agile and sustainable supply chains
- for start-ups to build up their supply chain on key factors of SSCM

## Limitations

- only one specific type, namely sustainable entrepreneur, participated – not a comparison between traditional and sustainable entrepreneurs
- two different concepts appeared, which were not considered beforehand: circularity and the governmental role in times of crisis

## Conclusion

This qualitative research in the form of a case study aimed at showing how sustainable supply chain management can be advantageous when disruptions arise and even benefit from them. After existing literature was reviewed, outcomes that supply chain management must be redesigned in a more sustainable way, were expected. Nevertheless, the variety of the interviewed sustainability entrepreneurs contributed with insightful knowledge to the existing theories.