

## Country of Origin – Consumers' perception at the point of purchase of meat

- A Means-end chain analysis

*Malin Hagbardsson*



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**Credits:** 30 hec

**Level:** A2E

**Course title:** Independent project/degree in Business Administration

**Course code:** EX0536

**Programme/Education:** Agricultural Programme - Economics and Management

**Faculty:** Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

**Place of publication:** Uppsala

**Year of publication:** 2013

**Cover picture:** Malin Hagbardsson

**Name of Series:** Degree project/SLU, Department of Economics

**No:** 811

**ISSN** 1401-4084

**Online publication:** <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

**Key words:** Country of Origin, laddering interviews, means-end chain, meat, purchasing decision



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet  
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# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Helena Hansson for her valuable feedback on my journey from a brief idea to a completed Master thesis. I'm ever thankful for new insight, comments and support from my supervisor and people in my surrounding that have enriched my inspiration to write my thesis.

I'm even more grateful to all respondents for their time and providing me with their thoughts concerning their purchase of meat. Without your participation this study would not have been possible, Thanks!

Uppsala, June 2013

*/ Malin*



# Summary

Focus of this study was on the underlying values behind consumers buying motives at the point of purchase of meat products in Sweden. Meat consumption in Sweden has increased and in 2012, almost 50% of all meat consumed was imported (SJV, 2013). This is the case despite of the fact that consumers frequently state the importance of Swedish country of origin on the meat products they purchase (www, LRF, 2, 2006). A rising public awareness about health, environmental issues, animal welfare and food safety coupled to meat consumption and meat production is scrutinized both from media and consumers. Due to rising concerns of production-methods of meat, consumers wants to make informed purchasing decisions of the meat they purchase (BEUC, 2013). By identifying key product attributes, consequences and underlying values influencing a purchasing decision of meat, this study will increase the possibility to position Swedish meat in order to fulfil consumers' needs.

The aim of the study is to identify the underlying values of Swedish consumers buying decision at the point of purchase of meat, in order to assess the relevance of country of origin as a key product attribute involved in a buying decision. The method to address the study's aim and research questions was through conducting 30 interviews in two supermarkets. The data collection consisted of laddering interviews with consumers by probing why they chose to buy specific meat products. In order to grasp the underlying values of the purchase the interviews were conducted at the meat counter. The study is based on the theoretical framework *Means-end chain theory* and the methodology framework of *Laddering interview technique* which are used together in order to reveal the consumers underlying values of a purchase (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). A literature review, theories of Marketing Strategies and a Consumers cognitive map are presented as well. The objective of the analysis of the interviews was to make use of the presented literature and theories, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon within the purchasing decision of meat and the relevance of Swedish country of origin in accordance to the purchase.

A key result elicited from the interviews was that the attribute *Swedish* country of origin was used as a quality cue at the point of purchase of meat. Strong connections revealed from the attribute *Swedish* were consequences of *food safety* and *stay healthy*. Further the consequences had a strong connection to the end value to *live a long life*. Another attribute identified from the interviews were the attribute *locally produced*. The consumers used locally produced as a quality cue in order to evaluate the meat product prior a purchase in order to achieve the perceived benefits from buying locally produced meat. Consumers who bought locally produced meat tend to care more for the environment compared to consumers who bought meat of Swedish country of origin or imported meat. The identified consequence to *care for the environment* and the end value *environmental issues* in order to protect the environment to the next generation were the strongest connections revealed from the attribute locally produced. Consumers who bought imported meat stated the attribute *price* as the most important factor in accordance to their purchase of meat. The attribute *price* had strong connection to the consequence of *spend money on other things*. Consumers purchasing *Swedish* and *locally produced* meat were found to be more involved in their purchasing decision compared to consumers who bought imported meat. Through the identification of underlying values involved in a purchasing decision of meat, a marketing strategy or a communication plan could be developed to address the identified factors. This marketing strategy or communication plan could also be used in order to influence consumers purchasing decisions.

# Sammanfattning

Denna konsumentstudie belyser konsumenters köpbeslut och underliggande värdering i samband med ett köp av kött. Den totala köttkonsumtionen i Sverige har stadigt ökat, samtidigt som andelen av importerat kött har stigit till nästan 50 % fram till 2012 (SJV, 2013). Svenska konsumenter utger sig dock för att värdera det svenska ursprunget av köttprodukter de köper väldigt högt (www, LRF, 2, 2006). Ett ökat medvetande kring hälsoaspekter, miljöpåverkan, djurvälstånd och livsmedelssäkerhet kopplat till köttkonsumtion och köttproduktion är faktorer som belysts av både konsumenter och media. Till följd av ett ökat medvetande hos konsumenter beträffande konsekvenser av köttkonsumtion, önskar konsumenter kunna göra medvetna och upplysta köpbeslut (BEUC, 2013). Genom att kartlägga produktattribut, konsekvenser och underliggande värderingar som påverkar ett köpbeslut av kött kan en ökad förståelse av vad konsumenten värderar i ett köp nås samt vilka behov som kunden vill ha uppfylla. Med en djupare uppfattning av konsumenters köpmotiv och underliggande värderingar i ett köp kan svenskt kött positioneras på marknaden och på det sätt uppfylla konsumentens behov.

Syftet med studien är att fastställa svenska konsumenters underliggande värderingar i samband med ett köpbeslut av kött, med avsikt att kartlägga i hur stor utsträckning produktattributet *svenskt* är involverad i köpbeslutet. För att besvara syftet och forskningsfrågorna för studien har 30 intervjuer genomförts i två olika livsmedelsbutiker. Intervjuerna gjordes i direkt anslutning till köpbeslutet för att fånga upp konsumentens underliggande värderingar av själva köpet. Den teoretiska basen för studien utgörs av *Means-end chain theory* och den sammanlänkade intervjumetoden *Laddering*. Denna teori och metod används tillsammans för att frambringa konsumenters underliggande värderingar i samband av ett köpbeslut (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). En litteraturgenomgång och teorier kring *Marketing strategy* och *Consumers cognitive map* är liksom presenterade i teorikapitlet. En analys genomförs för att koppla samman resultaten till tidigare studier och teorier för att få en djupare förståelse kring konsumenters köpbeslut av kött.

Resultatet från studien påvisar att produktattributet *svenskt* används som en kvalitetsparameter i samband med ett köpbeslut av svenskt kött. Den starkaste kopplingen som gjordes från produktattributet *svenskt* var konsumentens koppling till *livsmedelssäkerhet*, *vara frisk* och den underliggande värderingen av att kunna leva ett *långt liv* som associerades till valet av svenskt kött. Produktattributet *lokalproducerat* kött innefattar likväl en kvalitetsparameter som konsumenterna värderar innan ett köp för att utifrån attributet kunna värdera de potentiella positiva konsekvenserna som kan nås. De starkaste motiven kopplade till attributet *lokalproducerat* var den identifierade konsekvensen att *bry sig om miljön* och den underliggande värderingen att *värna om miljön* för att kunna föra denna livsmiljö vidare till nästa generation. De starkaste motiven för ett köp av importerat kött uppkom från attributet *pris*, som var sammankopplat med konsekvensen att *lägga pengar på annat*. Konsumenter som köpte *svenskt* och *lokalproducerat* kött anses vara mer involverade i sitt köp till följd av att fler konsekvenser och värderingar var framkallade ur intervjuerna jämförelsevis med importerat kött där få konsekvenser kunde beskrivas och ingen underliggande värdering kunde kopplas till köpet. Genom att kartlägga konsumenters underliggande värderingar i ett köpbeslut av kött kan information och marknadsföringsstrategier utvecklas för att möta de värderingar och motiv som konsumenten grundar sitt köpbeslut på. Detta kan sedan användas för att påverka konsumentens köpbeslut och tillfredsställa de identifierade behoven.

# Abbreviations

LRF - Lantbrukarnas riksförbund

MEC - Means-End Chain

HVM - Hierarchial Value Map

SJV - Statens jordbruksverk

# Table of Contents

<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 PROBLEM BACKGROUND .....	2
1.2 PROBLEM .....	3
1.3 AIM .....	4
1.4 OUTLINE .....	5
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 MARKETING STRATEGY .....	9
3.2 CONSUMER COGNITIVE MAP .....	10
3.3 MEANS-END CHAIN THEORY (MEC) .....	12
<b>4 METHOD.....</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1 CHOICE OF APPROACH .....	14
4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWING .....	15
4.2.1 <i>Ethical aspects</i> .....	16
4.3 COURSE OF ACTION .....	17
4.3.1 <i>Laddering Interview technique</i> .....	17
4.3.2 <i>Implication of MEC and laddering technique</i> .....	20
4.3.3 <i>Research design</i> .....	20
4.3.4 <i>Coding the laddering interviews</i> .....	21
<b>5 RESULT &amp; ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1 HIERARCHICAL VALUE MAP (HVM) .....	22
5.2 SWEDISH COUNTRY OF ORIGIN .....	22
5.3 LOCALLY PRODUCED .....	26
5.4 IMPORTED .....	29
5.5 AGGREGATED HIERARCHICAL VALUE MAP (HVM) .....	30
<b>6 DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>35</b>
6.1 SHORT COMINGS OF THE STUDY .....	38
6.2 FURTHER RESEARCH.....	39
<b>7 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Literature and publications</i> .....	41
<i>Internet</i> .....	44
<b>APPENDIX 1: PICTURES OF SWEDISH COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, LOCALLY PRODUCED AND IMPORTED MEAT.....</b>	<b>45</b>



# 1 Introduction

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*This chapter starts with an introduction to the subject country of origin, consumers purchasing decisions and the attributes, consequences and values that are tied to consumers buying motives. Further the problem background, the problem statement, the aim and the research questions are presented.*

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Imagine yourself purchasing meat in a supermarket where the meat counter is overloaded with alternatives; well-known brands, organic, local, premium products, private label products, Swedish meat, and imported meat. The choices seem to be endless for the consumer. Each alternative selection of meat comes with its own attributes and consequences that the consumers take into consideration before making a meat purchase. These attributes and consequences are important to the individual's desired end value of the purchase. However, meat production, meat consumption, meat scandals and meat are concepts that involve various factors that come with a multitude of debates and perspectives that the consumer has to consider prior to the decision to purchase meat. It has become a complex task for the consumer to be able to make a well-informed purchasing decision due to numerous aspects connected to meat consumption today. Factors related to meat production and meat consumption, such as environmental issues, health, origin, food safety and animal welfare, have been scrutinized in recent years from media, which indicates that there is a rising trend of consumers' awareness concerning meat. To achieve an extensive knowledge of purchasing decisions concerning the paradox of meat, consumers' reasoning of attributes and consequences that lead to the underlying value of purchasing meat have to be examined.

A well-recognized product attribute, which also serves as a quality cue when evaluating meat, is country of origin (Roosen *et al.*, 2003; Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2006). As much as 83 % of Swedish consumers want to know the origin of the meat products they purchase (BEUC, 2013). Today, there are only a few food products that require mandatory origin labeling, such as beef, eggs and honey. However, some food companies have voluntarily developed labels and brands that declare the origin or place of production of the food as a marketing tool. This is done in order to meet the growing interest from consumers concerning the origin of the food they consider to purchase. Even though these voluntary labels are a step in the right direction, they can mislead the consumer with flags, names, symbols and pictures. Nothing on the product informs the consumer about the place of farming, rearing, slaughtering, processing or packaging of the meat product. For example, meat from Danish pigs could be processed in Sweden and labeled a "Swedish" product. These product attributes communicated to the consumer make it difficult to grasp the actual origin of the product. The European Commission's regulation (EU/1169/2011) concerning the "provision of food information to consumers" will apply from December 2014, which will help determine whether the mandatory labeling will expand to include more food products or not.

In 2012, total consumption of meat in Sweden was roughly 85 kilograms per person, which is a 40 % increase in total meat consumption from 1990 to 2012 (SJV, 2013). Even though meat consumption has been increasing, Swedish domestic production of meat is decreasing. Imported meat that is often in the lower price range where Swedish meat has difficulties to competing fills the gap. According to Swedish Board of Agriculture almost 50 % of all meat consumed in Sweden in 2012 was imported. To be able to differentiate in the market from both imported meat and the increasing number of private label products, several Swedish farmers have jointly chosen to market their meat as locally produced in order to add value to

the domestic products. However, there is no clear definition of locally produced and the concept could be misleading for the consumer (SJV, 2010). Swedish consumers verify that they prefer Swedish meat products rather than imported due to higher food safety, animal welfare, quality attributes, price and environmental concerns (www, LRF, 2, 2006; BEUC, 2013). According to the increase in meat import, there is conflicting evidence between what factors consumers state they prefer in their meat and what their actual buying behavior is. A more holistic view of meat consumption needs to be analyzed. This could help in assessing the choice criteria and a better understanding of the connected consequences and values when Swedes purchase meat. This can be achieved through conducting one-to-one interviews in the actual purchasing decision in order to grasp quality cues and motivational factors at the point of purchase of meat. Quality cues are considered to be stimuli that consumers respond to prior to a buying decision, which assists them to evaluate the products (Steenkamp, 1989).

## 1.1 Problem background

The rising public awareness about environmental issues, food safety, animal welfare and health aspects in meat production have created marketing opportunities because more values can be added to products in order to differentiate them (Ouden *et al.*, 1996). Through product differentiation and by adding values to the products a response to consumers' demand can be achieved. Food safety issues perceived by consumers have led to different types of labeling systems and brands to counteract the concerns in order to signal both food safety and diverse quality attributes of the product (Roosen *et al.*, 2003). Certifying and labeling products have been a fundamental step to ensure safety of products and productions methods in the European Union (EU) (European Commission, 2010). Due to the lack of mandatory certifications required in the EU for meat, an increasing number of private certifications and voluntary labels on meat have been driven from a consumer demand. However, product attributes with labels and certifications with the purpose to influence consumers purchasing decisions may increase the difficulties to distinguish labels from each other and also create confusion amongst consumers. In 2011, on initiative of The Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF), the four major super markets in Sweden and Swedish Meat Industry Association, implemented the voluntary labeling "Swedish meat" on certain meat products that guarantees Swedish country of origin. The labeling system serves as a guidance to help consumers to make informed purchasing decisions. In April 2013 as an improvement of tracing the origin of the food, LRF launched an application to smartphones where consumers can scan the barcode on the food package to identify the origin. Labels such as the locally produced, environmental friendly and country of origin can be used as a differentiation strategy for marketing and can influence consumers purchasing pattern (Peter & Olson, 2010).

Within the EU, production standards and regulations differ between member states (SJV, 2008). Therefore the availability of country of origin information may be a useful tool for consumers to distinguish between different production standards and to be able to make well-informed purchasing decisions. It is recognized that consumers use the information of country of origin to evaluate products (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Dinnie, 2003). The importance of origin as a quality cue has also been overruled and questioned in previous literature (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Liefeld, 2004). However, in the food sector, consumers frequently state the importance of country of origin (Skaggs *et al.*, 1996; Hoffman, 2000). A traceability system of beef meat has been used since the 1990's within EU after the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). The system has not only provided increased food safety and increased consumer confidence but also to add value to products by enriching the food quality through different labeling and credence attributes (Caswell, 1998). Examples of

credence attributes are production and process methods such as animal welfare, organic, natural, food safety, country of origin and no-genetically modified food. These credence attributes have been troublesome to communicate to consumers during a long time. In order to counteract the lack of mutual communication, government and private responses have enhanced product labeling to provide consumers with the degree of information and knowledge they desire in order to conduct a well-informed purchase of meat (Verbeke & Viaene, 1999). Government and authorities can also require mandatory labeling to ensure nutrition, production methods and country of origin, if consumers do not trust private labels (Roosen *et al.*, 2003). In order to provide consumers with information, organizations can develop a collective label or individual brand that associates towards certain quality characteristic and production methods. Development of such a labeling has been done in Sweden through the voluntary label “Swedish meat” and also through brands and labels that mark, the meat as locally produced in order to differentiate their products. Previous studies have to a low extent examined how the product attributes are connected to consequences and consumers underlying values at the point of purchase of minced meat in Sweden. A study of pork products based on MEC and laddering interviews at the point of purchase were conducted by Lind (2007). Findings from Lind (2007) will be used in order to evaluate similarities and divergent results from purchasing motives of minced meat versus pork products. (From hereby minced meat will be referred to as meat).

## 1.2 Problem

The confusion of the meaning of country of origin of meat products, and the consumers’ ability to distinguish the origin through voluntary and mandatory labeling are challenging for consumers today (BEUC, 2013). Swedish consumers want to know the origin of the meat they purchase and want to be able to make informed purchasing decisions. By responding to consumers demand product differentiation through country of origin labeling can be used on meat products to communicate quality and food safety (Roosen *et al.*, 2003). However, country of origin is only one of the attributes consumers consider in a purchasing decision. Due to many attributes involved in the meat purchase decision, it is important to examine how consumers evaluate quality cues in the decision to purchase meat. By recognizing factors consumers evaluate at the point of purchase of meat products, it will be possible to differentiate products in a market with increasing rivalry and add value to meat products (Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996). By identifying the consumers underlying behavior and buying motivations a consumer-oriented approach of improved marketing of meat products will be possible. The Means-end chain theory (MEC) provides an insight of the consumers’ decision making process and is used in order to identify the choice criteria that lead to a fulfillment of values (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Gutman 1988; Peter & Olson, 2010). MEC is frequently used in order to get a comprehensive knowledge concerning the associations that consumers make between product attributes, consequences and end values.

By identifying the means-end when purchasing meat, the consumers buying motives can be obtained. To obtain consumers underlying behavior the MEC accompanied with laddering interviews are proposed in order to study the connections between product attributes and consumers buying motives. A deeper understanding of associations between product attributes and consumers’ underlying values at the point of purchase will increase the possibilities to develop brands and labels that fulfill consumers needs (Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996). The increasing number of brands and labeling systems on food products provide the consumers with various numbers of benefits. Through a MEC, inputs can be provided from those bundles of benefits by linking the attributes to values. Further, this can

be used in order to meet consumers requirements and can serve as guidance for both marketing and consumer communication. However, it is relevant to grasp the most important factors when purchasing meat in order to develop product strategies that are successful in a consumer oriented approach, as it is the consumer that decides what kind of meat that is being purchased (Steenkamp, 1989). In this study it is of importance to understand the consumers purchase motives in order to distinguish how the product is linked to the consumers purchasing behavior and underlying values at the point of purchase.

### 1.3 Aim

The aim of this study is to identify the underlying values of consumers buying decision in Sweden at the point of purchase of meat products. This will be done in order to assess the relevance of country of origin as a key product attribute in the buying decision process. The purpose of this study is to achieve expended knowledge of key product attributes that influence and underlie Swedish consumers' buying motives on meat products. In order to evaluate how Swedish consumers perceive different product attributes in the decision making process while purchasing meat, the Means-end chain theory is used to investigate the motivations for a product choice. The following research questions are in focus in this study in order to reach the aim of the study;

- *What consequences and underlying values are tied to different product attributes on meat products at the point of purchase?*
- *How is the product attribute "Swedish" involved in a purchasing decision?*

The primary purpose of the research questions is to recognize the product attributes and motivations in respect to country of origin of meat products. The attribute "*Swedish*" in this case is referred to as meat with origin from Sweden. By using the laddering interview technique the consumers' means-end will be uncovered and a more comprehensive insight into the consumers purchasing decision of meat can be obtained. The result can be used as a fundamental tool in order to market Swedish meat products in an effective way and to develop suitable communications plans in order to add value to Swedish meat.

The research questions will contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the importance of country of origin in the consumer decision process when purchasing meat in a supermarket. The scope of this study is that the interviews are close to the real purchasing situation and not in a context separated from the real purchasing decision. While studying consumers purchasing decisions it is of importance to obtain that the quality cues are in the respondents mind while doing the data-collection. Thereby it is essential to keep the data-collection comparable to the actual purchasing decision.

## 1.4 Outline

A presentation of the outline of the study is illustrated in Figure 1. In chapter 1, a background of the studied subject is described, following a description to the problem background, problem statement, aim and the research questions are defined. The next chapter, 2, includes the literature review with a presentation of previous research within the field. Further in chapter 3, a presentation of the theoretical framework are carried out which consist of consumers cognitive map, marketing strategy and an explanation of Means-end chain theory. In chapter 4 the method, laddering interview technique is described in detail and how the interviews were conducted is further explained. The result and analysis are illustrated and presented in chapter 5 and then discussed and linked to the theoretical framework and literature review in chapter 6. Based upon the analysis and discussion a final conclusion of the study is presented in chapter 7 where the research questions are addressed and answered.



*Figure 1. Own illustration of the outline of the thesis.*

## 2 Literature review

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*To identify a clear problem, the basis for a literature review is set with the aim of finding applicable and relevant theoretical frameworks to the study. The used literature in this study is gathered from databases such as; Epsilon, Web of Knowledge, Jstor, LIBRIS and LUKAS which are available from the library at Swedish University of Agriculture (SLU). The keywords used in the search process were; Means-end chain theory, laddering interview, consumer cognitive map, country of origin and consumer behavior. In the literature review the consumer's decision making process is described in relation to meat purchase, the relevance of country of origin, the involvement in a purchase and ongoing trends concerning meat consumption is described to the reader.*

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When the consumer is engaged in the decision making process of choosing what meat to purchase, there are many factors and stimuli involved which leads to a final decision (Steenkamp, 1989). Some of the cognitive factors are conscious, while others are basically automatic and intuitive and not part of a logical thinking process (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). Therefore, consumers' behavior and decisions are not always based on a reasoned action, but instead based on more irrational and impulsive actions. However, consumers' reasoning and awareness of food safety, quality, origin and other production attributes of food products are increasing (Caswell, 1998). Additionally, consumers' purchasing trends have been shifting towards more healthy choices as well as a need for safe and natural products which have become important factors for food producers to respond to when offering products (Wierenga *et al.*, 1996).

Intangible factors such as country of origin and production method of the meat are not visible to the consumer without information on the product (Caswell, 1998). The consumers will not be able to differentiate and make an informed decision on the meat products they consider to purchase without any information available on the products. Different quality cues are considered to be useful features that consumers respond to prior a final buying decision, which assists them to evaluate the products characteristics (Steenkamp, 1989). Quality cues can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic cues; the intrinsic cues are often a part of the product such as fat, marbling and color of meat products. Whereas the extrinsic cues associated with the product are for example price, brand and country of origin. Country of origin is stated as an extrinsic cue, and by verifying through labeling and information, consumers can evaluate such attributes of the product prior to a purchasing decision (Caswell, 1998). The appearance of extrinsic cues such as price, country of origin and brands can serve as a guideline for the consumer when deciding what meat to purchase. The consumer decision process and desired end value of a food purchase can also be influenced by and changed as a result of lifestyle, culture, trends and demographic factors (Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996).

The country of origin is moreover stated to be a quality cue for reliability, safety and quality when there is lack of other information available on the product (Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2006). The use of quality cues depends upon the consumer's trust to such signals and credibility behind the cues, which otherwise tend to be useless. Visual information and quality cues available on products are the same for every consumer, but how consumers perceive and interpret these quality cues have a high degree of diversity (Steenkamp, 1989). Different types of consumers tend to value different types of quality cues differently and will evaluate the available attributes on a product based on their own perspective and awareness. How a

consumer values the importance of different quality cues depends on the consumers' attitudes, experience, socio-economic status and personal preference of the consumer.

Several studies have been conducted to assess consumer's preferences and willingness to pay for credence attributes on food products such as no use of growth hormones, genetically modified organism, traceability, organic production and country of origin (Lusk & Fox, 2002; Lourerio & Umberger, 2003; 2005). The results showed that parts of the consumers are willing to pay a higher price for labels that verifies different credence attributes while some consumers do not value credence attributes and are not willing to pay a higher price. According to Hoffman (2000), Swedish women compared to Swedish men use the attribute country of origin to a larger extent as a quality cue when purchasing fresh meat and use the origin in order to evaluate food safety and food quality. The same study indicated that animal welfare issues, strict antibiotic use and limitation of salmonella in Sweden serve as quality factors when the respondents evaluate the country of origin of meat products in Sweden. When consumers evaluate products, the country of origin play a great role in the evaluation process of food products. In most cases consumers prefer food products from the domestic country in contrast of food from other countries (Steenkamp, 1989). The country of origin is favorable when the country is perceived to be associated in a positive manner with in the category, otherwise country of origin can have a reverse effect. Consumers are believed to make their purchasing choices in order to achieve the most positive consequences as possible and avoid negative consequences in order to attain a desired outcome of a purchase (Reynolds & Olson, 2001).

A survey conducted by Roosen *et al.*, (2003) determined that country of origin of beef was the most important product attribute before price, brand, fat or marbling amongst German and French consumers. Compared to consumers in the United Kingdom (UK) where the consumers stated the price, fat and the color of the meat as the most important attributes. However, country of origin was considered to be more important than brand in the UK. This confirms findings from Lusk & Fox (2002) and Lourerio & Umberger (2003; 2005) that consumers put value on different type of quality cues. However, few studies have been conducted in accordance to the importance of country of origin at the point of purchase and to what degree such attribute influence the consumer in a decision making process. Liefeld (2004) have questioned the importance and the lack of external validity of country of origin as an influencing product attribute in the buying process. Liefelds (2004) doubts are based on previous studies concerning country of origin have to most degree been based on research that have been conducted in a non-purchasing situation and thereby not revealed how consumers act when selecting among product alternatives in a real purchasing context.

The availability of origin on products together with a well-known brand tends to be less important compared to products with a brand that is less known of the consumers (Schaefer, 1997). Brand and origin as quality cues can to some extent be mixed up for the consumers due to great linkage between these attributes. Branding is a way to add value to food products and support food and agricultural companies to become more market oriented in order to perform better (Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996). Therefore, it could be problematic to separate the importance between brand and origin that makes it difficult to understand how consumers value the different attributes that are generically tied to a certain product (Profeta *et al.*, 2012).

Costa *et al.*, (2004) stated that food in general have many abstract attributes and are rich in consequences for the consumer. The authors also argued that consumers base their choice of what food to purchase on routinized, emotional and habitual decisions. These purchasing

behaviors are often already established and therefore the knowledge concerning food product are likely to be of a limited amount for most of the consumers. Further, Costa *et al.*, (2004) stated that consumers have a low involvement in food and meat choices in a purchasing decision.

The involvement from different types of meat and also the consumer's personal perceptions of meat choice differ among consumers. The more involvement and knowledge of a product the consumer has, the more complex chains can be elicited through a laddering interview (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). Lind (2007) investigated Swedish consumers involvement in different types of pork in two different supermarkets through laddering interviews and MEC to determine consequences and values that were attached to the different product attributes. The findings stated that pork with a differentiated approach such as organic, local and branded had a more complex HVM compared to non-differentiated pork. Findings by Costa *et al.*, (2004) indicated low versus high involvement in different kinds of meat. Whereas the involvement is determined how complex HVM are created from the different types of meat. Lind (2007) showed that imported pork was bought because it was the least expensive and consumers aimed to save money. None of the respondent that bought imported meat created a complete value chain that stopped at an end value. Consumers who bought unbranded pork stated the attributes; good taste, domestic origin and price as important for their motive of purchasing the unbranded pork. The most important attribute in the unbranded category was the domestic origin. The connection between domestic and the end value "hedonistic - enjoy food" and the end value "security" revealed from domestic meat had relative strong connections. The third investigated type of pork was the branded, where the respondents stated that the country of origin from Sweden was the most important attribute. The connection and consequences made from branded meat were the respondent's beliefs of security, quality and health aspect of consuming the chosen pork products. The most frequently stated attributes and values of the branded pork were taste and enjoying food that were associated to the domestic origin. The type of organic and local pork had a more complex value chain compared to the other types of categories. The local and organic meat was mostly bought just because it was organic with the consequence of the perceived good quality and taste with the end value of animal welfare.

Meat products are often discussed in terms of quality. Hence, the meaning of quality in terms of meat products has no clear definition and confusion often arises when trying to define the term. To understand how consumers interpret quality characteristics, gaining insight to how the consumer connects the characteristic of a product to consequences and the buying motives are important (Grunert, 1995). By finding out how attributes, consequences and personal values are connected to food purchasing decisions and how consumer act in order to maximize the positive outcome, a MEC can be used. MEC can uncover how consumers' unconscious, habitual and emotional behaviors are formed in order to gain a deeper understanding of consumers purchasing process (Reynolds & Olson, 2001). By gaining insight in consumers' buying motives through a MEC of meat products suitable marketing and communication information can be created.



## 3 Theoretical framework

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*A presentation of the concept marketing strategy, consumers' cognitive map and an expanded description of the Means-end chain theory are carried out in this chapter. The theories address the consumers' cognitive motivations, consequences and underlying values in accordance to a purchasing decision. Presentations of the theories are key factors in order to understand the consumers purchasing decision and underlying values concerning meat purchase. As well how to market and communicate meat products in order to meet consumers' expectations on the products is described.*

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### 3.1 Marketing Strategy

A marketing strategy is the implementation, design, and the control of a certain plan to influence exchanges in order to accomplish organizational objectives (Peter & Olson, 2010). Basically a marketing strategy is used to increase the demand from consumers by influence the positive feelings and thoughts connected to a certain product, brand or service. By creating a positive approach to the product the possibility that the purchase will be repeated will surge.

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA, 1985) a classic recognized explanation of marketing is seen as a process of planning, performance, promotion, pricing and delivering ideas, services and goods in order to satisfy organizational and individual objectives where an exchange between parts are created. The AMA explanation of marketing can be seen as the well recognized 4P:s and marketing mix, which are described further down in this section. The foundation of marketing is to satisfy consumer needs and the main activity should be geared to give consumers what they want and need (Brassington & Pettitt, 2007). A main theme in marketing is that consumers do not want the product in itself, they want a solution to a problem (Kotler, 2000). This could be obtained through using or consuming a product. By offering a product that have a differentiated profile that appeal to be more attractive compared to competing products a competitive advantage of the product can be achieved. However, if consumers requirements are not fulfilled by the product or services offered, the marketing process has failed both from a organizational point of view but also failed to satisfy the consumers expectations. The fact that consumers have the desire to achieve the highest quality for the money they spend also influences the businesses to improve their quality standards frequently, to satisfy, attract and keep consumers.

Marketing have been a research area for long time and within the field many new paths have been developed. According to Grönroos (1997) marketing is going towards a relationship-oriented approach, with customer focus that embrace both socially and ethical concerns. The progress within the shift in marketing segment is defined, as "Marketing is to establish, maintain and enhance relationship with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises" (Grönroos, 1997, pp.327). The customer relation is enhanced by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises. The relationship approach is usually based on a long-term basis and reflects the partnership idea of the concept about doing something with someone instead of doing something to them. A drift towards relationship-based marketing with the aim to fulfill promises to potential customers is important in order to keep them loyal or even to appeal new customers. If organizations or business does not keep their promises,

the degree of losing a buyer is relative high and the trust between parties can disappear. However, in order to lose a consumer, the consumer first need to be appealed to the business marketing mix and offerings.

The foundation in a marketing mix consists of: Product, Price, Promotion and Place (4P) (McCarthy, 1960). To be able to fulfill requirements in marketing, the concept of marketing mix with the 4P have not only been widely spread but also revised and overruled (Kotler, 2000; Grönroos, 1997). According to the authors, a product does not only signify what the brand or product means for the consumers but also the experience involved when purchasing or using it, as well as the desired outcome. The price serves both as a brand image and as a competitive advantage compared to other products. Through price, the chosen position in the market can be obtained such as premium product or a product in the lower cost segment. Consumers often evaluate the price in relation to the quality of the offered product (Steenkamp, 1989). Promotions of products are mostly used to create a positive image of the product or the brand in order to attract consumers (Kotler, 2000). It is through promotion and by emphasizing the attributes of a product that the consumers looking for in order to possibly establish a positive connection to the product. The fourth and last p, as in place refers to the location where the products are market such as stores or countries. Place also includes the display in the shop shelves or how eye catching a promotion campaign are. To satisfy the needs of consumers, a mix of the 4P can be used to find the optimal offering concept that will satisfy consumers' needs and meet the end value of a purchase. Consumers aiming for the best mix and are not tied to neither the price nor the product. Instead, the consumers look for access to information, service that creates value to a certain product and achieved benefits from the product (Brassington & Pettitt, 2007). However, not all consumers have the same needs and desire for a certain product. To be able to identify the common characteristic of needs and wants from different consumers, organizations can develop a more targeted marketing mix and a segmentation of consumers that could help to satisfy their specific needs through offer a differentiated product (Kotler, 2000).

It is of importance for companies to decide their marketing strategy in order to attain a competitive strategy (Kotler, 2000). Whether the choice is to penetrate in the lower cost market or in the premium market, the companies should aim to attract their chosen potential market segment in order to be successful. A future oriented company seeks to deliver highly desired product solutions in order to create advantage within the chosen target market. Due to consumers changing habits and new behaviors, an innovative strategy will fulfill consumers' needs and desire in order to be prepared to match rivalry amongst innovations from other organizations. In order to develop a successful marketing strategy, the essential factor of understanding consumer behavior is of great importance (Peter & Olson, 2010). By gaining insight in consumers' behaviors and reasoning, marketers can not only analyze and understand consumers purchasing decision but also gain insight in other offerings from competitive companies and reasons behind consumer purchase of such.

### 3.2 Consumer Cognitive map

Consumers usually have three different types of knowledge of a product; the attributes, consequences when using the product, and the values consumers achieve when using the product (Peter & Olson, 2010). It is of importance to have knowledge concerning the attributes that are relevant to the consumer, what the attributes means, and how the consumers associate the attributes and consequences the “means” in a cognitive process, such as a purchasing decision. Consumers have a diverse insight about product attributes that often includes both concrete and abstract attributes. The attributes are seen as properties of a

product where the abstract attributes characterize intangible and subjective characteristics such as quality, where the concrete attributes represent the tangible and physical attributes like the material of a product. The consequences and preferred benefits refer to what the product provides to the consumer. Values are perceived outcomes and ends states. Peter & Olson (2010) stated that consumers often reflect upon products in respect of consequences and values rather than the attributes in itself. In order to reach the desired end value it is important to distinguish what the product attributes are believed to provide and not the attribute in itself.

The consequences that are created from the attributes are further divided in functional and psychosocial consequences (Peter & Olson, 2010). The functional consequences is described as tangible outcomes when using the product and what the consumer experience straightforwardly when consuming it. The psychosocial consequences signify the social and psychological outcome of consuming or using a product. These consequences state the internal and personal consequences for a person e.g. how the products make you feel and the perceived well-being of using the product.

In peoples cognitive system, the consequences achieved of a product attribute will serve as a knowledge base, which is stored in the memory (Peter & Olson, 2010). The stored cognitive knowledge can be activated from the memory and used in a buying decision process. Consumers use the stored knowledge and they form positive and/or negative consequences of buying or using the product. These consequences can be viewed as potential benefits and potential risks. Benefits are described as the desirable outcome of buying or using a product and usually it is benefits the consumers wants to achieve with a certain purchase. The potential risk represents consequences that are not desired from the consumers point of view and also trying to avoid. The sum of the potential risk that consumers perceive is based on how large impact a negative consequence may have and the probability that a negative consequent will appear (Weber *et al.*, 2002). The fact that consumers have different insight in certain product groups the perceived risk differ from consumer to consumer. Some consumers overestimate the risk while others do not notice the risks at all. In a buying decision process, the consumer value both potential risks and potential benefits. Then by incorporating the stored information concerning negative and positive consequences a decision can be made.

By using and interpreting previous knowledge, consumers tend to avoid products with high potential risk. One of the most important factors in a decision making process of food products is consumers' past experience when searching for information in order to evaluate a product (Steenkamp, 1989). However, the involvement in the product group, variation of quality within the product group and time pressure are related factors that influence the consumer's purchase (Engel *et al.*, 2006). The benefits products provide serves as a value satisfier for the consumer, and by buying a certain product the desired end value can be achieved (Peter & Olson, 2010). Values are described as subjective and intangible such as people's life goals, being successful, achieving security, self-fulfillment or live a long and healthy life (Schwartz, 1992).

Previous researches in marketing tend to focus on attributes and consequences alone but not the connection of personal values integrated with those attributes and consequences (Peter & Olson, 2010). The implication by just studying one type of consumer knowledge is that the understanding being incomplete and the connections between attributes, consequences and values are lost. In order to achieve understanding of consumers connections between product attributes, consequences and end values the MEC is frequently used. MEC helps to

understand the consumer's involvement of different types of products and how marketing and communication can impact the consumers.

### 3.3 Means-end chain theory (MEC)

MEC is used in order to reveal a comprehensive knowledge concerning the associations that consumers make between product attributes, consequences and end values (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Gutman 1988; Peter & Olson, 2010). MEC focuses on connections between the product attributes, the consequences, referred to as the “*means*”, which is elicited from the product attributes, and then the personal values, referred to as the “*ends*” (Gutman, 1982). MEC propose that consumer reflects about product attributes in form of personal consequences, such as the meaning of a specific attribute, which then leads to “*Means to some end*”. The end for the consumers is usually a consequence or a value. Figure 2 illustrates the four common levels in a consumers means-end: attributes, functional consequences, psychosocial consequences and values.

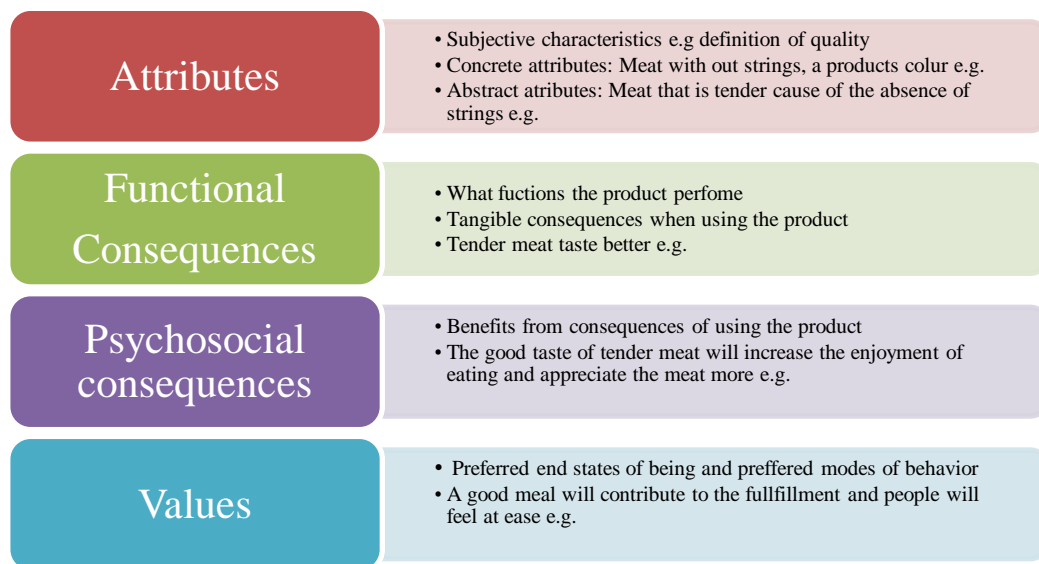


Figure 2. Means-end chain theory. Representing the four common levels (own illustration after Peter & Olson, 2010, pp.78)

MEC is constructed in order to identify consequences and values perceived by the consumer and enable the understanding of the consumer's choice criteria (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). Through the means-end insights into buying motives and the connections to buying behavior can be achieved. Consumers' are perceived to act in order to obtain the most positive outcome and thereby also avoid the negative outcome from a certain purchase. Consumers tend to learn and draw connections what attributes leads to the maximum of positive outcomes. The more important the achievement of a certain value is, the more important is the attribute and the consequence that lead to this value for the consumer. Consumers are expected to buy products for the benefits they provide, rather than buying products for their own sake (Costa *et al.*, 2004). MEC are usually accompanied by the interview technique laddering, which is a semi-qualitative interview approach (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988; Grunert & Grunert, 1995). The product attributes, consequences and the end value can be illustrated as a chain and be put into a HVM that describes the motivational and cognitive structure of a person's decision making process (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). The view of MEC and the HVM:s approaches consist of two different views: the motivational view and the cognitive view. The motivational view illustrates the buying motives and will contribute to a deeper understanding

of consumers purchasing behavior. The cognitive view illustrates the knowledge related to a certain product and how it is organized and stored in a consumer mind.

## 4 Method

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*In this chapter the method approach is explained, which includes a description of how the study was conducted with 30 qualitative laddering interviews. The empirical part of the study was based on interviews, which is the unit of analysis, at the point of purchase of meat in two Swedish supermarkets. The choice of approach, qualitative research interviewing, ethical aspects and implications of chosen methods are described and motivated in the chapter as well.*

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### 4.1 Choice of approach

The purpose of obtaining knowledge within the research field is for the researcher to recognize previously conducted studies in order to grasp a different focus and shed light on a new research area or confirm/reject previous findings (Bernard, 2011). However, it is difficult to find a method that is suitable for the studied subject in order to address the aim and to eliminate feasible errors when conducting the research. To be able to limit possible errors in the study, pros and cons with different methods have to be considered and valued by the researcher prior choosing a method that can address the aim. The choice of an approach for this study is limited due to the purpose of the research, which is to identify the subjects' motives for purchasing minced meat in an authentic situation. Neither an experiment nor a survey will fulfill the requirements of the purpose due to a separation of the actual purchasing decision and the respondents' replies. By conducting interviews, both the respondents and the researcher have the possibility to ask questions to clarify potential misunderstandings at the point of purchase (Kvale, 1997).

A qualitative research approach is considered to be an appropriate tool when investigating human actions and behavior (Robson, 2011; Allwood, 2004). Through a qualitative interview approach, it is feasible to grasp and understand the respondents reasoning and unconscious values in a purchasing decision of meat. The researcher wants to gain knowledge about how the respondents perceive the studied subject and follow up with questions depending upon the given answers from the respondents (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The qualitative approach is not considered to serve as a generalizing tool, rather to enlighten and describe specific situations that could occur, such as a purchasing decision. The choice of conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews in this study is based upon the approach is suitable to the situation of studying means-end and laddering interviews accompanied with purchasing decision of meat. Similar approaches have been used and verified by previous researcher such as Lind (2007), Zanolini & Naspetti (2002) and Grunert (1995). Although, the choice criteria of minced meat at the point of purchase had never been investigated previously.

The selected meat was minced beef because it is perceived as a more ordinary and "everyday" product with similar visual, tender, price and fat content in comparison to other more exclusive meat cuts. Due to many subjective quality aspects involved in cut meat, with often a higher price, the choice of a more uniform product such as minced meat was taken. The findings of purchasing motives about minced meat can then be used for other meat products in order to discuss two things: (1) if there are similar factors involved in the purchase; (2) or if other key factors are involved. Further on minced meat will be referred to as just meat.

Through consumers means-end the researcher will enable to interpret subjective consumer needs such as taste, health and quality attributes towards more objective needs such as brand, country of origin and price. The choice where to conduct the interviews were based upon Lind (2007) where the researcher conducted a similar study of pork products in two different supermarkets in Uppsala. In order to make comparison between the studies the same supermarkets were chosen. Thereby the same customer segments buying motives could be obtained and an understanding between the buying motives of different types of meat could be clarified.

In order to fulfill the aim of the study, a deeper understanding of the consumers buying motives and how Swedish consumers perceive the chosen meat products is required. The choice criteria of the method, laddering interviews, are based upon the theory of MEC that are used in order to obtain the consumers means-end in a purchasing decision. The MEC has been proven to be a useful instrument in order to understand consumer behavior and how product attributes are perceived as a mean to attain specific end values (Gutman, 1982). Knowledge of consumers associations between attributes, consequences and end values is crucial for the investigated problem: (1) How consumers obtain different attributes; (2) to what extent country of origin is of importance in a purchasing decision and to what end values it leads. With a deeper understanding of the consumers' value and expectations of the attributes of a product, a proper marketing strategy can be developed in order to satisfy consumers' needs. In this study, the laddering interview technique is used to uncover the meaning of a specific purchasing decision and to connect it to attributes, consequences and values. The probing in the laddering interview will illustrate in what way unconscious structure are connected with the actual buying process. The laddering interview technique was chosen as its purpose works best in a realistic situation where the respondent can provide immediate associations related to their actual purchase (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Through laddering, it is feasible for the researcher to climb up a person's structure and understand the personal meaning or reason in accordance to the purchase of meat. The new obtained knowledge revealed from the laddering interview can serve as a guidance of new campaigns, advertising and labeling of Swedish meat products.

## 4.2 Qualitative research interviewing

The approach of a qualitative interview provides a deeper understanding how the respondent sees and interpret the world (Brinkman & Kvale, 2009). An interview format that is either totally structured or totally opened is considered to be a semi-structured interview (Bernard, 2011). As the laddering interview is perceived as a semi-structured interview format that will enable the researcher to follow up given answers from the respondents and also serve to address the purpose of this study. The objective of a semi-structured format is to achieve an understanding of the studied subject's life. A Semi-structured interview is seen as a suitable interview format in situations where the researcher is limited to interview the respondent only once. The format indicates that the researcher is competent and prepared but does not want to have an extreme control over the respondent as in a totally structured interviews (Bernard, 2011). The semi-qualitative laddering interview were chosen to enlighten the respondents own underlying values and the possibility to attain a deeper knowledge of the unconscious thoughts in accordance to a purchase of meat were the respondents only can be interviewed once, at the meat counter. When a semi-structured interview is carried out the respondents can express themselves with their own words and the researcher can obtain facts from the individual behaviors (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). It is of importance in this study how the researcher interprets the given answers and to ensure the validity no leading questions will be

addressed. If the researcher follows up questions it is of importance to avoid leading questions in order to not affect the result of the study, instead if the respondents cannot come up with any answers the negative form of laddering will be undertaken, which is further explained in section 4.3.2. The analysis of the study is based upon what the respondents have communicated in accordance to their choice of meat purchase to the researcher in the interviews. It is then how the researchers interpret the answers from the interviews that also set the basis and credibility of the study's quality. The quality of this study is ensured by the use of Reynolds & Gutman (1988) guideline in order to conduct the coding of the data.

Further to increase the credibility of the findings it is of importance that the respondents reflect a wide variety of perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). By acknowledging different perspectives shows that the researcher is aware of the complexity of conducting a meat purchase and portray it through gathering contradictory perceptions and diverse understanding that individuals tend to have. By obtaining different points of view a more complete picture of the choice criteria of meat can be provided to the researcher. By selecting a diversity of respondents will contribute to the results that will be obtained to be more credible due to more perspective is highlighted, which is done in this study with two supermarkets and a mix of respondents.

The main theme of the laddering interviews consists of representing what the respondents have said in a sufficient way and show the world from the studied subject's world, in order to do so the respondents have to feel at ease with the researcher. If the researcher is able to create and communicate a high sense of involvement respondents feel more confident and can talk more freely concerning their meat purchase (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Thereby it is easier to attain the fundamental motive of the underlying reasons of the respondent's behavior and perceptions of their choice criteria of meat. To be able to understand the respondent it is crucial for the researcher to put aside own references and biases in order to reflect respondents' answers and reasoning in order to not affect the given answers in the laddering interview. The issues involved in a qualitative interview are further addressed in the next section of ethical aspects.

### 4.2.1 Ethical aspects

Ethical issues involved in interviews have to be considered all the way from the start until the final version of the study (Trost, 1997). The importance of securing confidentiality of the respondents and to assure their security is essential when conducting the laddering interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To guarantee the respondents' integrity, the researcher should always act in a manner that the respondents do not feel at ease and not offended by participating in a study or interview session. By assuring and explaining to the respondent that it is no right or wrong answers the respondent can talk more freely and genuinely in order to provide the underlying values concerning their meat purchase. In addition, informing participants that there are no right or wrong answers makes them feel comfortable.

When conducting interviews it is up to the researcher to decide how much information the respondents should receive prior the interview (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). In this study the respondents were approached and questioned if they could contribute in a shorter interview. At the same time, they were informed of the confidentiality of the study. The purpose of the study was explained ahead to verify that the respondent felt comfortable and not obligated to take part in the study. Before conducting the interview the respondents confirmed their participation in the study, they were also informed about the possibility to stop the



interview during the session. By assuring these issues concerning confidentially the respondent can answer in a more reliably manner and feel confident that the answers were treated in a proper way by the researcher (Kvale, 1997). When conducting an interview the probing part should be designed in the way that the respondent gets stimulated to provide more information with absence of the researchers involvement. By using the echo probe that consists of repeating the last thing the respondent said in the interview shows that the researcher have understood what it has been said. It also helps to verify the respondents' answers (Reynold & Gutman, 1988). The probing process can be perceived as a repetition of the respondents' answers but it is still neutral and will not lead the respondent to give answers the researcher is lurking after.

### 4.3 Course of action

After conducted the theory and method chapters, the preparation of the qualitative interviews were carried out. It is of importance to carefully prepare for the interviews in order to conduct valuable and useful interviews to make it possible to analyze and discuss the findings further on. The aim of the interviews is to obtain how consumers perceive different product attributes on meat and the association the consumers reveal from the attributes. By using the laddering interview, hopefully the consumer's unconscious motives and values in the purchasing decision can be captured. The findings were then categorized and coded into a HVM to visualize how attribute, consequences and values are connected to each other.

An illustration of attributes, consequences and values connected to the underlying buying motives will be visualized in a HVM in order to understand the motives in a purchasing decision. Important to mention is that the purpose of the study is not to generalize the conclusions, but instead, to highlight how a number of consumers perceive different product attributes, consequences and values tied to a purchasing decision of meat. Even a smaller study has to rely upon numbers of 30 - 40 interviews in order to have sufficient data to analyze (Bernard, 2011). By conducting the laddering interviews during a limited time period, the potential risk that the respondent's observations and attitudes might change over time is minimized.

#### 4.3.1 Laddering Interview technique

Laddering is a commonly used interview technique to deduce means-end and recognize consumers' cognitive structures concerning the investigated situation (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). With the attempt to gain a deeper understanding how consumers perceive and interpret situations, the researcher has to find a way to understand the consumer's way of reasoning. The laddering technique has been explained by several authors, such as, Reynolds & Gutman (1988), Grunert & Grunert (1995) and Leppard *et al* (2004), and it has previously been used to deduce consumers means-end on meat products (Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996; Lind, 2007). The laddering interview is a suitable way of exploring the respondents' motives and values in an interview situation (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). By using MEC the researcher can discover the most important product attributes for the consumer in a purchasing decision. The focus is to determine connections made by the respondents between attributes, consequences and values. The interview form takes the respondent up the ladder from attributes, consequences to the preferred end state: values. An example of a soft laddering interview for meat is illustrated in Figure 3.

**Interviewer:** “Why did you choose to buy that meat?”

**Respondent:** “Because of the absences of hormones” (**attribute**)

**Interviewer:** “You said the absence of hormones is important when you decide what meat to purchase. Why is that important for you?”

**Respondent:** “I think beef without hormones is a more nutritious product” (**consequence**)

**Interviewer:** “Why is it important for you to buy a nutritious product?”

**Respondent:** “I want to be healthy” (**value**)

**Interviewer:** “Why is it important for you to be healthy?”

**Respondent:** “If I’m healthy I can enjoy life more.” (**value**)

**Interviewer:** “Why is it important for you to enjoy life?”

**Respondent:** “It is just important to me” (**end**)

Figure 3. Segment of a laddering interview for meat (own illustration after Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996, pp. 220)

The product attributes are the starting point for the interview and they are followed up by consequences and values. The respondents are first probed with the question “Why did you choose to buy that meat?” Whereas the type of probing “Why is that important to you?” takes the respondent one-step up the ladder until the respondents is unable to give an answer and the interview stops. The interview format can be obtained as repeating from the respondent’s point of view when the probing “Why is that important to you?” is repeated (Gutman & Reynolds, 1988).

The interview approach of soft laddering was used in order to portray an appropriate value chain where the natural flow of the respondents was encouraged, which is in contrast to a hard ladder where the respondents are forced to give one ladder at the time (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). The soft laddering approach allows the respondents to provide diverse motives concerning the attributes and why certain attributes are important for them in a purchasing decision and talk more freely. Furthermore, soft laddering allows the respondent to state the same reason for two or more different attributes, and the researcher will be able to follow one ladder at the time and then return to start all over again with another ladder. A hard laddering approach could not enable the researcher to follow up two ladders at a time, thus important associations and connections could have been left out from the respondents’ reasoning (Costa *et al.*, 2004). According to Costa *et al.* (2004), soft laddering is more suitable for studies with less than 50 respondents whereas hard laddering is more suitable in a quantitative study.

The outcome of a laddering interview is favorably illustrated in a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM). The HVM illustrates connections consumers make between products attributes, consequences revealed from buying these products and the obtained end values. The identified connections in the HVM can provide a comprehensive understanding of significant

drivers behind a purchase and also enlighten marketing opportunities of a certain product (Reynolds & Olson, 2001). Illustration in Figure 4 describes the HVM where (a) is a straight ladder where the respondent only creates one ladder at the time and complete the ladder from attribute, consequence and to the end value. Compared to ladder (b), is a ladder that entails of multiple ladders where some ends at the attribute level and some are completed to the end value

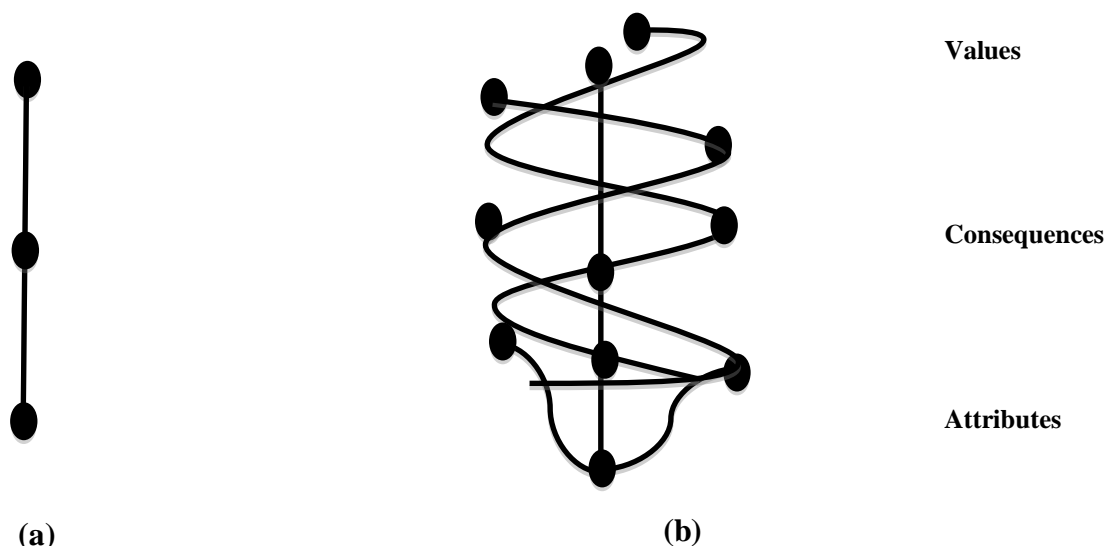


Figure 4. Linear Hierarchical structure and network context (own illustration after Grunert & Grunert, 1995, pp. 214)

The HVM defines the consumers' connection between a product and the personal means-end it has for the consumer (Gutman, 1982). The focus is on the connection between the attributes the "means", and the consequences that are uncovered from the attributes to the consumers values the "ends". It is the connections that respondents elicit that are illustrated in the HVM and creates the illustration of a ladder. To be able to withdraw the authentic buying motives of meat and to grasp the consumer means-end the laddering interview is an appropriate instrument.

Means-end elicited from the laddering interview characterize the consumers' individual perception of a specific product or brand and are based on the consumers personal interests and background according to the studied object (Peter & Olson, 2010). Consumers usually have different means-end for the same brand or product and it is not for sure that every person's means-end leads to a specific value. The chain can both stop on the consequence level and also end on the attribute level depending on the involvement of the consumer with the subject. According to Costa *et al.*, (2004), food in general involves many abstract attributes and consequences for the consumer. High involvement of e.g. great knowledge of a product leads to a larger amount of ladders in a HVM that can be obtained from the consumer (Gengler & Reynolds, 1995). Low involvement products tend to have less solid and connected maps compared to high involvement products. Hence, the fact that if a product attributes have vague or no connections to consequences, consumers will not be aware of what the benefits from the attributes are, and will thereby have little impact on the consumers purchasing decisions. To be able to retrieve the means-end the researcher first have to identify the most important product attributes to each consumers at the point of purchase which is done through laddering interviews. The aim of the interview technique is to elicit how

consumers perceive product attributes towards consequences and values (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Using the MEC the researcher can then identify the connections that consumers make between attributes, consequences and values through a laddering interview technique. An advantage of using laddering interview technique is to gain a deeper understanding of the consumers' product knowledge rather than methods that just focuses on single attributes and benefits.

### 4.3.2 Implication of MEC and laddering technique

The used frameworks for this study have several limitations to consider when conducting and evaluating the results. The main problem while conducting a laddering interview is that the respondent do not know the answer when they probed why a certain attribute or consequence is important for them or they struggling to state why something is of importance for them (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). In those kinds of situations it is challenging for the researcher not to influence the respondent's answers and keep the interview unbiased. To avoid those situations where the respondent could not answer, Reynolds & Gutman (1988) recommended probing questions such as: What would happen if the attribute or consequence were not present? This is referred to as a negative laddering. MEC have a number of factors that limit the validity of the chosen theory. For example the lack of a well-established theoretical framework, methods of handle the data collection and analysis techniques in accordance to MEC and laddering interviews (Costa *et al.*, 2004). Limitations concerning a clear distinction between whether a subject is considered to be an attribute, consequence or value are still absent in the literature. The absence of guidelines put subjectivity into the study because it is the researches own distinction between attributes, consequences and values that has to be done due to lack of guidelines (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). Other factor that is of importance to consider is that purchasing food is often connected to habitual actions and routinized shopping decisions. The habitual factor may serve as a problem for the consumer when probed to make the connections between motives for consumption and the involved personal end values. Moreover, consumers may have misconceptions about the connections between attributes of products and the consequences of what the consumption will provide to them.

### 4.3.3 Research design

The research design will serve as a guidance for the researcher throughout the study by raising awareness of what research questions to study, what the relevant data are, what data should be collected, and how to summarize and analyze the gathered data (Yin, 2003). By having a clear research design, the researcher can avoid problems and situations where the conclusion will not address the research questions.

A semi-structured face-to-face interview with laddering technique was carried out in two supermarkets in Uppsala during one week in April 2013. A total of 30 respondents were interviewed at the meat counter, just after they purchased meat. The purpose was to obtain the first answer that came to the respondents' mind when probing why they chose to buy this particular meat. The interview took place as close to the decision making process as possible in order to attain the most significant choice criteria and important attributes. That was done in an effort to enable the forthcoming laddering interview. The laddering interview technique was used in order to deduce the means-ends from the respondents' connections between product attributes, consequences and end-values of the purchased meat. The interviews were conducted during 10 am to 6 pm during two weekdays in each supermarket. A wide range of diversity of the answers was required in order to create an informative HVM. The sample of

selected respondents was sifted through in order not only to reveal the complexity and diversity of the studied subject but also to reflect the supermarkets customers segment.

When the probing part were finished, the researcher asked question concerning education, gender, age and if the respondent was responsible for the households grocery shopping were asked in order to get some background information of the respondents. Both of the investigated supermarkets had different types of meat such as locally produced, organic, imported, Swedish, meat that were minced in the store, vacuum packed meat e.g. The large supply of meat enabled the respondents to choose freely between products and chose the one that were of highest desire. Appendix 1 shows pictures of the different types of meat. It should be noted that one of these two supermarkets offered imported meat to their customers.

Direct elicitation was used in order to study consumer's motivation rather than a cognitive structure in order to obtain the buying motives rather than how the product is stored and organized in the mind (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). The direct eliciting implies that the consumers spontaneously choose between attributes of products and asked to directly state relevant attributes of the products. The direct elicitation is the least time consuming and serves to gain insight how consumers compare abstract attributes and establish an extent number of chains into a HVM (Costa *et al.*, 2004).

#### 4.3.4 Coding the laddering interviews

The analysis of the laddering interviews is done through classifying the responses into summary codes of attributes, consequences and values in order to reduce the result in to a more manageable amount (Reynold & Gutman, 1988). It is of importance to have broad enough categorizes of consequences and values in order to grasp connections between categories and how they are correlated to each other. However, if the categories are too broad, essential information can be lost. The importance of the analysis is to focus on central and meaningful categories according to the studied subject. The data-program *LadderUX* was used after the categorization in order to illustrate how connections between attributes, consequences and values were established. It should be noted that it is the connections between the elements and not the elements themselves that are in focus in the analysis. By separating the element and group them into larger categories, a clearer and stronger connection is facilitated. However, there is no clear and existing guidance on how to make a distinction between attribute, consequences and values (Costa *et al.*, 2004). Analysis of the data collection will consist of a rather subjective and complex process and the result will face controversy because of the subjectivity (Grunert & Grunert, 1995). The graphical design and the HVM of the results are based on the numbers when every summary code (e.g. Swedish) was connected to another summary code (e.g. healthy). Direct links show the direct associations made by the respondents between codes while indirect links indicate just the general assumption among the codes which is illustrated in the HVM (Costa *et al.*, 2004). To decide what codes or categories that should be illustrated in the HVM depends on how many times every associations should be provided in the laddering interview in order to be present in the HVM. These associations are usually described as the cut-off level (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The cut-off level stet the number of time an indirect or direct link between two codes has to be mention by the respondents in order to be visualized in the HVM. A cut-off point between 3 to 5 is recommended in order to create a sufficient HVM (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

## 5 Result & Analysis

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*In this chapter, the results from the laddering interviews are presented together with an analysis based on the theoretical framework of the MEC and the literature review. The interviews are based on consumers buying motives of Swedish country of origin, locally produced and imported meat that are illustrated in separated HVM. The illustrations in section 5.2 to 5.4 are used in order to view the identified connections between attributes, consequences and consumers end values according to a purchase. In section 5.5 an aggregated HVM is illustrated in order to distinguish similarities and divergences from the separated HVM.*

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### 5.1 Hierarchical Value Map (HVM)

The 30 respondents in the interviews composed of 70% women (21) and 30% men (9) with an age between 23 to 75 years old. The interviews lasted approximately in 3.30 minutes. Half of the respondents in this study had a university degree. According to the average university level in Sweden of 32 %, respondents in this study had a slightly higher education level than the average Swedish person (www, SCB, 1,2013). The respondents that were interviewed bought different types of meat: 43 % (13) bought locally produced, 33 % (10) bought Swedish country of origin and 23 % (7) bought imported meat. The respondents were handpicked close to the meat counter in order to obtain a great variation of people with different background, age, sex and different choices of categories within the segment of minced meat. Most of the respondents were in charge of the families grocery shopping and thereby routinely conducting most of the purchasing decisions. The Swedish country of origin and the locally produced meat created a complex HVM whereas the imported type of meat did not produce any complex HVM, which indicates a lower level of reasoning when it comes to consumers deciding to purchase imported meat.

### 5.2 Swedish country of origin

Ten of the 30 respondents bought meat with Swedish country of origin. Nine out of 10 of the respondents who bought Swedish meat also mentioned “Swedish” as an attribute when probing why they chose to buy this specific meat. Moreover, six of 10 of the respondents that bought Swedish meat had a university degree. Some meat within the segment had the voluntary label “Swedish meat”. However, the most frequently bought meat did not use the label and was of the type “private label product” and also vacuumed packed. The price within the Swedish country of origin segment varied between 66-96 SEK/kg. Respondents purchasing Swedish country of origin elicited 17 ladders, whereas nine of the 17 ladders were completed to an end value. Eight of 10 respondents elicited one or two ladders, with a maximum of three ladders within the category of Swedish meat. The illustration in Figure 5 is the HVM created from 10 interviews were respondents bought meat with Swedish country of origin. Only the most frequently made associations from the attribute Swedish country of origin are illustrated in the HVM. Both direct and indirect links established by the respondents are present in the illustration. In Figure 5 and further on, the numbers are indicators for each time a category are linked to another, both directly and indirectly. Within the nodes, the numbers indicates every time the respondents stated the attribute, consequence or value. For example in Figure 5 the attribute “Swedish” n: 18/29, indicates that the

respondents mentioned and created 18 direct links and 29 indirect links toward the attribute “Swedish”.

# Hierarchical Value Map – Swedish country of origin

Numbers (n): 10

Cut-off-level: 3 (49 direct links & 55 indirect links)

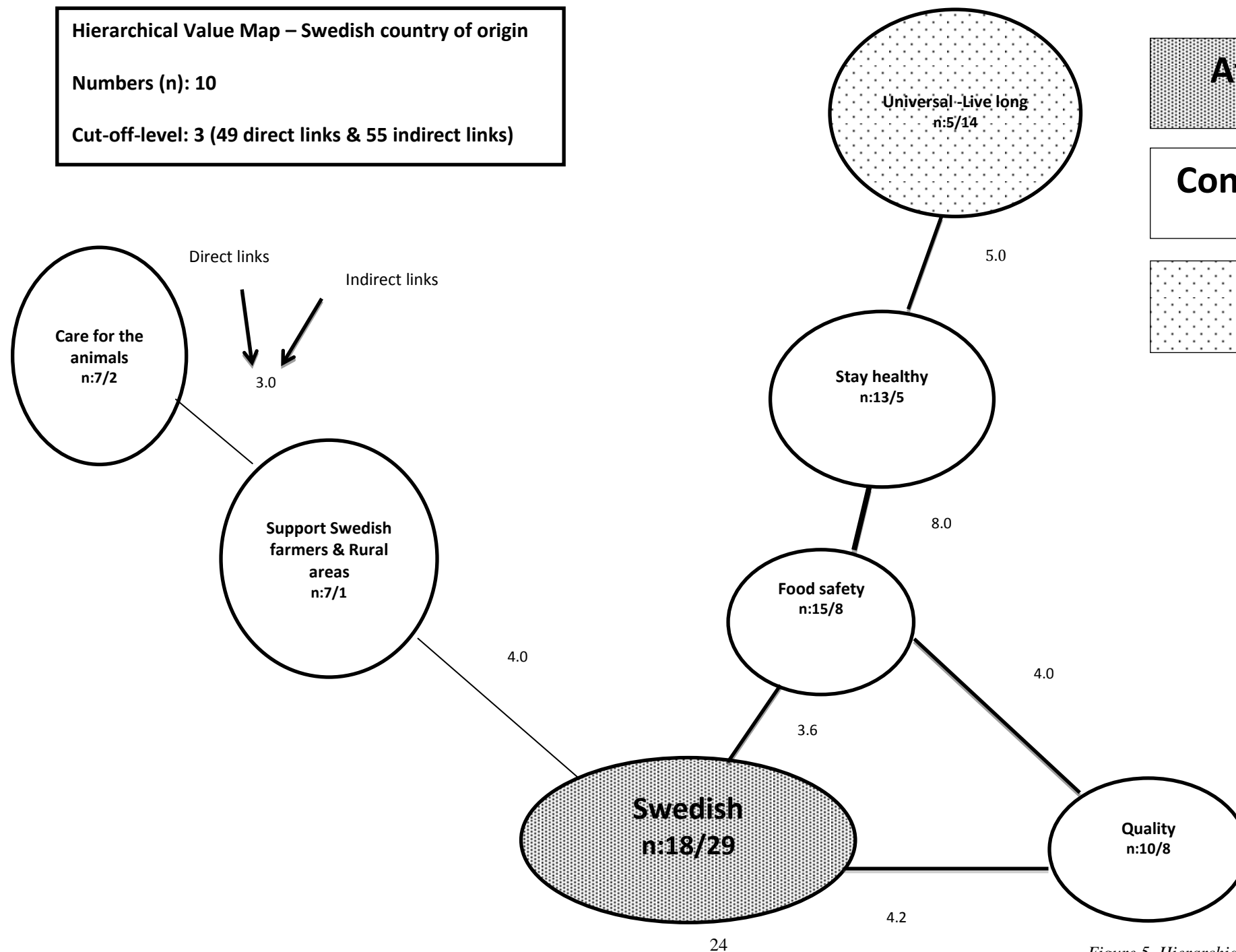


Figure 5. Hierarchical Value Map – Swedish meat



The most important consequences visual in the HVM that was associated with *Swedish* country of origin were concerns of *food safety* and *stay healthy*. By choosing Swedish meat, avoidance of illnesses and additives were believed to be obtained. These consequences were also connected to the universal value to *live long* and have a healthy life where the ladder was completed at the end value. The expression of “universal” is hereafter referred to as an overall higher achievement or a life goal that people strive to achieve. The associations made by consumers between Swedish and food safety, is identified as a functional consequence, stay healthy, identified as a psychosocial consequence, and live a long life is identified as a end value. The attempt to limit the subjectivity in the judgment and divide attribute, consequence and the values are based on the MEC and Reynolds & Gutmans (1988) guidelines. Swedish meat were considered to be safe due to no use of hormones or other additives which were obtained to be a guarantee of good quality of the meat. Consumers frequently stated the importance to nourish the body with a good product, to know contain of the food and the perceived good quality of Swedish meat. These were consequences revealed from the consumers when probing why they chose to buy the specific meat and why certain factors were important for them in a purchasing decision. The findings that Swedish country of origin is an attribute that were associated with a safe and healthy product are not visual or tangible for the consumer prior a purchasing decision. The belief that *Swedish* meat is of good *quality* and provides food safety is based on the consumers' reasoning and previous experience of purchasing this type of meat (Caswell, 1998). In this case, Swedish meat has provided a safe and healthy product that is stored in the consumers' cognitive map. This knowledge is used as a quality cue when evaluating what meat to purchase (Peter & Olson, 2010). The quality cue that country of origin is perceived to be is used in order to evaluate and distinguish meat prior to a purchasing decision, which appears in this study and also in accordance to previous findings of Steenkamp (1989). The strong connection with eight direct links between *food safety* and *staying healthy* revealed from the *Swedish* attribute are supported from a previous study concerning the purchase of pork in Sweden, in which similar results were exhibited (Lind, 2007).

A consequence of buying *Swedish* meat is the connection of *supporting Swedish farmers and rural areas*, visual in the HVM with four direct links. The connection from the consumers is established in the belief that Swedish farmers act in a responsible way and use trustworthy production methods. Meat production within Sweden is perceived to have better control both from governmental authorities and from a farm management perspective, for example due to strict rules and guidelines that farmers obey. Which is in accordance to the consumers' belief that Sweden is a country with strict regulation and the perceived positive consequence this provide for the consumers. Consumers then use Swedish as a quality cue to achieve a maximum of positive consequences from a purchase. The perceived image of a country associated to high quality will affect the evaluation of the products that are perceived and valued in accordance to the image of the country (Steenkamp, 1989). However, in contrast, if a country is linked to bad quality of meat or has a bad reputation, the consumer value products from the country lower. In this study, the respondents made the connection between Sweden and meat production in a positive and trustworthy manner due to strict regulation and previously positive consequences.

The connections deduced from consumers means-end between *Swedish* and the consequence *care for the animals* were due to perceived good treatments of the animals and favorable breeding practices such as being grass-fed and no use of additives, etc. The universal *animal welfare* was also obtained to create *good quality* and *safe products*, although there were not

enough strong connections between the elements and the end value Universal-animal welfare in order to be visualized in the Swedish country of origins HVM.

### 5.3 Locally Produced

Nine out of the 13 respondents who bought locally produced meat stated the attribute locally produced when probing why they chose to buy the specific meat. Seven out of the 13 respondents who bought locally produced meat had a university degree. Two types of locally produced meat were available to the consumers. The first type was locally produced, organic (KRAV- certified) and vacuum packed and had a price of 129 SEK/kg. The second type was just marketed as locally produced, but minced and packed in the store and had the lower price of 89 - 92 SEK/kg. The numbers of ladders completed were twelve out of 22, from attribute to the end value, which was the highest degree of involvement of the investigated type of meat. Eleven of the 13 respondents elicited one or two ladders when probing why they chose to buy a specific type of meat. The elicited connections of the 13 respondents who bought locally produced meat are illustrated in the HVM in Figure 6.

**Locally produced**

**N:13**

**Cut-off- level= 3** (55 Direct links and 58 indirect links)

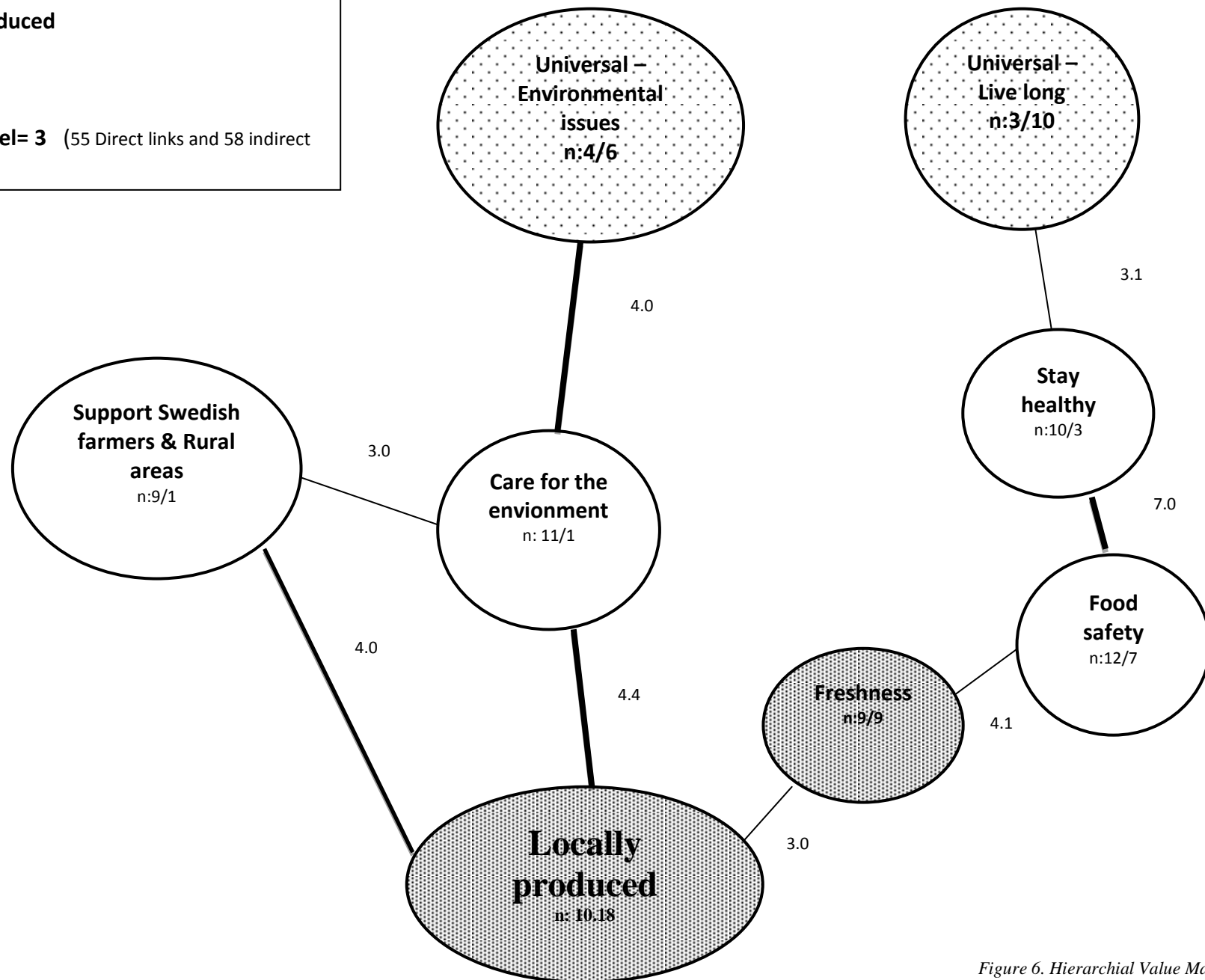


Figure 6. Hierarchical Value Map – Locally produced

The high involvement of locally produced meat is supported by Lind (2007), who verifies that organic and locally produced meat creates more complex HVM compared to non-differential meat. The involvement of locally produced meat is based upon the consumers personal insight in meat which then enable to elicit more ladders and more complex HVM compared to consumers that does not have the same knowledge (Peter & Olson, 2010). Consumers who purchasing locally produced meat are seen as involved in the purchasing decision due to a rather complex HVM. The fact that respondents could elicit a complete HVM indicates consumers' involvement in locally produced meat (Gengler & Reynolds, 1995). The HVM provide an understanding of the associations concerning the purchase of the specific meat. Due to the strong connections between *locally produced*, *care for the environment* and the underlying values of universal *environmental issues* it could be seen as the consumers end value being fulfilled when choosing to buy locally produced meat.

The consumers' considerations for the environment were mostly tied to issues such as avoid transportations, reduce the carbon footprint and other general climate aspects. The value of the purchase was connected to the universal environmental issues and the importance of acting in a responsible manner in accordance to the environment. The ambition of sustainable shopping behavior could be based upon an increased awareness of meat production and the perceived negative impact on the climate but also the fact that consumer's shopping behavior are influenced by trends, lifestyle and culture (Audenaert & Steenkamp, 1996). To be able to incorporate sustainability in meat consumption and minimize the carbon footprint in order to transmit the earth in a good condition to the next generation were statements that recurrently were stated by the respondents to answer the question why they chose to purchase locally produced meat. Within the category *locally produced* the identified consequences and values towards environmental and climate were seen as the most important choice criteria for the purchase. Those well-established connections are seemed to provide positive consequences for the consumers when purchasing products that are marked as locally produced. The value satisfier for the consumer is when believed to act for "bigger sake" with the aim of protecting the environment, which can be seen as the consumer trying to avoid negative consequences. According to Gutman (1982) consumers are perceived to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative consequences, which then can be obtained when buying locally produced.

Consumers are perceived to buy products for the benefits they provide and not for the specific products itself (Costa *et al.*, 2004). The locally produced meat are having the same features as other types of meat but are obtained by the consumer to provide more positive benefits, both for themselves and the environment compared to meat only market as Swedish. The attribute locally produced meat are stored in the consumers cognitive system and memory with the persuasion that it is better for the environment and will serve as a knowledge base when the cognitive process is activated and used in a new purchasing decision of meat. In a purchasing situation, the consumer will interpret the attribute locally produced and through the means, the consequence of care for the environment are created, and thereby the value universal environmental issues will be achieved which is the desired outcome of the products.

*Locally produced* meat were considered to be more *fresh* due to the perception of avoiding long transports that were perceived to affect both the animals and by extension the meat. The perceived *freshness* of minimizing the transports as a key attribute of buying locally produced were connected to the consequence *food safety* as considered to be a safe product to consume in order to avoid illnesses and additives. A strong connection is made between *food safety* and *stay healthy* which also is unveiled in Lind's (2007) study of pork products. A high awareness of what the consumers were eating and the importance to know what the food contains were

of great concern that repeatedly occurred in the interviews. Importance of purchasing meat that did not contain of antibiotic residues, use of hormones, or other additives and in the meanwhile are nourishing for yourself and your family is seen as important factors in order to stay healthy. The food safety concerns are well supported by the purchasing trends towards more healthy and natural products concerning food and are seen as a response to consumers' needs and wants (Wierenga *et al.*, 1996).

The attribute *locally produced* was also associated with the consequence of *supporting Swedish farmers and rural areas*. The strong connection was made from perceived better farming practices and to keep the local area in business. Swedish farmers were stated to have strict control over the production and therefore seen as trustworthy and consumers wants to favor. The aspects to keep and support Swedish farmers, especially since they are perceived to act in a responsible manner both from an environmental perspective and animal perspective, were of importance for the consumers. The importance to have domestic production even in the future and avoid dependence upon other countries with less stringent controls were also stated to be of significance importance. However, the attribute Swedish were to a low extent mentioned as a quality cue when purchasing locally produced meat. This is also confirmed by Schaefer (1997) where the origin tends to be less valued when the products are perceived to be more differentiated and having more credence attributes than just the origin. This was also supported by Lind (2007) where the attribute Swedish were to low extent mentioned when purchasing local and organic products. The strongest connections from the attribute locally and organically produced pork in Lind (2007) were the consequence quality and further on linked to the value of Animal welfare. The consequences good taste were factors that arose and connected to the value of enjoy the food in Lind (2007). Those connections are not present in the HVM for this study of minced meat.

## 5.4 Imported

None of the seven respondents that bought imported meat stated the origin as choice criteria for the purchase. The *price* was the attribute that were most frequently stated as the motive of the purchase. The price of the imported meat was 56 SEK/kg and four of the 7 respondents that bought imported meat had a university degree. The elicited connections of the seven respondents who bought imported meat are illustrated in the HVM in Figure 7.

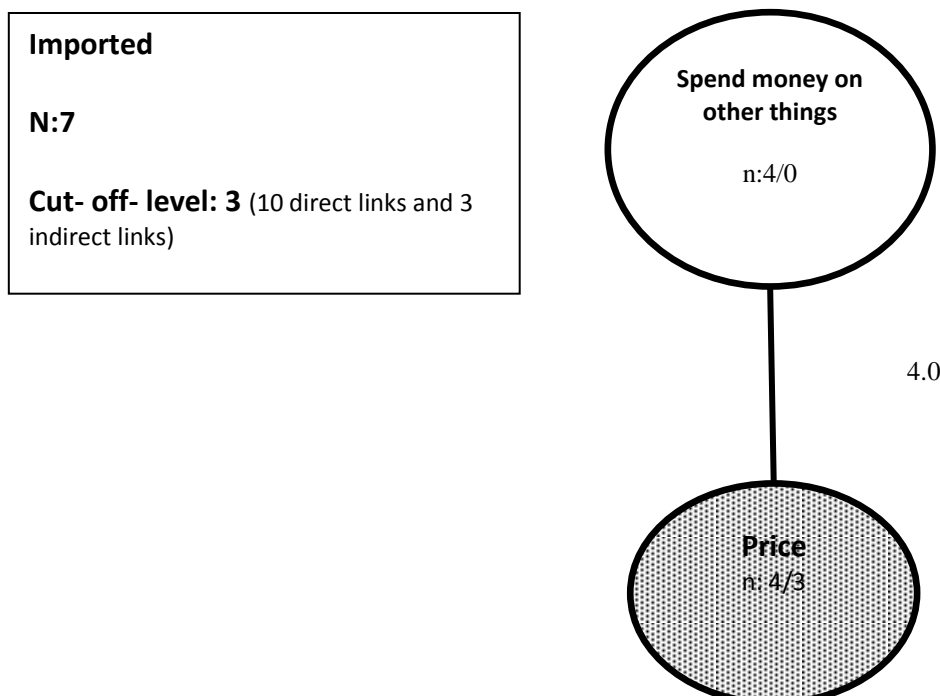
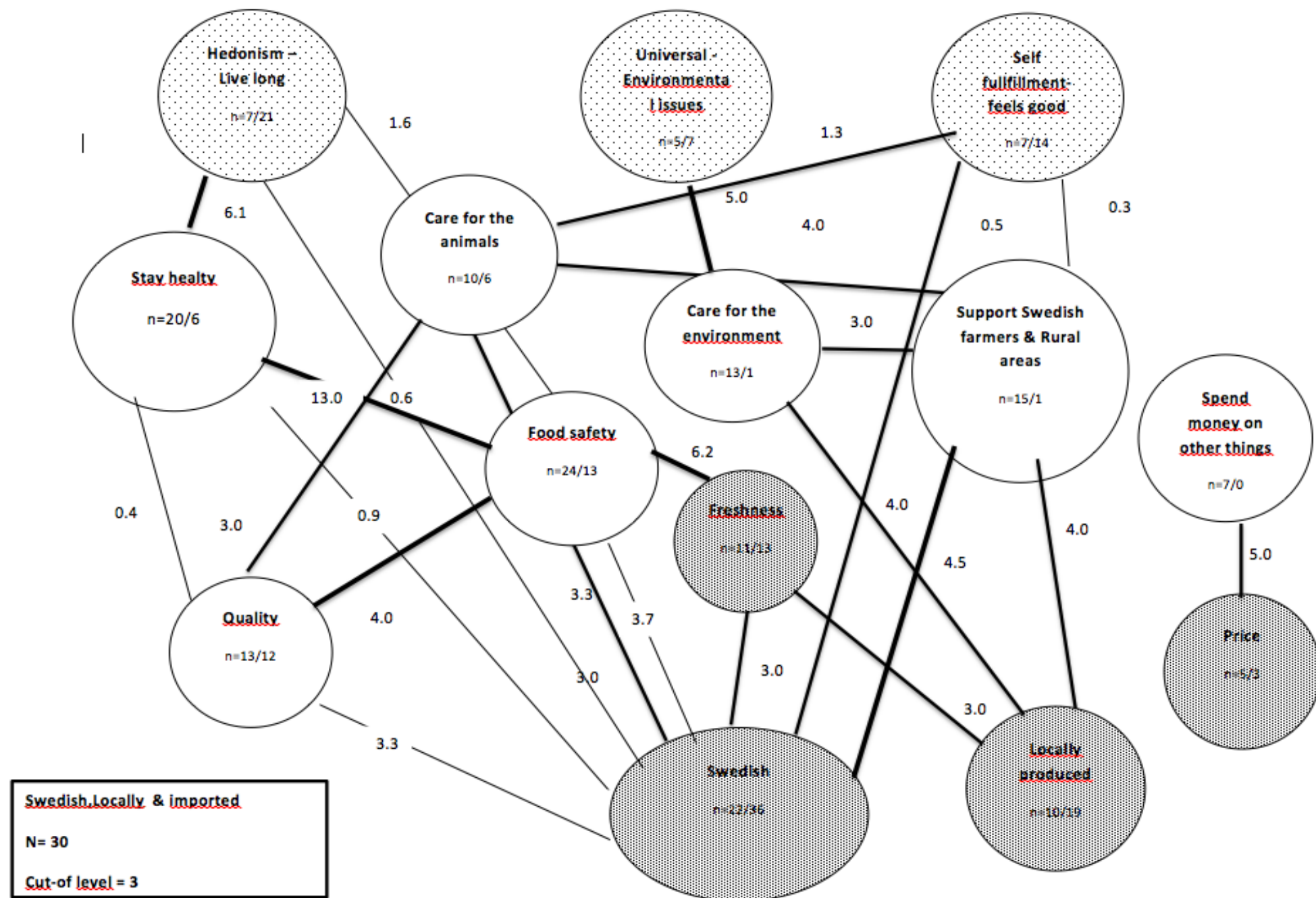


Figure 7. Hierarchical Value Map - Imported

The attribute *price* was tied to the consequence to *spend money on other things*. The HVM of imported meat is not complete due to absent of an end value. The imported meat established least ladders and a non-complex HVM, which indicate low involvement of imported meat products. The low involvement is due to the non-complex HVM, which is confirmed by Costa *et al.*, 2004, and Lind, 2007. The lower involvement of imported meat could be seen as the consumers who purchase imported meat consider the importance of quality cues less than consumers that purchase meat from the other categories. The personal involvement of meat is stated to be based on previous experiences, attitudes and socio-economic elements obtained by the consumers (Steenkamp, 1989).

## 5.5 Aggregated Hierarchical Value Map (HVM)

To get a more holistic illustration of the three categories of the purchased meat an aggregated HVM was created. Thereby, both more indirect and direct links between attributes, consequences and values of the purchased meat were identified. The objective was to illustrate similarities and differences from the separated HVM in order to compare these in an aggregated HVM which is illustrated in Figure 8.



In the aggregated HVM, all 30 respondents answers were coded into the same map. This creates a more complex HVM due to more data that enables an illustration of more attributes, consequences and end values with a cut-off level of 3. Food in general is perceived to be rich in abstract attributes and consequences (Costa *et al.*, 2004). Which also are illustrated and present in the aggregated HVM where many of the consequences are linked to one other and more direct and indirect links are visual as well. The numbers illustrated in the aggregated HVM are accumulated from the separated HVM and thereby the numbers in the nodes and the connection will differ from previous illustrations.

### **Differences in the aggregated HVM compared to separated HVM;**

- More indirect links deduced from the attribute *Swedish* country of origin is present.
- The consequence *care for the animals* is connected to the end value *Self-fulfillment /feels good*.
- The connection between *quality*, *care for the animals* and *food safety* is stronger in the aggregated HVM.
- An indirect connection straight from the attribute *Swedish* to the end value *Self-fulfillment/ feels good* is visual in the aggregated HVM.
- Connections between locally produced, support *Swedish farmers & Rural areas* and *care for the environment* is visual in the aggregated HVM.

By comparing the separate and the aggregated HVM, three different values are present compared to a maximum of two that are present in the locally produced HVM. The additional value *Self-fulfillment/feel good* that are present in the aggregated is not deduced directly from any of the meat types but are instead based upon different consequences that possibly lead to a state of feeling good or acting in a way that feels good for the consumer. By mapping all connections and elicit consequences, the underlying value of fulfillment are present in the HVM. A reason of this could be seen as it is many personal indifferences that leads to self fulfillment and how individuals achieve it and it is not one specific attribute or consequence that are connected to self fulfillment.

In the aggregated HVM, the attribute *Swedish* mostly created connections that were either direct or indirect linked to other consequences and attributes. The numbers of connections are more visual in the aggregated HVM compared to the separated ones. Thereby, *Swedish* country of origin seemed to be the most important attribute at the point of purchase of meat within the investigated sample group. The strong connection revealed from *Swedish* country of origin towards *food safety* reflecting the consumers concerns for antibiotic residues, use of hormones, avoid diseases and other additives in meat. *Swedish* meat is perceived not to contain any of those components and is thereby seen as safe for the consumer. The country of origin information is used as a quality cue in order to make well-informed purchasing decisions and to evaluate the products prior to a purchasing decision. This seems to be confirmed both in this study and in previous research (Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2006). By purchasing *Swedish* meat, illnesses correlated to food are avoided due to the stringent control when handling the meat and the good treatment of the animals. The *quality* aspect is highly



integrated in *food safety* and *care for the animals* which is illustrated in the aggregated HVM but not present in the separated HVM for Swedish country of origin. The quality aspects connected with Swedish meat were stated due to the good quality that is partially based on the good care for the animals. The assumption that Swedish animals were treated well, which then leads to good quality and good taste were frequently stated factors in accordance to a purchase. The motive behind those consequences is to *stay healthy* in order to *live long a long life* and is seen as the most important consequence and value connected to the attribute *Swedish*.

Meat with Swedish country of origin is considered to be a safe product, which also has been communicated for long time from both LRF and Meat Industry Associations in order to influence the purchasing behavior of Swedish consumers. However, the added value of Swedish meat is more often in accordance to animal welfare rather than food safety. Consumers trying to avoid negative consequences or/and obtain positive consequences linked to consuming meat. By purchasing Swedish meat, the stored cognitive structures associate the attribute *Swedish* in order to avoid illnesses, which are perceived to be a positive consequence. The consumers previous experience of buying a product is processed in the consumers cognitive map and used next time a purchasing decision will be made (Peter & Olson, 2010). A difference in the aggregated HVM and the separated HVM based on the *Swedish* attribute is the present of the indirect links from *Swedish* to the value *Self-fulfillment/feel good*. This shows that consumer's act in order to fulfill more underlying values than just universal *live long* when buying *Swedish*.

Both the attribute *Swedish* and *locally produced* were frequently connected to the consequence support *Swedish farmers & Rural areas*. Swedish farmers were believed to perform in a respectable manner both from an animal perspective and environmental perspective as illustrated with the connection in the aggregated HVM. The connections between *locally produced* meat, support *Swedish farmers & rural areas* and *care for the animals* is not present in the separated HVM but on the contrary present when aggregated links from the other types of meat are linked in to consensus. The consumers have a limited ability to obtain and evaluate every attribute and possible consequence concerning the meat choice that is supported by Steenkamp (1989). Cues behind the great linkage between the attributes *locally produced*, *Swedish* and the consequence *Support Swedish farmers & Rural areas* are supported by keeping rural areas alive, keep farmers in business, support the local economy with employment and limit the dependence on import.

The attribute *Swedish* country of origin are more linked to the consequence of *food safety* rather than a well established consequence to Swedish farming practices that in fact leads to food safety. However, even though it was a strong connection between *locally produced*, *Swedish* and the consequence of supporting *Swedish farmers & Rural areas* there were no clear linkage towards a significant end value. According to Gutman (1982), people are limited in conducting multiple ladders from the same attributes and will only be able to evaluate some of the attributes and consequences to a full extent. Thereby, an explanation of why the ladder from the attribute *Swedish* and the consequence support *Swedish farmers and rural areas* are not completed, both in the aggregated and separated HVM.

The attribute *locally produced* is highly interconnected to the consequence *care for the environment* and the value *environmental issues* that are illustrated both in the aggregated and the separated HVM. The most important factor when purchasing meat marketed as locally produced were the belief of acting in favor for the climate and the environment. The

marketing advancement of locally produced meat has been done in a successful way. This is done in order to provide the consumers with a product with the right benefits that fulfill their needs and underlying values when consuming the product (Brassington & Petitt, 2007). The communication of locally produced meat has influenced the consumer with positive feelings and thoughts, such as locally produced meat is perceived to be better for the environment. By scrutinizing the attribute locally produced, consumers obtain both abstract attributes such as quality as well as objective attributes such as how it look and taste. These seemed to be stored cognitive factors of the attributes that lead to both functional and psychosocial consequences (Peter & Olson, 2010). The functional consequences that are obtained is the fact of reducing the environmental impact and avoid food hazardous whereas the psychosocial feeling of being healthy and favor the environment are obtained and visualize in the HVM. In the aggregated HVM, fewer links are elicited from the attribute locally produced compared to the attribute Swedish. The links that are deduced from locally produced consist of stronger connection compared to Swedish that consists of more links but not of the same clear connection as locally produced

The attribute *price* was linked to the consequence to *spend money on other things*. The attribute and consequence did not have any particular intercorrelated linkage towards other categories either in the aggregated or in the separated HVM. The attribute price and consequence to spend money on other things were the most stated motive to buy imported meat. Moreover, the consumers that did not buy imported meat considered the meat to have less control due to unknown production method and the long supply chain. The same consumers also expressed a lack of confidence in imported meat and avoided the meat due to health concerns. However, it is noticed that consumers having different willingness to pay for credence attributes on food (Costa *et al.*, 2004). The willingness to pay seemed to be lower for imported meat and based on more routinized behavior compared to consumer that chose to buy meat from the other categories that created a more complex HVM.

## 6 Discussion

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*In this chapter of the study, the results and analysis presented in chapter 5 will be discussed in order to provide an expanded analysis of the significance of the results. The aim of the study will be addressed in order to tie back to the theoretical framework and presented literature. Implications of the study will be discussed and also suggestions to further research will be carried out. Moreover, a proposal to how the identified findings can be used to improve communication and policies concerning meat products will be presented.*

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The result from this study shows that the product attribute *Swedish* is involved in consumers purchasing decision of meat, and the attribute is especially involved when purchasing Swedish country of origin of meat. Consumers that bought *locally produced* meat, which also were of origin from Sweden, did to a low extent mention the attribute Swedish in accordance to a purchase. The absence of Swedish as a key attribute in a purchasing decision of locally produced meat could be based on the consumers' assumption that the locally produced meat is of Swedish origin and thereby did not mention the attribute when probing why they chose to buy the specific meat. Likewise, the consumers subconsciously believe that locally produced meat have more added values compared to meat that is just marketed as Swedish. In this case, locally produced serves as a more frequently used quality cue than the attribute Swedish. Furthermore, it is problematic to distinguish the importance of the origin, label or brand that are generically tied to a product (Profeta *et al.*, 2010). According to the consumers who bought Swedish meat from a well-known private label, it was difficult to distinguish to what degree the consumers associated the private label with the attribute Swedish or vice versa.

The attribute Swedish is involved in the consumer's decision process and used in order to evaluate the products characteristics prior a purchase. The identified consequences and values from the MEC show how the theory may give insights in a particular purchasing decision on meat and the motives behind the purchase. Based on the attribute Swedish, the MEC educed the consequences of *food safety*, *stay healthy* and finally the underlying value to *live a long life*. To note, the consumption of red meat in general is not seen as a way to stay healthy or live a long life (www, SLV, 2013). In the interviews consumers stated consequences and values that could be seen as abstract and thereby impossible to obtain without a confirmation of a label or the country of origin of the product. The country of origin seems to be a quality cue for reliability and safety in cases where other quality cues are not available (Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2006). The quality cues seem to be accurate in the case of purchasing and evaluate country of origin from Sweden as well. Within the aggregated HVM, the consequence of quality is tied to the attribute Swedish that involves the sensory and taste aspects of meat as well. The meat is considered to be tastier when consumers have the knowledge that the animals have been treated well or the product is considered to be safe to consume. In the study by Lind (2007) on pork products, the value to enjoy food was elicited, which is not present in this study. In relation to minced meat, this could be explained as minced meat having a more equal standard and the taste is not so different between batches compared to cut pork, which could be more indifferent in taste and quality.

The attribute *locally produced* was mostly tied to the consequence to *care for the environment* and the universal value end *environmental issues*. The involvement of purchasing meat that is market as locally produced could be seen as a way of manifesting the personal value through conducting a purchase. By observing consumers when making a purchase underlying values manifested through a purchase or the benefits the purchase provide to the consumer can be obtained. Taking this into consideration, a well-embedded marketing strategy could be developed (Reynolds & Olson, 2001). It is of importance to know the consumers' needs and desired outcome in order to have a successfully mutual exchange and the position or differentiation of the products can be achieved. Consumers' reasoning concerning locally produced and care for the environment were mostly based on the argument to avoid transportation. Avoiding transportation was seen as a factor in sympathy for the environment and the climate. To emphasize the consumers' belief of acting in accordance to the environment, reducing transportation seems to be one of the most important arguments when purchasing locally produced meat. However, the transportation on boats and trucks are presumed to have a relative small impact on the environment compared to a lifecycle analysis of the whole production of meat (LRF, 2002). The consumers' beliefs of acting in favor for the environment when buying locally produced could be based on the public awareness and the general assumption that transports have a negative impact on the environment.

A recent trend in Sweden is the popularity of buying food locally or at farmers markets that also affects consumers' shopping behavior. Trends in the society and changes in lifestyles that occur in the society are perceived to affect consumers shopping behavior (Steenkamp & Audenaert, 1996). A notable issue is that meat in general is not seen as an environmentally friendly product due to releases of methane gas, especially from beef production. Although, the strong connection between locally produced meat and care of the environment the consumers seems to be overconfidence in locally produced meat in accordance to favor the environment. The added value of buying locally produced meat could be seen or used as a confirmation or reward of acting in a responsible manner and it feels better for the consumer to buy locally produced even though the person does not know if it actually has any impact on the environment. The more important it is for the consumer to achieve a certain value, the more important it becomes to act in a way in order to achieve the value (Gutman, 1982). For the consumers who bought locally produced meat, the value of environmental issues seems to be of very high desire to achieve in order to meet and manifest their end values.

Another identified attribute were *freshness* that was frequently stated in accordance to the studied object. Minced meat was perceived to be a sensitive product that had the consequence that it was important to buy a product that was fresh. By purchasing a fresh product, consumers believed that they could avoid illnesses and limit the possibility that the product will get wasted fast. Most of the locally produced meat was minced in the store and had a durability of 1-2 days compared to vacuum packed meat where the durability were 8 days. The strong connection between locally produced and freshness were established due to the fact that consumers perceived shorter transports as a signal of a fresh product and a safe product to consume.

The price of the meat was also an identified factor and a motive for buying the specific meat. The price was mostly a choice criteria when buying imported meat, which are considered to be a product of low involvement. Thus, a non-complex HVM were created from the attribute price. The buying behavior could also be based on time constraint where shopping decisions have a limitation of time and the purchase is made in a hurry which also leads to a non-complex HVM (Engel *et al.*, 2006).

The results from the interviews can be used in order to develop marketing strategies or communication plans that should be formed from the basis of the educed consequences and values from different categories of meat. The locally produced meat could hint towards the environmental aspects since these are central aspects for the consumers that purchase this type of meat. Marketing of Swedish country of origin meat have been done during many years from both meat industry associations and LRF. The communication has mostly focused on the added values concerning animal welfare and Sweden as a country of more rigorous regulations than rest of the world. However, the connection between Swedish and animal welfare is not the strongest connection that are present in the aggregated HVM. The consumers reasoning concerning animal welfare seems to be of less significance compared to food safety and stay healthy even after campaigns concerning the animal welfare in Sweden. A way forward could be to shift focus of communication towards more emphasizing of food safety and health aspects of purchasing Swedish meat instead of highlight animal welfare issues.

The attempt to influence the public with good arguments of buying Swedish has been through the arguments of animal welfare and not the arguments of food safety. The food safety concerns that influence individuals' health more direct could be an issue why the consumers state the importance of it. It might be easier to change consumer behavior when the consequence is more tied to the individual him/herself instead of making statement that is further away and more difficult to grasp such as animal welfare. The consumers have a more significant contact to their own health which affect them more directly than for example how the animals are treated, the numbers of Swedish farmers in business or preserving the rural area. Today, many consumers do not have any knowledge about farming practices neither in Sweden nor in the rest of the world. The supply chain between "farm to fork" is often very long and contains of many questionable practices that consumers have difficulties to trust and thereby they might not value the origin. Therefore, a shift in marketing could be towards food safety of consuming Swedish products. Furthermore, the ongoing trend with health aspects could be a factor for Swedish consumers willingness to pay more for domestically produced food with no use of hormones, additives, and antibiotic residues e.g. To gain trust throughout a long supply chain, focus should be towards the customer oriented approach where good marketing is based upon the relationship and the fact that promises between parts are fulfilled in order to gain mutual trust (Grönroos, 1997). The relation and trust is crucial when the consumers only can evaluate the products from the quality cues prior a purchase or the previously obtained experience of the product.

Policy implications based on the result could be developed in order to differentiate Swedish meat as safe to consume and the obtained benefits will be to stay healthy. If the mandatory labels or certifications only state the origin, it is possible that the consumers do not know what the product attribute stands for and their desired end value will not be fulfilled due to lack of knowledge connected to the attribute Swedish. By using a certification either it is voluntary or mandatory it is of importance that the receiver of the information is well educated in the topic otherwise the information will be lost. It might be more powerful to state or grade the products from a food safety approach and from a reverse position influence consumers purchasing decision concerning domestically products. There are already strong connections between Swedish and food safety that could be utilized to a wider extent. Consumers know they want to have a safe product but they might not know that it is a Swedish product that delivers the food safety. By verifying that food safety and quality is equal to Swedish products, a link could be established from the point of view that quality means Swedish. Instead of lobbying for the product attribute Swedish in itself where the

consumers do not see the value of paying a premium price for, the persons individually benefits could be highlighted such as avoid illnesses and, stay healthy and live a long life.

## 6.1 Short comings of the study

The study is based on a qualitative approach in order to reveal the consumers choice criteria of meat at the point of purchase. The finding of the study is not possible to generalize to a general assumption regarding Swedish consumers choice criteria of meat. In order to do so, a quantitative study is required. The findings of the motives behind the purchase of different types of meat is neither comparable to other respondents in Sweden due to differences in the socio and demographics in different parts of Sweden. A comparison between other supermarkets stores might be of difficulties in accordance to different customer segment and profile of the super markets. These aspects are weaknesses that have to be of consideration when evaluating and using the study's result. The result could have been different if both of the supermarkets had imported meat, but the choice criteria of the supermarkets was based upon the same supermarkets investigated in a study conducted by Lind (2007).

The differences in consumers cognitive map and the diversity of involvement in meat products are a constrigent when probing why the respondents chose to buy a specific type of meat. The number of respondents is also a limitation as the sample group does not cover all different perspectives concerning the motives when purchasing meat. A non-homogeny group would shed light on other issues concerning the meat purchase and increase the validity of the findings. By conducting the interviews close to the real buying decision, the buying motives could be caught while they were present in the respondents mind. These buying motives would be difficult to recall for the consumer if probed on a later stage why they chose to buy this specific meat

Conducting the interviews in a supermarket might influence the result since the environment could be obtained as stressful and the consumer might give less developed answers. Thereby, the links in the HVM will not be that complex as if the respondents have had more time to categorize and reason concerning the purchase. However, the purpose of the study was to obtain the first thoughts that came to the respondents mind when probed why they chose to buy the specific meat.

The findings in this study can be questioned in accordance to the outbreak of a horsemeat scandal in Europe and Sweden in the spring of 2013. The scandal entailed of false table of content on products sold in Swedish supermarket. Thereby, the importance of knowing where the food comes from and a strict control could be valued higher when the interviews were conducted if one compare prior the detection of the scandal and the massive media report. However, only two of the respondents mentioned the examination from media as a factor of their purchase.

Important to note is the researchers subjectivity when coding the interviews into categories. The categorization of stated attributes, consequences and values do not have any clear distinction between another and thereby there is a possibility that a stated consequence also could be seen as a value or vice verse (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The decision to not divide the consequences into psychosocial and functional consequences and the values into terminal and instrumental were done in order to not complicate the illustration and scope of the findings in the HVM. The categorization of the respondents answers might have been different if another researcher did the coding which depends on the researcher skills to view

the world from the respondents perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this study, the precautionary principle has been considered and thereby the numbers of connection between consequences and values that are present in the HVM are relative strong. More connections and values could have been present if the decision of the cut-off level would have been different and the categorization of the data not that strict. Thereby it is only the most important connections that will be visual in the HVM. The comparison between Lind (2007) and this study could be questioned due to the researches differences of the categorization and coding of the data.

## 6.2 Further research

A more comprehensive view could be achieved by conducting a study with a higher number of respondents in different regions in Sweden. To verify the findings in this study, repeated interviews could be conducted after six months in order to grasp similarities or differences and also to avoid circumstances that might have influenced the results in this study. Moreover, other agricultural products could be evaluated through a MEC and laddering interviews to provide a more holistic view of consequences and values tied to the products in order to develop good marketing opportunities and strategies.

Future research could also be conducted in order to obtain more in-depth interviews which enables to distinguish the actual underlying values in accordance to a purchasing decision and how the underlying values gear the consumers' behavior. Consumer behavior is frequently changing during ones life, thereby it would be interesting how the underlying shopping behavior is changing in accordance to a persons life. For example if the end values is changing mostly because of a change in the person's income, when establish family life or how much trends in the society will affect the buying motives.

## 7 Conclusions

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*In this chapter the identified conclusions are presented in order to address the study's aim and research questions. The aim of the study is to identify the underlying values of consumers buying decisions in Sweden at the point of purchase of meat products, in order to assess the relevance of country of origin as a key product attribute in the buying decision process.*

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The results from this study imply that the attribute *Swedish* country of origin is used as a quality cue at the point of purchase of meat. *Swedish* country of origin is associated with the consequences of *food safety*, *stay healthy* and the end value to *live long*. The consumers' belief in food safety and quality of meat from Sweden is coupled to the strong control of production methods and trust in Swedish farming practises. The *locally produced* meat is mostly purchased in the belief that the meat is better for the environment due to avoiding transports. For consumers that bought locally produced meat, the strongest associations were the consequence to *care for the environment* and the end value to protect the environment for the next generation. Consumers who purchased *Swedish* and *locally produced* meat were found to be more involved in their purchasing decision compared to consumers who bought imported meat. The attribute locally produced imply that the consumers used the quality cue in order to evaluate the product prior to a purchase and made the association that the meat were better for the environment. The attribute *Swedish* is not considered to have any major influence on the purchasing decision of locally produced meat even though the origin is Swedish. Consumers who bought locally produced meat also made the connection to the consequence of food safety and the value to live long. In comparison to the attribute *Swedish* country of origin were the environmental factors were absence in the consumers cognitive map. Consumers who bought imported meat stated the attribute *price* as the most important buying motive. Price was connected to the consequence to *spend money on other things*. The key results from the interviews can be used to understand consumers purchasing decisions of meat and further on serve as a base to develop communication and marketing strategies. The consumers underlying values can be influenced through this well developed marketing or information strategy of meat. The added value on the meat products should be based upon the consumers' expectations and desired outcome of a purchase.



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# Appendix 1: Pictures of Swedish Country of Origin, Locally produced and Imported meat

## Swedish Country of Origin minced meat



*Photo1: Swedish Country of Origin*

## Locally produced minced meat



Photo 2: Locally produced meat



## Imported minced meat



Photo 3: Imported meat.