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# Extending Mixed Embeddedness: Entrepreneurial Figurations of Entrepreneurs with Migrant Origins in Germany

*Stefan Berwing\**

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**Abstract:** »Eine Erweiterung des Mixed Embeddedness Ansatzes: Unternehmerische Figurationen von Migrantenunternehmen in Deutschland«. Focusing on entrepreneurs with migrant origins, this contribution introduces the concept of entrepreneurial figurations as a theoretical complement to mixed embeddedness. After introducing Elias' concept of figuration, I explain how figurations can be used to understand migrant entrepreneurship. Using a dataset of 584 entrepreneurs with migrant origins, I show to what extent entrepreneurs of migrant origin build their businesses on co-ethnic interaction and how co-ethnic economic relations are combined into different figurations. The analysis shows that a majority of entrepreneurs with migrant origins in Germany do not make use of any co-ethnic resources. The discussion points out crucial differences between branches of economic activity and I propose that figurations, understood as typical interaction patterns, could foster the understanding of different types of migrant entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the figurational approach is a useful complement to mixed embeddedness, which helps to deal with the plethora of phenomena in migrant entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** Migrant entrepreneurship, figurational sociology, mixed embeddedness.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The critique of individualistic conceptions of society has a long tradition in sociology (Mannheim 1980; Schütz and Luckmann 1979; Elias 2006). Many arguments against individualism stem from the sociology of knowledge and argue against the idea that new knowledge is the result of the exceptional capabilities of the individual genius. Instead, the sociology of knowledge claims that knowledge is the product of collective action (Fleck 1979; Foucault 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was written during my time working at the Institute for SME Research and Entrepreneurship (ifm Mannheim) of the University of Mannheim.

We can find a similar discursive situation in current entrepreneurship research in that it is deeply rooted in individualistic thinking. Schumpeter's entrepreneur is almost by definition an exceptional and visionary individual who wants to change the world (Ogbor 2000). As a result, successful entrepreneurship is seen as the outcome of the leadership of a heroic entrepreneur. However, more and more scholars scrutinise this narrative and emphasise that entrepreneurship is based on collective action (Ruef et al. 2004; West 2007; Ruef and Lounsbury 2007; Iacobucci und Rosa 2010; Ruef 2010b). For Ruef, entrepreneurship is embedded into collective economic action and is the result of a recruitment process of fellow investors in a business, which may include co-founders, investors, and employees (Ruef 2010b).

The collective nature of entrepreneurship is also well known in the research on migrant entrepreneurship. Extensive work in the US has shown how migrant entrepreneurs make use of ethnic resources such as co-ethnic business contacts, co-ethnic staff, or family workers. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Ruef sees ethnic entrepreneurship as a forerunner to the research on entrepreneurial groups (Ruef 2010a). The social networks of migrant entrepreneurs could hence be seen through the lens of entrepreneurial groups, since there is an overlap in the phenomena in which scholars of both migrant entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial groups are interested.

Research on co-ethnic relations has a long tradition in the research on migrant entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, this focus has been challenged in the last decade. European researchers in particular warn against reducing migrant entrepreneurship to an ethnic phenomenon (Jones and Ram 2007; Rath 2005). They stress that all entrepreneurs – not only migrants – are embedded into social networks. Relying on social contacts for developing and running a business is thus not a distinctive feature of migrants or certain ethnic groups, but rather a feature of the collective nature of entrepreneurship in general. From this perspective, it is reasonable to ask how important ethnicity is to migrant entrepreneurship. Questioning the importance of ethnicity for migrant entrepreneurship has theoretical implications, since we have to ask how the opening and closing of markets actually works for entrepreneurs with migrant origins.

The emphasis on ethnic resources for developing and running an enterprise as a migrant has also been criticised from another perspective: scholars have argued that specialising in ethnic markets sets limits to the growth of enterprises and therefore often becomes an obstacle for migrant businesses (Light 2010, 653). This argument found its expression in the so-called breakout hypothesis. Beginning in the 1990s, more and more scholars claimed that migrant enterprises broke out from their economic niches and break into mainstream markets (Ram and Hillin 1994; Engelen 2001; Parzer and Czingon 2013; Arrighetti et al. 2014).

Both criticisms argue against stereotypical views of migrant entrepreneurship. In order to address these criticisms adequately, it is necessary to under-

stand the collective aspects of migrant entrepreneurship and the role of ethnic resources in it. To differentiate between different forms of mixed embeddedness, I extend the idea of mixed embeddedness by utilising Norbert Elias' figurational analysis. In doing so, the aim of this contribution is to shed new light on the role of ethnic and non-ethnic relationships in the collective economic activities of migrant entrepreneurs. The results uncover different figurations on how migrant entrepreneurs are embedded into economic life and how this embeddedness varies across economic contexts.

My contribution is structured as follows: After an introduction to the theoretical framework of mixed embeddedness and figurational sociology, this article will focus on the structural-relational aspects of migrant entrepreneurship. Using a dataset of entrepreneurs with migrant origins, I will analyse how the entrepreneurial activities of entrepreneurs with migrant origins take place in different figurations. This figurational analysis is based on information about the co-ethnic and non-ethnic economic relations of the entrepreneurs. I will compare these figurations across the branches of economic activity to show how the institutional settings of those branches provide different openings for entrepreneurship.

My findings inform the debate on migrant entrepreneurship in general as they illustrate that ethnic resources play a less important role in Germany than commonly assumed. They also contribute to the discussion on the collective entrepreneurship of migrants, since they show that ethnic resources are only one layer in striking relationships in economic activity. For future research on the formation of migrant entrepreneurial groups, my findings make clear that the role of German natives and of migrants of different origin should get much more attention.

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## 2. Mixed Embeddedness and Entrepreneurial Figurations

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The discourse on migrant entrepreneurship was shaped for a long time by the pioneering work of scholars from the United States (Barrett et al. 1996; Ram and Jones 2008). The emergence of a European perspective on migrant entrepreneurship took until the turn of the last century when the Dutch scholars Kloosterman and Rath published their seminal papers on mixed embeddedness (ME) (Kloosterman et al. 1999; Kloosterman and Rath 2001). ME fell on fertile ground in the European context and, ever since, more and more European researchers have used the concept for their work (Ram et al. 2017).

Drawing on the literature on the varieties of capitalism and on Granovetter's distinction of relational and structural embeddedness, Kloosterman and Rath asked how migrant entrepreneurship is embedded into ethnic social networks and the market conditions of the receiving countries (Kloosterman et al. 1999; Kloosterman and Rath 2001). Although they developed a distinct European

point of view – by including the institutional settings of European welfare states – they stand nevertheless in the American tradition of interaction theory (Kloosterman 2010). Interaction theory assumes that migrant entrepreneurship is a product of the resources an entrepreneur has and the market opportunities an entrepreneur finds (Light and Rosenstein 1995). Kloosterman himself sees ME as an adaption of interaction theory to the European context. The result of this adaption is a different emphasis on opportunities and markets. US scholars emphasise ethnic resources, especially ethnic networks, whereas ME emphasizes the markets, especially how market regulations and institutions shape the opportunities for migrant entrepreneurship (Kloosterman 2010).

For proponents of ME as well as of interaction theory, an individual entrepreneur and his or her (psychological) qualities are not the focus of their research. Instead, these scholars are interested in the social context in which migrant entrepreneurship emerges and exists. This is an important common viewpoint of proponents of interaction theory, ME, and proponents of the idea of entrepreneurial groups (Light and Rosenstein 1995; Ruef and Lounsbury 2007; Kloosterman 2010).

However, the ME perspective sees the social embeddedness of migrant entrepreneurship in a wider context: “in terms of customers, suppliers and various kinds of business organizations” (Kloosterman et al. 1999, 252). Thus, ME goes beyond the scope of entrepreneurial groups, and existing research shows that studying this wider context is necessary to understanding the phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship in its breadth and depth (see, e.g., Barrett et al. 2001; Price and Chacko 2009; Jones et al. 2014; Bagwell 2018).

ME can be studied in various ways. For Kloosterman it

entails extensive fieldwork and qualitative research to grasp the social embeddedness, strategies and careers of the immigrant entrepreneurs, the gathering of quantitative data showing the distribution of immigrant entrepreneurs over the different types of openings, as well as long-term analyses of the institutional framework and its impact on entrepreneurial opportunities in a given country. (Kloosterman 2010, 41)

As the quote shows, proponents of the ME approach are interested in the relational, structural, and processual aspects of the phenomenon.

Although Kloosterman and Rath do not refer to Norbert Elias as a source of their reasoning, those familiar with Elias’ work can see a strong resemblance. For the structural-relational patterns of social life, Elias coined the term *figuration* (Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2001). Although figuration suggests that structural-relational patterns of social life are static entities, Elias had a processual understanding of figurations. He was interested in their long-term changes and how individuals interrelated with figurations shape and change them. (Dunning and Hughes 2013). Elias’ figurational sociology is therefore a perfect theoretic complement for the ME perspective.

In Elias' sociology, one of the most basic figurations is the relation between the established and the outsiders (Goodwin and Hughes 2016). The term *outsider-established figuration* was coined in a study of a suburban city Elias undertook together with Scotson (1990 [1965]). The city community grew due to labour demand from local factories and therefore many newcomers joined the local community. These newcomers were not different from the local population, but they lacked the close social networks the local population had. This basic power imbalance made it possible that the local population, drawing on their internal cohesion through their social networks, could shame and stigmatise the newcomers (Paulle and Kalir 2014). In the course of this process, the groups of outsiders and the established could emerge in the first place. Elias and Scotson's study is seminal since it did not use pre-existing categories like gender, class, or ethnicity (in their case the newcomers) but, instead, showed how the "distribution of, and means of further appropriating, scarce material and symbolic resources" produced the social categories of outsiders and the established (Paulle and Kalir 2014). Although Elias and Scotson did not study migrants or ethnic groups, the concept of established-outsider figurations has recently gained more attention in the sociology of migration in an effort to understand processes of othering, discrimination, and inequality (Loyal 2011; Lever and Milbourne 2014; Paulle and Kalir 2014; Eve 2016).

Using the categories of outsiders and the established is especially interesting for the study of migrant entrepreneurship. At first glance, it could seem it just translates the disadvantages approach into a different terminology, whereby the migrant simply is the outsider who suffers from disadvantages; however, it actually allows for more detailed analysis. It abstracts from essentialising categories like migrants or ethnic groups and is instead relational to social contexts. For example, ethnic attributes, like being Italian or German, remain the same over different contexts, but being established or an outsider is relational to context (Lever and Milbourne 2014). Therefore, it is possible to belong to the outsiders in one context, but in another to the established. In fact, the whole idea of ethnic resources is based on this logic. An ethnic group can belong to the outsiders in the receiving country and suffer from disadvantages. Therefore, entrepreneurs turn to their ethnic groups where they belong to the established and are, thus, in the smaller context of their own group and not disadvantaged. The relational nature of the established-outsider dimension is also true for ethnic products. For example, Italian food was at the margins of German food culture in the 1950s, but went mainstream in the 1970s (Möhring 2012). Today, Italians belong to the established in the restaurant business, but an Italian name can still make someone an outsider in other branches of economic activity (Felden et al. 2012) – the rules of the game change due to context.

The game metaphor plays an important role in Elias' work and will help here to extend the figurational approach to the comparison of different branches of economic activity. To explain figurations, Elias uses a card game as a

typical example of a figuration (Elias 2006). Four people sit around a table and each of them tries to be successful in playing the game. Each of these players acts independently, but at the same time the players are bound together by the rules of the card game. Each of the players can play their hands as they like; nevertheless, the rules of the game set the space of possible opportunities and constraints within the game. This simple example illustrates Elias' notion of a figuration: Figurations consist in the regular interaction patterns of individuals within a given social space of opportunities and constraints (Elias, 2006, 170-83; 2003, 243-50).

Against this backdrop, we can understand different branches of economic activity as different game settings. The rules of the game in different branches of economic activity are the different institutions, conventions, and markets that form economic activity within these branches. Typical examples of such differences in institutional settings are the trades or the liberal professions. These are areas of economic activity which are – at least in Germany – protected by high entry barriers. Such institutional regulations can affect how migrants can make use of ethnic resources and exploit opportunities. Thus, the intersection of institutional settings of the branches of economic activity with outsider-established figurations will produce different figurations for migrant and native entrepreneurs.

The three central questions of this contribution are therefore: What figurations of ethnic and non-ethnic economic relations can be found among entrepreneurs of migrant origin in Germany? How are these figurations distributed across branches of economic activity? To what extent can they be interpreted as established-outsider figurations?

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### 3. Relations in Entrepreneurial Figurations

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The research on migrant entrepreneurship has discussed the social and economic relations of migrant entrepreneurs from different theoretic viewpoints and different relations have been considered to be important. To decide which relations should be included into a figuration analysis of migrant entrepreneurship in Germany, it is useful to identify the main areas of interest in existing research. Taking the classic contributions in the field into account, it is possible to identify seven different concepts of migrant entrepreneurship with different perspectives on the embeddedness of migrant businesses.

Middleman minorities (1) are outsider ethnic groups who broker between two parties: “producer and consumer, employer and employee, owner and renter, elite and masse” (Bonacich 1973, 583). An example of a middleman minority in the US is Korean retail traders who broker between their African American customers and their white wholesale traders (Minand Bozorgmehr 2000). In ethnic enclave economies (2), the established-outsider relation is

additionally expressed in spatial segregation. The concept of ethnic enclave economies was originally used to describe the observation that workers of a certain ethnicity find work more easily with co-ethnic employers within ethnic enclaves (Wilson and Portes 1980; Light 1984). Markets where ethnic entrepreneurs serve co-ethnic customers that do not cluster spatially are called ethnic niches. Ethnic ownership economies (3) emerge when entrepreneurs, their (often unpaid) family workers, and co-ethnic employees cluster in certain occupations or industries (Light and Gold 2000, 27). Ownership economies can give rise to ethnically controlled economies (4), where certain ethnic groups have huge influence on the labour relations in an industry (Light and Gold, 2000, 49). In both cases, migrants create social settings which compensate for their role as outsiders. The aforementioned approaches originate from labour market theories and cultural theory and emphasise segregation processes. In opposition to this, interactionism (5) takes a perspective from business economics and asks how migrant entrepreneurship is shaped by the resources migrants have at their disposal and by the opportunities receiving societies provide (Waldinger et al. 1990). The transnational entrepreneurship approach (6) highlights from a similar viewpoint the importance of transnational networks as an important resource to start up and run a business (Saxenian 1999; Portes et al. 2002). These concepts focus on how transnational embeddedness leads to different market openings. Finally, ME (7), drawing on varieties of capitalism research, makes the point that migrant entrepreneurs are – if they are building on ethnic resources – embedded into the institutions of their ethnic community as well as into the economic institutions and organisations of the receiving country (Kloosterman et al. 1999; Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Ram et al. 2017).

In sum, the seven concepts of migrant entrepreneurship include our different types of economic relations: (a) relations to employees (3, 4), (b) relations to customers (1, 2, 5, 7), (c) relations to trading and retail partners (1, 5, 6, 7), and (d) relations to organisations of the receiving country (5, 7). A figurational analysis building on existing research should therefore include, ideally, these economic relations.

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## 4. Data and Methods

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To apply the idea of entrepreneurial figurations to migrant entrepreneurship, we need data on the four relationship types described above. We consequently need information on the relations between entrepreneurs and their retail and trading partners, customers, employees, and organisations in the receiving country. Furthermore, we need for these types of relation measures for the outsider-established dimension. In Germany, no survey data that describe migrant entrepreneurship at this level of detail are publicly available from statisti-



cal offices or research institutions. Therefore, I use data from a survey I conducted with my colleagues in 2013. The survey covers measures for the co-ethnicity of retail and trading partners, employees and customers, and proxies for the outsider status of migrant entrepreneurs. However, it does not cover relations with public organisations. The dataset contains 771 complete cases and consists of two subsamples: one sample of respondents of migrant origin (584 cases) and a sample of natives as the control group (187 cases).

We defined migrant origin, using the standard definition of migration origins by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, as

all persons who have immigrated into the territory of today's Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, and of all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born in Germany who have at least one parent who immigrated into the country or was born as a foreigner in Germany.

In the dataset, 68% of the entrepreneurs of migrant origin belong to the first generation and 32% belong to the second generation.

To get a sample of potential entrepreneurs of migrant origin, we drew for our survey a sample from the yellow pages and analysed the names onomastically (Humpert and Schneiderheinze 2002; Schnell et al. 2013). As a result, we were able to raise the probability of contacting migrants. Using this method, the final probability of contacting an entrepreneur of migrant origin was about 60%, whereas the share of residents of migrant origin in the population of self-employed people was around 16%. Entries that were contacted but falsely classified by the onomastic algorithm (migrants classified as natives and natives classified as migrants) were added to the other subsample until we reached the targeted sample size (600/200 cases).

The sample deviates from the population of self-employed people in Germany. Therefore, I used a weighting factor based on the distributions of the 2011 Microcensus of the German Federal Bureau of Statistics. The weighting factor includes the variables migrant origin, gender, establishment size, and branch of economic activity (see Appendix for effect of weights).

I will present the results of the analyses in three steps: In the first step, I will describe the economic figurations of ethnic and non-ethnic relations. In the second step, I will further detail this analysis by including branches of economic activity. In the third step, I will detail this analysis by combining it with measures for the outsider-established dimension.

The first step includes the variables for co-ethnic employees, co-ethnic retail, and trading partners and co-ethnic customers. Regarding employment, we asked: How many employees, how many employees with migrant origins, how many co-ethnic employees, and how many family workers does the establishment employ? To cover the relations with retail and trading partners, we asked whether contacts with individuals of the same origin as the owner are crucial to running the business. We provided categories for four different groups: (1) co-ethnic people in Germany, (2) co-ethnic people in the country of origin, (3) co-

ethnic people in other countries (diaspora), and (4) contacts with other people living in other countries. However, for this contribution I will only use information about whether or not an entrepreneur has co-ethnic business contacts. The relation to customers is represented by the question: how big is the share of co-ethnic customers? As a threshold value for a high share of co-ethnic customers, I used 19%, which corresponds to the share of population with migrant origins. I recoded each of the three variables into one binary variable: whether or not an enterprise has co-ethnic business contacts, customers, or employees. In the case of co-ethnic employees, unpaid family workers were excluded, since family work is rather a result of the branch of economic activity and establishment size than of ethnicity. I also included into the variable for co-ethnic employment information about whether an entrepreneur has no employees. Afterwards, the three variables were summarised into one variable representing the different figurations.

In the second step, the branch of economic activity is added. We use six different classes based on the German Classification of Economic Activities. These are construction, hospitality, trade, manufacturing, non-knowledge-intensive services, and knowledge-intensive services.

In the third step, I will include further variables for the established-outsider dimension. Three of the variables used stand for opportunities in niche markets and open markets. As a measure of ethnic products, we asked if the relationship between the origin of the owner and the product or service is recognisable for customers. Additionally, we asked whether the origin of the owner has a positive, neutral, or negative effect on (a) selling products and services or (b) on recruiting staff. The latter question was supplemented by information about whether new employees were recruited via personal network ties to family, friends, or colleagues. To examine if being self-employed is a strategy to escape disadvantages in the labour market, I include further proxies for the outsider-established status. These proxies are whether the owners were unemployed or had no other labour market alternative and whether they faced disadvantages in their prior jobs.

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## 5. Results

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The central variable for the presentation of the results is the variable for entrepreneurial figurations. This variable is included at the beginning of Table 1 and Table 2. Each of the tables has three columns at the beginning. These columns describe figurations by indicating whether relations to business contacts, customers, or employees are co-ethnic or not.

**Table 1:** Share of Figures Overall and by Branches of Economic Activity (in percent)

Figuration Co-ethnic			Branch of economic activity			
Contacts	Customers	Employee	Overall	Construction	Hospitality	Trade
no	no	no	20.9	15.4	36.4	23.6
no	yes	yes	1.2	1.2	1.7	0.7
no	yes	no	1.8	0.7	4.7	1.4
no	no	yes	6.2	7.3	12.6	1.7
yes	yes	yes	0.7	0.0	0.4	0.3
yes	yes	no	2.1	0.8	3.3	4.5
yes	no	yes	3.7	0.4	11.2	3.4
yes	no	no	4.4	2.4	8.2	5.2
Sum with employees			41.0	28.2	78.5	40.8
no	no	without	42.8	55.5	14.7	38.1
no	yes	without	3.7	4.0	0.0	7.5
yes	yes	without	5.6	0.0	0.0	3.4
yes	no	without	6.9	12.1	7.0	10.3
Sum without employees			59.0	71.6	21.7	59.3
Sum no co-ethnic relations			63.7	70.9	51.1	61.7
Sum co-ethnic business contact			23.4	15.7	30.1	27.1
Sum co-ethnic customers			15.1	6.7	10.1	17.8
Sum co-ethnic staff			31.0	24.2	57.0	31.2
Unweighted n			584	64	154	79

  

Figuration Co-ethnic			Branch of economic activity			
Contacts	Customers	Employee	Overall	Non knowledge int. Services	Manufacturing	Knowledge int. Services
no	no	no	20.9	14.6	27.4	13.5
no	yes	yes	1.2	1.5	0.0	0.7
no	yes	no	1.8	1.0	1.6	1.0
no	no	yes	6.2	5.5	7.7	1.6
yes	yes	yes	0.7	0.7	3.3	1.2
yes	yes	no	2.1	1.0	0.0	2.5
yes	no	yes	3.7	1.9	2.5	0.8
yes	no	no	4.4	2.6	4.1	3.7
Sum with employees			41.0	28.8	46.6	25.0
no	no	without	42.8	56.7	31.4	50.7
no	yes	without	3.7	4.9	6.4	2.9
yes	yes	without	5.6	7.3	0.0	16.6
yes	no	without	6.9	2.4	15.7	4.8
Sum without employees			59.0	71.3	53.5	75.0
Sum no co-ethnic relations			63.7	71.3	58.8	64.2
Sum co-ethnic business contact			23.4	15.9	25.6	29.6
Sum co-ethnic customers			15.1	16.4	11.3	24.9
Sum co-ethnic staff			11.8	22.1	36.7	18.6
Unweighted n			584	99	41	147

**Table 2:** Share of Figurations Overall and by Branches of Economic Activity (in percent)

Figuration Co-ethnic			Branch of economic activity			
Contacts	Customers	Employee	Overall	Construction	Hospitality	Trade
no	no	no	51.0	54.6	46.4	57.8
no	yes	yes	2.9	4.3	2.2	1.7
no	yes	no	4.4	2.5	6.0	3.4
no	no	yes	15.1	25.9	16.1	4.2
yes	yes	yes	1.7	0.0	0.5	0.7
yes	yes	no	5.1	2.8	4.2	11.0
yes	no	yes	9.0	1.4	14.3	8.3
yes	no	no	10.7	8.5	10.4	12.7
Sum with employees			100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
no	no	without	72.4	77.5	67.7	64.2
no	yes	without	6.3	5.6	0.0	12.6
yes	yes	without	9.5	0.0	0.0	5.7
yes	no	without	11.7	16.9	32.3	17.4
Sum without employees			100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unweighted n			584	64	154	79
Contacts	Customers	Employee	Overall	Non knowledge int. Services	Manufacturing	Knowledge int. Services
no	no	no	51.0	50.7	58.8	54.0
no	yes	yes	2.9	5.2	0.0	2.8
no	yes	no	4.4	3.5	3.4	4.0
no	no	yes	15.1	19.1	16.5	6.4
yes	yes	yes	1.7	2.4	7.1	4.8
yes	yes	no	5.1	3.5	0.0	10.0
yes	no	yes	9.0	6.6	5.4	3.2
yes	no	no	10.7	9.0	8.8	14.8
Sum with employees			100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
no	no	without	72.5	79.5	58.7	67.6
no	yes	without	6.3	6.9	12.0	3.9
yes	yes	without	9.5	10.2	0.0	22.1
yes	no	without	11.7	3.4	29.3	6.4
Sum without employees			100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unweighted n			584	99	41	147

Table 1 presents the overall distribution of figurations and of the branches of economic activity and, additionally, Table 2 presents the distributions for enterprises with and without employees separately. The overall column in Table 1 exhibits that the majority of businesses (63.7%) do not have any co-ethnic relations. Higher values can be found in construction (70.9%) and in the non-knowledge-intensive services (71.3%), whereas in hospitality figurations based on co-ethnic relations are quite common (49.9%). The second most important figuration in all branches of economic activity—except for trade and knowledge-

intensive services—is the figuration with no co-ethnic contacts and customers but with co-ethnic staff. In the knowledge-intensive services, figurations with co-ethnic business contacts and co-ethnic customers account for 20.3% of overall cases. In contrast to this, trade figurations with co-ethnic business contacts but no co-ethnic customers account for 18.9% of the cases.

Thus, the highest values for figurations with co-ethnic customers surprisingly cannot be observed in trade, but instead in the knowledge-intensive services. Co-ethnic business contacts are the least common in construction and the non-knowledge-intensive services. Figurations without employees are most often found (>70%) in construction, the knowledge-intensive services, and the knowledge-intensive services. In contrast, hospitality is especially labour intensive and hence figurations with co-ethnic staff are typical for this branch.

**Table 3:** Influence of Origin on Selling Products and Services, Influence of Origin on Recruiting Staff, Ethnic Products by Figurations (in percent)

Figuration Co-ethnic			Un-weighted n	Influence of origin on Selling services or products			Ethnic product
Contacts	Customers	Employees		Irrelevant	Negative	Positive	
no	no	no	215	76.3	5.9	17.8	23.1
no	yes	yes	13	55.4	2.3	42.2	53.2
no	yes	no	19	64.3	0.0	35.7	51.6
no	no	yes	72	71.6	3.5	24.9	24.2
yes	yes	yes	9	14.6	0.0	85.4	71.4
yes	yes	no	24	41.0	3.0	56.0	62.6
yes	no	yes	41	38.5	8.9	52.6	62.3
yes	no	no	51	68.4	2.9	28.7	49.7
no	no	without	8	83.0	5.1	11.8	12.1
no	yes	without	93	92.2	0.0	7.8	20.2
yes	yes	without	15	12.6	12.0	75.4	61.6
yes	no	without	14	61.0	9.1	29.9	15.2
Overall			574	71.5	5.5	23.0	24.7
Figuration Co-ethnic			Un-weighted n	Influence of origin on Recruiting Staff			
Contacts	Customers	Employees		Irrelevant	Negative	Positive	
no	no	no	215	86.8	5.8	7.3	
no	yes	yes	13	77.3	0.0	22.7	
no	yes	no	19	100.0	0.0	0.0	
no	no	yes	72	85.8	8.8	5.4	
yes	yes	yes	9	61.0	11.5	27.5	
yes	yes	no	24	74.9	14.1	10.9	
yes	no	yes	41	65.8	10.9	23.3	
yes	no	no	51	86.6	3.6	9.8	
no	no	without	-	-	-	-	
no	yes	without	-	-	-	-	
yes	yes	without	-	-	-	-	
yes	no	without	-	-	-	-	
Overall			574	84.1	6.6	9.3	

Table 3 shows the influence of origin on selling services and products or recruiting staff as well as the share of enterprises selling ethnic products or services. Overall, only a quarter of enterprises sell ethnic products or services. High values for ethnic products and services are found in all figurations with employees with the exception of the figurations with co-ethnic staff only. However, for figurations without employees this is not the case. Here, only the figuration with co-ethnic customers and co-ethnic business contacts exhibit high values for co-ethnic products and services. Table 4 also shows the cross tabulation of ethnic products with the branches of economic activity. This tabulation shows that more than 50% of enterprises in hospitality sell ethnic products, whereas in other branches the shares are much lower.

**Table 4:** Composition of Staff, Origin Advantage for Selling Products, Ethnic Products by Branches of Economic Activity (in percent)

	Un-weighted n	Migrant Origins	Co-ethnics	Family	Ethnic Products
			Among all employees		
Construction	64	40.7	29.0	10.8	7.0
Hospitality	154	71.3	41.7	30.9	52.9
Trade	79	46.3	24.8	19.0	29.4
Non knowledge int. Services	99	58.9	27.4	19.9	14.1
Manufacturing	41	46.8	16.1	12.9	4.8
Knowledge int. Services	147	50.0	25.7	13.5	23.4
Overall	584	49.9	32.3	21.2	24.7
	Un-weighted n		Co-ethnics among migrants	Family among co-ethnics	Origin advantage for selling
Construction	64		71.3	37.3	5.3
Trade	79		53.6	76.7	22.9
Non knowledge int. Services	99		46.5	72.5	14.9
Manufacturing	41		34.5	80.0	23.2
Knowledge int. Services	147		51.4	52.6	34.8
Overall	584		64.7	65.8	23.0

The majority of entrepreneurs state that their origin is irrelevant for selling their products or services (71.5%). Only the figuration with no employees and co-ethnic business contacts and customers shows a higher value (12%) for a negative influence of origin. In hospitality and in knowledge-intensive services especially, foreign origin seems to be an advantage. Moreover, a majority of entrepreneurs (85.1%) state that their origin has no influence on recruiting staff. This result holds for all figurations. The share of native staff (Table 4) varies across the branches of economic activity between 59% (construction)

and 29% (hospitality). Among migrant employees, about 50% are of co-ethnic origin. Exceptions are construction (where 70% are co-ethnic employees) and manufacturing (where only 34% are co-ethnic employees). In all branches, more than 50% of the co-ethnic employees are family workers. Only in construction is this pattern not found. Additionally, family workers can be found more often in smaller establishments (Table 5). Looking at how new employees are found (Table 5), 46% of migrants entrepreneurs state they rely on personal networks, whereas this is only the case for 36% of native entrepreneurs.

**Table 5:** Reasons to become Self-Employed, Recruiting Staff via Family, Friends and Colleagues, Share of Family Workers by Establishment Size (in percent)

Reasons to become self-employed		
	Migrant origin	Natives
Unemployed before	11.2	5.5
Faced unemployment	10.4	4.3
Disadvantages in former job	13.9	9.9
combined	24.3	10.3
Recruit staff via personal network		
	Migrant origin	Natives
Family, friends, and colleagues	45.6	35.6
(Unpaid) Family Workers		
	Migrant origin	Natives
1-5 employees	34.0	27.7
6-10 employees	19.8	13.1
> 10 employees	8.8	4.0
n	584	187

For entrepreneurs with migrant origins, being unemployed or facing unemployment is twice as often a reason to become self-employed than it is for natives. However, only a minority of migrant origin entrepreneurs (about 10%) mention this as a reason. Almost 14% of migrant origin entrepreneurs state that disadvantages in their former jobs were a motive for founding their businesses. If these reasons are combined into one binary variable, then almost a quarter of migrant origin entrepreneurs state some kind of disadvantage was a reason for becoming self-employed, whereas this is only true for 10% of native entrepreneurs.

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## 6. Discussion

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The starting point for this contribution was the following question: which figurations emerge from the ethnic and non-ethnic economic relations of migrant

entrepreneurs? Existing research had already pointed in this direction, but, interestingly, my analysis shows that the vast majority of migrant origin entrepreneurs (64%) are in figurations without any ethnic business contacts or ethnic relations to customers or employees. If we distinguish between businesses along employment, then 51% of the establishments with employees and 73% without employees have no ethnic relations at all. This large number of enterprises without any ethnic relations is a surprising result if we consider the vast amount of literature dedicated to the importance of ethnic resources.

Among the remaining 49% of establishments with employees and with ethnic relations, the most common figurations are those with relations to co-ethnic staff only (31%) and those with co-ethnic business contacts only (22%). All figurations with employees and with relations to co-ethnic customers account for 28% altogether. Among the 59% of entrepreneurs without employees, co-ethnic customers and business contacts are much more common. More than half of them have co-ethnic customers, three quarters have co-ethnic business contacts, and a third makes use of both resources.

This quantitative overview proves the proposition of many scholars that migrant enterprises break into mainstream markets. Against this backdrop, this seems to be rather the rule than the exception. The analysis is also further evidence that ethnically controlled economies or ethnic enclave economies do not exist in Germany to the same extent as in the US (Berwing forthcoming). Regarding the theoretical discussion about whether ethnicity is a sufficient concept to understand migrant entrepreneurship, this makes attempts like utilising the idea of outsider-established relations even more persuasive. For the analysis of entrepreneurial figurations as well as for the idea of entrepreneurial groups, this could also suggest that the shared experience of having migrant origins could be more influential than sharing the same ethnic background. The large numbers of non-co-ethnic migrant employees in many branches of economic activity point especially in this direction. My dataset does not contain such information, but it could also be true for the relations to investors, consultants, and further owner-managers. For example, up to 60% of employees in construction are natives.

The second question at the beginning of this contribution was as follows: how are figurations distributed across different branches of economic activity? Here, the two fastest growing branches in Germany (Leicht et al. 2017), construction and knowledge-intensive services, are interesting. In both branches, entrepreneurs without employees account more than 50% of the businesses. In construction, co-ethnic customers and business contacts are a rare phenomenon. This is no surprise since many European migrants explicitly come to Germany to found businesses in the booming German construction sector (Leicht et al. 2017). In contrast to this, co-ethnic customers and business contacts are essential in knowledge-intensive services. It seems plausible that in these services entrepreneurs use knowledge about institutional contexts in



different countries, common language, cultural competence, and trust as resources to run their businesses (Schaland 2009). In trade, figurations with co-ethnic business contacts account for 27% of all figurations. However, only 18% of all figurations in trade serve niche markets for co-ethnic customers. This is also the case in hospitality and non-knowledge-intensive services. The comparison of results for trade and knowledge-intensive services is especially interesting. This could be a hint that, in low economic return markets, the break into the mainstream is necessary, whereas in the knowledge-intensive services economic success in niches is possible (see also Schaland 2009).

Although in all branches of economic activity the group with no co-ethnic relations is the majority, the results show considerable variation across different branches. However, an analysis on the level of branches of economic activity only scratches the surface. For example, hospitality encompasses entirely different figurations below the branches of economic activity. A pizza shop owner, for example, will very likely not have many co-ethnic business contacts, whereas the owner of an ice cream parlour needs specialised and often co-ethnic suppliers (Storti 2014). Such examples call for detailed comparative analyses of figurations below the high aggregation level of branches.

The third question was as follows: how can migrant entrepreneurship be interpreted as outsider-established figurations? If we consider direct discrimination as an indicator for belonging to the outsiders, then our data show only weak evidence, since only a minority state that their origin has a negative effect on selling their products and services or recruiting staff. Nevertheless, the results show that migrants are overrepresented among the employees of migrant enterprises. This could be a network effect, since migrant businesses recruit staff more often via personal networks than their native counterparts do. However, this could also hint at difficulties to recruit staff via other channels. An alternative explanation for the different importance of personal networks is differences in establishment sizes between native and migrant origin entrepreneurs. It is plausible to assume that the larger an enterprise is, the more professional its recruitment strategy will be. Since the enterprises of native entrepreneurs are larger than migrant-founded enterprises, it can be assumed that the role of personal contacts is less important in the case of natives. To solve this puzzle, multivariate analyses are needed.

Ethnic products, as a proxy for outsider or established status, are Janus-faced. Overall, only 24% of all businesses sell ethnic products or services. Ethnic products are common in hospitality and niche markets. In hospitality, more than 50% of the enterprises sell ethnic products, and almost 35% of entrepreneurs state their origin is an advantage to selling their products, but only 10% have many co-ethnic customers. We can therefore assume that foreign origin is a marketing advantage and is used to sell authenticity, which could, in this context, point to an established social position. In contrast, in the knowledge-intensive services, ethnic services are often sold to co-ethnic cus-

tomers and could therefore be an indicator of an outsider status, since serving a niche market could be a strategy to compensate disadvantages. This could lead to a contradictory situation, where the low prestige jobs in hospitality are associated with an established status, while the more prestigious jobs in knowledge-intensive services are associated with an outsider status. Interestingly, the figuration of solopreneurs with co-ethnic customers and co-ethnic business contacts common in knowledge-intensive services exhibits at the same time the highest values for negative influence of origin. However, since a majority of respondents in the knowledge-intensive services say their foreign origin is irrelevant, this is overall a rather rare figuration.

Finally, it was asked whether self-employment is a strategy to escape an outsider position. A quarter of all migrant entrepreneurs state they founded a business because they faced disadvantages in their former jobs, faced unemployment, or were unemployed before starting a business. This is twice as high as in the case of natives. Therefore, we can assume that for migrants and their children, self-employment often means escaping an outsider position in the labour market. The possible reasons for an outsider position – may they be lower educational attainment, unaccredited certificates, or discrimination – need more attention by researchers. Future surveys should therefore also include the income of migrant entrepreneurs in comparison to natives and to dependent employees to better understand the social position of migrant entrepreneurs (Leicht et al. 2015).

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## 7. Conclusion

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This contribution is the first attempt to map different forms of migrant entrepreneurship in Germany quantitatively. By employing the idea of entrepreneurial figurations, I tried to find a way to theoretically address different patterns of the mixed embeddedness of entrepreneurs with migrant origins. On the level of relational embeddedness, I found that, in all branches of economic activity, the majority of entrepreneurs operate in figurations without any co-ethnic ties. On the level of structural embeddedness, my analysis revealed that the distributions of co-ethnic figurations vary across different branches of economic activity. This shows that different market openings for entrepreneurs with migrant origins are closely intertwined with the ability to mobilise resources. Here, Elias' figuration sociology provides an analytical framework to map typical structural-relational patterns of migrant entrepreneurship systematically. To do so, entrepreneurial figurations address the intermediate level between the network analyses necessary to understand relational embeddedness and the abstract level of structural embeddedness. A further advantage of the figuration approach is that it has a built-in alternative to ethnicity. The theoretical lens of outsider-established figurations helps to avoid the reification of ethnicity, since

it allows for relational analyses of migrant entrepreneurship. Against this backdrop, the fact that the majority of entrepreneurs with migrant origins work in figurations without any co-ethnic ties seems to be a promising path to look at these figurations from an outsider-established point of view.

However, with limited available data, my empirical approach to entrepreneurial figurations must remain a first attempt. The dataset I used lacks, for example, basic information about investors, consultants, and further owner-managers for more detailed descriptions of entrepreneurial figurations. Also, the promise of the figurational approach could only be partially fulfilled. Since the focus of this contribution was on structural-relational aspects of entrepreneurial figurations, it lacks the sociogenetic dimension of the figurations. Therefore, historical analyses are needed to understand how different entrepreneurial figurations came to be and how they changed over the course of history. Also, to describe figurations in a more comprehensive way, new datasets with more breadth and depth are needed. For more breadth, more cases are needed, but for more depth, we need historical data and more information about the nodes and edges of the economic relations of migrant entrepreneurs. Finding the causes for the evolution of different entrepreneurial figurations requires a thorough study of qualitative research in the field to translate qualitative insights into further quantitative research. Combining such new detailed data with Elias' figurational approach could be a promising theoretical path to follow the recent call for more attention to context (Boettke and Coyne 2007; Welter 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson 2017).

Although Elias' figurational approach can make a contribution to the current debate on the context of entrepreneurship, it has theoretical implications that go beyond the recent discussions of context. It has wider implications, since Elias' sociological thought includes a strong critique of the categories used by sociologists (Elias 2006). At the centre of Elias' critique stands the idea of an atomistic individual. For him, individuals are not singular entities but nodes in networks. Typical network constellations – like the figurations described in this paper – are not only simple context variables for the actions of rational actors but also shape and form the social identities of the actors themselves (Lundqvist et al. 2015). The constitution of the empirical subject as well as the constitution of the subject as a scientific entity has thus its own historical *a priori*. From this standpoint of the sociology of knowledge, criticises Elias the implicit *a priori* understandings of the subject inherent in modernist sociological theories. Foucault coined the term 'anthropological slumber' for such hidden anthropological assumptions (Dahlmans 2008).

While critical perspectives on the subject have become part of the mainstream in social theory, they are still on the fringes of entrepreneurship research. The successful entrepreneur as a lone hero with exceptional psychological qualities is still the major paradigm in entrepreneurship (Johnsen and Sørensen 2017). Its underpinnings can be found in trait-based psychological

research and it is a common-sense a priori assumption for many scholars. It can therefore be said that entrepreneurship research is in its own anthropological slumber, although more and more scholars now analyse the discursive structures underlying entrepreneurship (Ogbor 2000; Jones and Spicer 2005; da Costa and Silva Saraiva 2012; Johnsen and Sørensen 2017).

From this angle, research on entrepreneurial groups is a welcome step forward, since it goes further than identifying the discursive roots of entrepreneurship by opening up a non-individualistic research perspective on entrepreneurship. However, if relying on ethnic resources is seen as typical for migrant entrepreneurship and in turn, migrant entrepreneurship is seen as a typical example for entrepreneurial groups, this perspective could become a discursive pitfall. This pitfall consists of a discursive situation where, on the one hand, rational, successful, native entrepreneurs exist and, on the other hand, their exist migrant entrepreneurs who rely on pre-modern clan and family structures, are bound to traditions of their own cultures, and survive economic niches.

In such a discursive structure, scholars have to be careful not only to see the mote in the eye of migrant entrepreneurship, but also the beam in the eye of entrepreneurship in general. Viewed in this light, (mixed) embeddedness in networks, family ties, and relying on homophilous orientation are features of venturing activities in general. Among those features, the so-called ethnic resources are just one further possible determinant and, as my results show, not an essential feature of migrant entrepreneurial groups. The figurational analysis also reveals that the role of ethnic resources in the formation of entrepreneurial groups is highly dependent on the context of economic activity. Against this backdrop, future research on entrepreneurial groups of migrants should address the effects of different entrepreneurial figurations on the economic outcomes of entrepreneurship but also the influence of figurations on entrepreneurial identities. Finally, since there are 64 % of migrant entrepreneurs in Germany without any co-ethnic ties, the role of natives and non-co-ethnic migrants in the formation of migrant entrepreneurial groups should receive much more attention.

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## Appendix

**Table 1A:** Number of Cases for Branch of Economic Activity (Distribution Weighted and Unweighted) for Migrant Entrepreneurs and Native Entrepreneurs

	Migrant origins		
	Cases	Unweighted	Weighted
Construction	64	11.0	15.4
Hospitality	154	26.4	21.3
Trade	79	13.5	12.1
Non knowledge int. Services	99	17.0	26.2
Manufacturing	41	7.0	4.5
Knowledge int. Services	147	25.2	20.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	Natives		
	Cases	Unweighted	Weighted
Construction	35	18.7	10.8
Hospitality	18	9.6	5.4
Trade	38	20.3	18.6
Non knowledge int. Services	21	11.2	23.1
Manufacturing	20	10.7	8
Knowledge int. Services	55	29.4	34.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2A:** Number of Cases for Establishment Size (Distribution Weighted and Unweighted) for Migrant Entrepreneurs and Native Entrepreneurs

	Migrant origins		
	Cases	Unweighted	Weighted
Without	133	22.8	59.3
1-5	322	55.1	32.6
> 10	48	8.2	3
6-10	81	13.9	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	Natives		
	Cases	Unweighted	Weighted
Without	39	20.9	49
1-5	89	47.6	34.7
> 10	29	15.5	8.2
6 - 10	30	16	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# Historical Social Research Historische Sozialforschung

## All articles published in HSR Special Issue 44 (2019) 4: Entrepreneurial Groups & Entrepreneurial Families.

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Entrepreneurial Groups: Definition, Forms, and Historic Change.  
doi: [10.12759/hsr.44.2019.4.7-41](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.44.2019.4.7-41)

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