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English abstract

My Ph.D. project investigates the implications of self-employment in terms of motivations, strategies and practise concerning female and male immigrant entrepreneurs in Denmark. The object is to contribute to a better insight and understanding of the different aspects at work within the so-called ethnic economies. In a preliminary study¹ carried out in the very beginning of my research process I discovered significant gender distinctions in the patterns revealed on the basis of an analysis of biographical interviews. Furthermore did I find that the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship to some degree neglects the role of gender and therefore is a gendered understanding of the social process insufficiently incorporated within this research field. Gender can be regarded as a modifier in relation to social and economical activity, in the sense that it influences on shaping the conditions for the actors' possibilities and constraints of manoeuvring within different fields. Likewise do the embedded structures and institutional social relations affect the life planning of the individual, as it structures the access to and limitation on accumulation of capital and therefore also in entering social positions. Although gender is the prioritised category does this investigation also include other differentiating categories such as ethnicity, class and generation, which gives the research an intersectional dimension. The aim of this investigation is to explore how male and female immigrant entrepreneurs differentiate from each other regarding their motivations behind becoming self-employed and the strategy applied in their approach to entrepreneurship and finally how this relate to their identity construction.

In the analysis I make use of both the biographical narration – the told story - and the factual trajectory – the lived life. The purpose of this combination is to reconstruct the life paths or status passages and to gain insight to the strategies applied entering the game of the entrepreneurship field. In this pursuit I find it is of great relevance to locate ruptures and turning points in the individual biographical stories in order to identify the pathway to a continuous and autonomous life plan. If one is to understand how individuals navigate in

¹ This Ph.D. project has its roots in a TSER (Targeted Socio Economic Research) research project titled: "Self-employment activities concerning women and minorities: their success and failure in relation to social citizenship policies". The groups that were in focus were those of weak positions within the entrepreneurial field/marked, the low-income businesses, giving the research a class dimension, besides the more explicit gender and ethnicity perspectives. The project was a comparative study conducted in Greece, Italy, Germany, Britain, Sweden and Denmark

different settings or fields, I find it appropriate to access the life world of the individual through the told story in which the respondent give gives information about their experience of the action and interaction of individuals and groups of individuals within a certain structural framework. Moreover is it possible to access the intended meanings through this method. When we then compare a number of life stories and trajectories patterns similarities and differences emerge and within these strategies and practices can be identified and linked to the construction of the field in terms of opportunity structures and values attached to it and how this influence on the identity construction of the individual.

1. Introduction. In this chapter I will present a short description of the development in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship with a reference to the larger fields of migration and the labour market. The aim is to create a picture of the setting or scene to which the particular field of immigrant belongs.

2. State of the Arts. In chapter two I wish to raise a discussion on contemporary approaches to immigrant entrepreneurship using a preliminary study. The purpose of this chapter is to argue in favour of the chosen approach to the investigation that is based on different perspectives.

3. Appropriating the theoretical framework. Based on my dialectic approach to the agent – structure relation I have chosen an eclectic theoretical frame in order to capture the reality as it is expressed through the empirical material

5.1. The structuralistic approach by Pierre Bourdieu, presenting central concepts of importance to this research.

5.2. An agent oriented thematic analysis based on the theoretical concepts of;

- *Recognition* as presented by Alex Honneth
- *Autonomy* as presented by Anthony Giddens

Other theoretical approaches will to a much lesser degree be integrated in the theoretical sensitisation to the empery in the analysis. Of these theoretical approaches I can mention Erving Goffman, Ulrich Beck and Nancy Fraser.

4. Methodological positioning. One of the central aspects of this chapter is to determine my *ontological position* and the implications of this on the scientific production of knowledge and generation of theory and theoretical concepts. Another important perspective in this chapter is the discussion of the relation between agents and structures, where the dialectic approach I advocate for is influences the theoretical framework

5. *The applied method.* This chapter focuses explicitly on the practical implication and implementation of the biographical narrative method and the pros and cons of using such an approach to this research field. The empirical material is produced through biographical narrative interviews with 25 immigrant entrepreneurs of both sexes, which are analysed in different stages. A larger part of the interviews were not conducted by my self, but were gathered in connection with another research project. This condition for my dissertation means that both the method and a larger part of the empirical material were given beforehand, which brings certain problems to the research process.

6. *The gendered nature of entrepreneurship.* In the first stage of the analysis the object is to unravel the causal motivations of the individual immigrant by identifying central themes. These themes are subjected to a theoretical sensitizing, which leads to the theoretical concept of recognition and autonomy.

7. *In-depth analysis.* The second stage of analysis is based on a thematic analysis, where the theoretical concepts of recognition and autonomy will serve as focal points around which the analysis will be structured yet leaving space for new developments to emerge.

8. *A multiple case analysis.* This third analysis stage places more focus on the structures that influence the opportunities of the individual and the *strategies* available to them. Central concepts of this analysis part are those of:

1. Education
2. Network

The two concepts connote to the theoretical concept of cultural/educational capital and social capital. Other central concepts such as habitus and dispositions

In the first analytical part of this research – the preliminary study - I establish the existence of different reasons for *why* (causal motivations) some immigrants choose to become self-employed and that these differences are partly gender based. At the second analysis level I wish to investigate *what* (intentions) the immigrants wish to obtain by being self-employed. I therefore seek to explore the relations between why the immigrants participating in this investigation chose an entrepreneurial strategy, and not for example further education, and how it is possible to realize or implement this project in relation to what the individual wishes to achieve through this strategy. The strategies are reflections of their life chances in the opportunity structures of the Danish society, whereas their intentions (not necessarily fully intentional) are an expression of their life plans or life chances and the expectations they

hold for their future. In continuation of this analysis of intentions I have identified three different strategies that represent distinct ways of accessing self-employed, in other words how they go about setting up their own business. The last part of the analysis concerns coping strategies and is orientated towards *how* (the strategy) the immigrant entrepreneurs navigate and cope with their occupational situation by the means of strategies, in order to establish the particular social route that has brought the agent to the present position (See also Bourdieu, 1992:103). The correlation between why and how some immigrants turn to self-employment is reflected in patterns where gender is a significant differentiating category. There is however also interesting deviations in the data sample, which illustrates the complexity and variety of the social field.

Starting with the first analysis stage the main result is the gender differences in the reasons of becoming self-employed. Central in this part of the investigation is the various themes that are presented by the immigrants in their narratives and the theoretical connotations that may help the interpretation of the data. The distinction seems to be somewhere between recognition and autonomy, although there is no a sharp division between female and male entrepreneurs. It is however quite noticeable that most of the male entrepreneurs are very concerned with about issues related to recognition whereas the female entrepreneurs have more considerations on autonomy related subjects. This gender distinction may have a number of different explanations and those that I have emphasized is those that I through my interpretations of the empirical data I have based this study on, which means that others researchers using either the same or a different method might come to different conclusions than I do. It is therefore important to make all the “calculations” visible in order to secure a high level of understanding of how the results are reached. A characteristic of the male entrepreneurs’ biographical stories is that in many of them their role as the patriarch and to secure the future of the family, which can be interpreted as a traditional lifestyle. Here something about embodied gender positions. This causal motivation can be linked to intentions in terms of what the immigrant wish to obtain through self-employment, which in this case is self-esteem and family empowerment. The motivation seem to be largely caused by discrimination and limitations on the labour market, which narrows down the possibilities for accessing social positions that they have been accustom to prior to migration. In this sense, the business world provides opportunities that are not available in the professional world. Their cultural capital does not hold the same value in Denmark as it did prior to migration, which brings on a lack of recognition that often results in a low self-esteem. A key issue here is therefore that the value of cultural capital is determined by the established group, mainly the native Danes, and that this generates barriers on the labour market for many immigrants.

In the following I will illustrate the relations between; causal motivations – intentional motivations – strategies or the other way round. When bringing together the central elements of the three analyses there emerge certain relationships between gender, motivations and strategies. The entrepreneurs who use the *profession based strategy* are aiming to achieve a various combinations of economic, career, freedom and self-realisation *intentions*. Their *causal motivations* can be characterised as discrimination, inflexibility and dependency and the central type of capital in their quest is cultural capital. The entrepreneurs using this strategy are more experienced within the trade of their business because it is linked with their professional qualifications.

The *conventional strategy* is commonly used by immigrants who have the *intentions* of gaining self-esteem, family empowerment and freedom/independence. The *causal motivations* behind the strategy are a combination of discrimination, limitations on the labour market and dependency. The central type of capital is social capital. The conventional strategy becomes for the main part of the professional male immigrants the most realistic strategies because their qualification is not as easily applicable in terms of self-employment as in the female cases. It is for example not as obvious an idea for an engineer to become self-employed, as it is for a dental technician.

In the use of the *innovative strategy* the common *intentions* are to gain economic, self-esteem and self-realisation and the causal motivations based on discrimination, limitations on the labour market and dependence. Economic capital is the central type of capital: Economic. These entrepreneurs use primarily an economic incentive as the reason for becoming self-employed and regard entrepreneurship as a better alternative to waged employment. They often start a business within a branch with the possibilities of expansion and high earnings.

When bringing the analysis stages together it becomes quite apparent that there is a large degree of intersectionality embedded in the biographies of the immigrant entrepreneurs, which means that it is insufficient to only focus on one aspect such as gender. Still, the gender dimension is the most prevailing in the empirical data, which is why the gender category is predominant in the present study, giving it precedence in the investigation. However this does not mean that other important differentiating categories are to be neglected and thereby do injustice to the empirical material. By this I mean that the analysis have shown quite strong indications of class having an important role in relation to the entrepreneurial practise. Moreover does the experiences of the majority of the observed

immigrant entrepreneurs point in the direction of an interrelationship between the discrimination related to gender, class and immigrant status (See also Morokvasic, 1985). A general conclusion to be made from the analysis is that it is easier for immigrants to access the business world compared to the professional world. Moreover is it not a simple matter of just establishing a business but rather that of a low-income business, which is by far the most common type of business owned by immigrants.

The opportunity structures bring different possibilities and constraints for different groups and individuals depending on the available resources. An important aspect of how immigrants cope in the country of settlement is the habitus that they have developed over time in particular in the early year of childhood. Moreover the socialisation process is influenced by matters such as the age at the time of arrival to the new country. It is noticeable that a high proportion of the female and male immigrants who can be characterised as well integrated and have accumulated a feasible amount of capital came to Denmark as children following parents who immigrated voluntarily. These migrants have often higher possibilities for internalising certain ways of perception and dispositions that are similar to those of surroundings. However, most of the immigrants in this study arrived in Denmark either in their teens or in adulthood, which means that they already have undergone an extensive socialisation process of their habitus. A consequence of this is in many cases an adjustment or extension of habitus and perhaps changes in practises.

The gain of autonomy through self-employment seems to have several implications that influence the consequences of entrepreneurial practise. One of these is that the type of occupation involves very often long working hours, low income and no or limited holidays. The majority of the women observed were motivated to become self-employed by gaining a more flexible lifestyle due to child caring and domestic work. Very few of these women have actually benefited from the possibility of managing their own time, because they have to work long hours in order to keep the business going, and thus does flexibility become more a matter of the idea than actual gain of flexibility. This is connected to strive for autonomy as being able to make your own decisions. Through the entrepreneurial strategy many of the female entrepreneurs manage to keep their biographical story going both as a mother and as a professional woman, creating a better coherence between private life and work life.