

Mixed Embeddedness and Migrant Entrepreneurship: Hints on Past and Future Directions. An Introduction *

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Abstract

The rise of migrant entrepreneurship — small business activities carried out by migrants in their destination countries — has been the subject of a large body of academic research. Over the years, the mixed embeddedness model has gained increased attention, and it has been used to study migrant entrepreneurship. After almost twenty years (1999–2018), this paper examines this approach and underlines the contribution that it has provided to the field. Furthermore, we identify three main streams of research in which the mixed embeddedness approach has been applied and can be further developed in connection with migrant entrepreneurship: 1) *the spatial dimension of migrant entrepreneurs' embeddedness*; 2) *super-diversity*; and 3) *transnationalism*. Also referencing the other articles included in this symposium, in the conclusions, we stress the importance of broadening the perspective by exploring other domains in which mixed embeddedness can be applied in the field of migrant entrepreneurship.

Keywords: migrant entrepreneurs; mixed embeddedness; spatial scales; super-diversity; transnationalism.

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1 Introduction

This article introduces a symposium of *Sociologica*, which focuses on the mixed embeddedness approach as a lens to understand migrant entrepreneurship. The symposium consists of five articles that contribute to and reflect on the mixed embeddedness approach and, in general, the academic debate on migrant entrepreneurship. To do so, the symposium presents conceptual contributions — suggesting advancements, reinterpretation, and redefinition of this seminal approach — and theoretically-grounded empirical application of mixed embeddedness.

In this introductory essay, we illustrate some of the main conceptual and empirical developments in the field based on this approach. After presenting the mixed embeddedness approach, we identify some key and prospective topics in relation to recent trends in the field of migrant entrepreneurship and migration studies in general. We conclude with some possible further developments and policy considerations.

The rise of migrant entrepreneurship, small business activities carried out by migrants in their destination countries, has been the subject of a large body of academic research (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Ambrosini, 2011; Barberis, 2008; Portes & Yiu, 2013; Ram, Jones, & Villares-Varela, 2017; Rath & Kloosterman, 2000; Rath & Schutjens, 2016; Zhou, 2006), especially in traditional countries of immigration. Since the 1980s, an increasing number of scholars have focused on the topic of migrant entrepreneurship. The phenomenon's social relevance stems from the increase in the number of migrant entrepreneurs in Western countries (OECD, 2010 & 2017), related to wider transformations in post-industrial economies and in labour market careers (Ghezzi & Mingione, 2003; Panayiotopoulos, 2006 & 2010; Rath, 2000 & 2002). The recent interest in the phenomenon is also linked to a policy-making trend considering self-employment a way to integrate newcomers into the labour market and create new jobs (European Commission, 2016), consistent with the destandardization (Beck, 1992) of labour hinted at above.

The impact of migrant entrepreneurship goes far beyond the economic benefit that the entrepreneur can gain (Rath, Solano, & Schutjens, 2019; Zhou & Cho, 2010). Although it has not been clearly demonstrated that running a business leads to migrants having higher incomes than waged workers (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009; Bradley, 2004; Lofstrom, 2011; Masurel, Nijkamp, Tastan, & Vindigni, 2002; Olson, Zuiker-Solis, & Phillips-Montalto, 2000), migrant entrepreneurs can impact the number of jobs available and the volume of trade, and they can revitalise certain sectors or areas. For example, migrant entrepreneurs have played a key role in sectors such as the food and garment sectors by breaking in (e.g., via price competitiveness) or breaking out (e.g., offering new products) (Engelen, 2001; OECD, 2010; Rath, 2002). They have also created new places for leisure and consumption, especially in formerly deprived neighbourhoods (Aytar & Rath, 2012; Serra del Pozo, 2012).

Equally relevant, entrepreneurship is linked with social integration. On one hand, migrants who start businesses seem to have a certain degree of integration in their destination countries. For example, Portes, Haller, and Guarnizo's (2002) research on the U.S. context showed that migrant entrepreneurs had lived in the country for more years than wage workers. On the other hand, a successful self-employment experience can increase migrants' social integration (Apitzsch, 2003; Allen & Busse, 2016; Basu, 2001; Light, 1972; Solano, 2015). Allen and Busse (2016) found that markets where natives and migrants were targeted fostered migrants' social integration by facilitating interaction between natives and the entrepreneurs (for a discussion on intergroup relations, see also Barberis, 2008 & 2017). Despite this optimistic view, scholars have also pointed out that migrants' entrepreneurial experiences are often bounded in their community, and migrants engage in not very profitable sectors and/or petty trade (Ambrosini, 2011). Furthermore, the choice of becoming an entrepreneur is sometimes linked to push factors (e.g., unemployment and professional downgrading) rather than to pull factors (e.g., self-realisation, entrepreneurial aspiration and human capital) (Ensign & Robinson, 2011; Kwok Bun & Jin Hui, 1995), evidence of inequality that has long been studied in the frame of "blocked mobility" and the disadvantage theory (Jones & Ram, 2003; Jones, Ram, & Theodorakopoulos, 2010; Rajjman & Tienda, 2000).

Most of the scholars that have analysed the phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship have focused on the analysis of the entrepreneurial choice and the determinants of entrepreneurial "success". In doing so, they have adopted various perspectives and focused on either the demand side or the supply side

(Ambrosini, 2011; Rath & Schutjes, 2016). The demand side refers to the entrepreneur's motivations, skills, and social contacts. The supply side refers to the contextual and structural determinants, such as policies, norms, and the economic landscape.

Other scholars have adopted a more comprehensive approach in explaining migrant entrepreneurship by integrating factors from the supply and demand sides. Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward (1990) were the first scholars to do so. The rationale underpinning their model is the *interaction* between migrants' characteristics (individual characteristics, skills, and social contacts) and economic and market conditions and characteristics (opportunity structure). Nevertheless, the interactive model of Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) still shows theoretical flaws: a latent assimilationism (ethnic niches as a transition phase towards mainstream economy), reductionism (poor focus on general market conditions and value chains where niches are nested), and differentialism since ethnicity is considered with culturalist nuances and as a separate group with no connection with the rest of the society (Barberis, 2008; Engelen, 2001).

Kloosterman and his colleagues (Kloosterman, 2010; Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Kloosterman, van der Leun, & Rath, 1999) further elaborated on that model, significantly advancing the theoretical and empirical analysis of migrant entrepreneurship, basically contributing to the agenda of new economic sociology by keeping together agency and structure in explaining markets and economic outcomes (Granovetter, 2017). Their model is still the main reference for everyone who wants to focus on this topic. Almost twenty years after Kloosterman et al. introduced the mixed embeddedness approach, we believe that it is time to analyse the (huge) impact it had in the field and to review the conceptual and empirical advancements that have been introduced based on this approach. The mixed embeddedness approach refers to the fact that migrant entrepreneurship is influenced by entrepreneurs' embeddedness in the contexts where they develop businesses and in the social sphere (social contacts). Furthermore, key to the approach is the matching process between migrants' skills and resources (the human and social capital) and opportunity structure(s), which is created by contextual conditions. Given that mixed embeddedness has become the reference approach to studying migrant entrepreneurship (Ram et al., 2017), this article focuses on the mixed embeddedness approach as a lens to understand migrant entrepreneurship.

2 The Mixed Embeddedness Approach to Migrant Entrepreneurship

Almost twenty years ago, Kloosterman, Rath, and van der Leun (1999) published a paper in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Together with a subsequent article published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001), it introduced the so-called "mixed embeddedness approach". These two articles are credited with some 1,300 references by Google Scholar (February 2018). Over the years, this approach has grabbed increasing attention and has become the standard reference when it comes to analysing migrant entrepreneurship.¹ The starting point of this approach is the matching process between migrants' skills and resources (human and social capital) and opportunity structure(s), which is created by the contextual conditions of the place where the business is located. In particular, "the rise of immigrant entrepreneurship is, theoretically, primarily located at the intersection of changes in sociocultural framework, on the one side, and transformation processes in (urban) economies on the other" (Kloosterman et al., 1999, p. 257).

To stress this fact, Kloosterman et al. (1999) made reference to the concept of *embeddedness*. They used this concept in relation to social networks (Granovetter, 1985) and place-bounded institutions (Polanyi, 1957). The model emphasizes that entrepreneurial activities are affected by migrants' embeddedness in the structure (laws, rules, market characteristics, etc.) of the places where the business is conducted; at the same time, entrepreneurs are also embedded in their networks of social relations. As

1. For a review of previous results on the mixed embeddedness approach, see Kebede (2017) and Ram et al., (2017). Ma, Zhao, Wang, & Lee (2013) provide an interesting overview of the paradigm shifts in ethnic entrepreneurship studies between 1999 and 2008, showing that the ethnic enclave approach faded in favour of immigrant entrepreneurship, with a key role played by scholars backing a mixed embeddedness approach.

such, (migrant) entrepreneurs are dually embedded.² This is the meaning of the adjective “mixed” in the “mixed embeddedness” concept. Kloosterman (2010) defined the first type of embeddedness (embeddedness in the structure) as *institutional embeddedness* and the second type (embeddedness in networks) as *social embeddedness*.³ In their seminal article, Kloosterman et al. (1999) provided the example of Dutch *halal* butchers to support their model. On one hand, the presence of Muslim migrants who required a certain kind of meat (*halal* meat) disclosed opportunities to start a butcher shop in a given regulatory and economic context (institutional embeddedness). On the other hand, they could run their businesses thanks to their embeddedness in a network of co-nationals that provided them with employees, customers, trust and support (social embeddedness). Kloosterman and Rath further elaborated on the concept of opportunity structure (2001) that was previously introduced by Waldinger et al. (1990). First, they specified the main spheres of opportunity structure. Second, they underlined the spatial scales that concur to create the opportunity structure.

Opportunity structure is composed by (Ram et al., 2017; Schutjens, 2014):

- the *economic context*, which refers to the economic situation (e.g., labour market conditions) and the market conditions (e.g., market openness and request of certain services or products), and
- the *political-institutional context*, which refers to the set of laws, rules and policies — on migration and business issues — that can directly or indirectly foster or hamper migrants’ business activities.

Furthermore, opportunity structure is defined by the interaction of three spatial levels (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001): national, regional/urban, and neighbourhood. Despite globalisation and the redefinition of the hierarchies of scale centred on the nation-state (Sassen, 2007), national institutions are still powerful. The state regulatory regime and its set of laws and regulations are still crucial in shaping migrants’ entrepreneurial activities. Recalling again the case mentioned in Kloosterman et al. (1999), for example, the informality of many butcher shops was tunnelled by the request of registration to the Chamber of Commerce and of a professional qualification.

However, due to the increasing importance of the city in the global economy (Sassen, 2007), cities develop their own socioeconomic spaces that may be well differentiated from state ones. Furthermore, urban policies might often diverge from the national ones in their content or in the way the national ones are implemented (Ambrosini & Boccagni, 2015). For example, Ambrosini (2013) presented several local policies aimed at excluding migrants. In some small towns of Lombardy (Italy), in the name of protection of local traditions, local authorities decided to ban new “ethnic” restaurants (e.g., kebab shops).

Opportunities might differ from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, too. As Kloosterman and Rath (2001) emphasized, these differences are mainly linked with the geographical distribution of migrants in the city. Compared to a neighbourhood with few migrants, different opportunities arise in a neighbourhood with many migrants. Areas with a higher concentration of migrants can favour the creation of ethnic enclaves (Wilson & Portes, 1980).

2. The concept of embeddedness refers to the degree to which economic activity is constrained by non-economic institutions in which the person is inserted (Mingione, 2006).

3. It is worth noting that Granovetter (2017, p. 17) defines relational and structural embeddedness as two aspects of network embeddedness: relational embeddedness refers to “relations that individuals have with specific other individuals. This concept is about pairs or, as sociologists like to say, dyads. [...] Not only particular dyadic relations may affect your behaviour but also the aggregated impact of all such relations”, entailing a core role for noneconomic factors in economic action. Structural embeddedness refers to “the overall structure of the network that individuals are embedded in” (*ibidem* p. 18), and it is particularly relevant for the circulation of information framing individual agency. In this respect, Granovetter’s relational and structural embeddedness seem on the side of Kloosterman’s social embeddedness. Kloosterman’s institutional embeddedness may be more easily related to Granovetter’s temporal embeddedness, or the fact that human actions “carry the baggage of previous interactions into each new ones” (*ibidem* p. 19), consistent with Granovetter’s idea of institutions as inventories, a menu, of ideas and viable alternatives that actors and networks assemble. All in all, the representation of institutions in the mixed embeddedness approach seems “thicker” than in Granovetter (2017) but quite consistent with Granovetter’s attention for a space for agency, an argument we will consider later on.

3 Trends and Directions

In this section, we present some trends and conceptual advancements that have been developed under the frame of the mixed embeddedness approach. We focus on three key areas of research in relation to migrant entrepreneurship because we maintain that they constituted some of the most important additions to migration and entrepreneurship research in the last decade, as the references to core authors in these fields show: *the spatial dimension of migrants' embeddedness* (Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2011), *super-diversity* (Vertovec, 2007), and *transnationalism* (Portes et al., 2002; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

We supported this understanding with a literature review. In particular, we reviewed papers mentioning the mixed embeddedness approach. Focussing on articles listed in the *Scopus* database (all research fields) by using the key phrase “mixed embeddedness”, we found 668 articles published from 1999 to February 2018. Among these, we found:

- a) No less than 326 mentioning “trans(-)national*”, which means that linking transnational dimensions to the mixed embeddedness approach is now a consolidated argument in literature;
- b) 65 mentioning “super(-)divers*”, which is a much smaller number than in (a), but it has been increasing in the recent years (it is mentioned in 18% of articles on mixed embeddedness published from 2015 till today and in just 8% of articles between 2007 and 2014);
- c) That the spatial dimension was harder to grasp since there may be different wordings to take it into account, though terms referring to the local dimensions were often found in association with mixed embeddedness, in particular “urban” (n = 563) and “region*” (584) occurring more than “nation*” (416), followed by “neighbo(u)rhood” (151), “territorial”, and even “rescaling” (15).

Other themes are becoming important: “Gender” occurs in 284 articles, “intersectional*” in 24, and “class” in 239, but for the argument here, we preferred to subsume them under the encompassing label of super-diversity.

3.1 The Spatial Dimension of Migrants' Embeddedness

Early in the development of mixed embeddedness, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) reflected on the spatial dimension of the opportunity structure migrant entrepreneurs have to deal with. As mentioned above, they considered a three-level approach, where the national, regional/urban, and neighbourhood levels had to be taken into consideration to analyse opportunity structures and markets (especially in comparative terms). Kloosterman and Rath (2001) never intended to provide an exhaustive overview of territorial processes and migrant entrepreneurship. Therefore, in light of recent theoretical and empirical developments, this is a field where much advancement is possible. For example, studies on transnational entrepreneurship (see below) and rescaling processes — including rescaling processes and migration (see Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2011) — require consideration of the global/supranational dimension of embeddedness on one hand and the multiscale, nested configurations of markets and opportunity structures on the other.

Kloosterman and Rath (2001) pointed out some possible lines of research for the future: how advanced economies provide opportunity for small businesses, how urban regions differ in their opportunity structures, how micro-level agency and networks (including societal reception and intergroup links, well beyond ethnic-bounded solidarity) influence opportunity structures, and how urban policies impact the supply and demand sides of the opportunity structure. The literature in recent years went quite far in exploring these research lines.

Comparisons between national structures of opportunity have been published (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009; Coduras Martinez, Saiz-Alvarez, & Cuervo Arango Martinez, 2013; OECD, 2010) as comparative studies on specific markets — e.g., Rath (2002) on migrant entrepreneurship in the metropolitan garment industry. More rarely, attention was given to the effect urban structures (facilities, built environment, etc.) may indirectly or directly have in fostering or hindering migrant entrepreneurship (Barberis, 2017; Beckers & Kloosterman, 2014; Folmer & Risselada, 2013). Keeping

together agency and structure, that is, providing accounts of migrant entrepreneurs without an over-socialized representation of their (kinship) networks, has been a harder achievement.

In this respect, promising insights can come from the literature on emplacement, positionality, and rescaling in migration studies. Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2011) analysed the reciprocal influences between economic restructuring and migration settlement processes with a specific focus on entrepreneurship and mixed embeddedness (Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2013). Based on a German case, they call for a joint analysis of localities' changing economic and power positions and the role migrants play there, in turn becoming "scale-makers" (i.e., transforming the local opportunity structure). Similarly, other scholars (Barberis, 2014; Bracci, 2016; Canello, 2016; Ceccagno, 2017; Hadjimichalis, 2006; Mingione, 2009) focussed on the relationship between the restructuring of the Italian cluster economy and the settlement of labour migrants, including their entrepreneurial emplacement. These studies show that the ethnicization of networks is just one of the forms migrant agency can take in a given opportunity structure and that embeddedness has a territorialized dimension according to the scalar position of and the power relations in the locale where migrants are emplaced.

This strand of the literature calls for a more nuanced understanding of sociospatial relations, referencing a more general theoretical turn in analysing social action in space: Against methodological nationalism in the analysis of migration and the "local trap" in the representation of agency, places, scales, and networks are to be analysed in their relations as structures of opportunity for migrant entrepreneurs — and (*à la* Granovetter, 2017) as inventories of alternatives in their socioeconomic actions (Brenner, 2011; Glick-Schiller, Çağlar, & Gulbrandsen, 2006; Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008; Purcell & Brown, 2005). In this respect, in this issue, a useful and critical review of spatial lenses used to scrutinize migrant entrepreneurship can be found in Valenzuela-Garcia, Guell, Parella, Molina and Lubbers (2018).

Further exploration of territorial embeddedness to the mixed embeddedness approach may be promising if "territorial" is not equated with "local" and is used to focus on anchorages and fixes in sociospatial relations (Hess, 2004). Anyway, proximity (especially for small migrant businesses) may play a too often neglected role, considered only in studies on "enclaves" (Wang, 2013). Nevertheless, besides the coethnic enclave, the area where migrant entrepreneurs live and/or where their business is located may be related to specific socioeconomic ties, resources, and opportunities in terms of inter-firm competition, cooperating institutional conditions (including localized markets), and social relations that may favour motivation and the success of a firm (Gomez-Velasco & Saleilles, 2007). Local social networks can be an asset *per se*, with or without ethnic ties, as part of wider sociospatial relations. At the same time, global and transnational linkages should not be underplayed since they can be relevant sources of disembedding and re-embedding, affecting the opportunity windows (also) for migrants and their social positions (Plüss, 2013).

On this issue, Zubair and Brzozowski (2018) focus exactly on recent migrant communities that do not have a reference coethnic enclave, thus needing to resort to other sociospatial relations for their entrepreneurial success. In recent literature, a step forward in the study of resources and constraints in the localization of migrant entrepreneurship has been relating emplacement to entrepreneurial agency and the quickly changing opportunity structure. Interesting insights are coming and can come in the future by bridging bodies of literature that have been usually separated. It has been noted, for example, that studies on cluster economies have rarely taken into account migration and ethnicity (Barberis, 2008; Wang, 2013), and studies on enclaves and ethnic business rarely took into account what economic geography and sociology had to say on cluster economies in general.⁴ Among the branches of literature in economic sociology and business studies that may be interesting to explore are those focussing on multiple locations and territorial embeddedness of firms (Hess, 2004). See for example the literature on multinational enterprises, location challenges at the international level, and agglomeration economies (Colletis, Gilly, Pecqueur, Perrat, & Zimmerman, 1997; Dicken & Malmberg, 2001; Guercini, Dei Ottati, Baldassar, & Johanson, 2017; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Meyer, Mudambi, & Narula, 2011). Jointly with works by authors like Grabher (1993) and Uzzi (1997) on embedding and disembedding processes, these research strands may help disentangle the social and economic territorial "anchorage" and the multifocality (see below) of (migrant) business. Sofer and Schnell (2002, p. 232), for example, char-

4. A similar argument applies to the relations between global value chains and labour migrations (Chignola & Sacchetto, 2017) — a field that needs more explorations in the role played by migrant entrepreneurship (Ceccagno, 2017).

acterize the embedding and disembedding process as producing different fixes: over-embeddedness as an intra-group commitment that impedes entrepreneurs' "participation in inter-ethnic markets" and under-embeddedness as inter-group market relations fail "to gain enough power to translate their networks relationships into economic growth." Based on their work, Barberis (2017) ranks the place attachment of businesses in a multicultural neighbourhood in Milan according to their rootedness in localized plural networks: territorially under-embedded firms may just "exploit" diversity without contributing much to its social reproduction at the neighbourhood level.

Storti (2018) in this issues links embeddedness and territorial patterns with an ambitious effort to combine forms of agency and configurations of opportunity structures.

The mix of networks (suppliers, clients, and non-business related ties) at different scales may produce varieties of migrant entrepreneurship (Ambrosini, 2005; Korsgaard, Ferguson, & Gaddefors, 2015; OECD, 2010) with specific competitive advantages and disadvantages due to their local embeddedness and scalar position as a (relative) newcomer in the place of destination and being in relation with one (the place of origin) or more (in case of interconnected diasporas) "elsewheres". For example, Kalantaridis and Bika (2006) and Najib (2016) provide an interesting example of migrant firms' competitive advantages in being less (over-)embedded than natives in rural Europe: by breaking some locked-in linkages, they contribute to the disembedding of the local economy but also — as scale makers — to its re-embedding in wider national and international arenas.

These studies confirm that local embeddedness should not be considered univocally an advantage *per se* since firms clustered in a place are in a dynamic environment with processes of disembedding, re-embedding, over-embedding, and under-embedding (Akgün, Nijkamp, Baycan, & Brons, 2010; Barberis, 2008; Uzzi, 1997). Therefore, different configurations are possible, with migrant businesses to be found in different positions according to the local opportunity structures and scalar configurations. In this respect, Barberis (2008) proposes a two-sided scheme that takes into account two reference groups (a majority one and a minority one) in a socioeconomic local context, both characterized by various degrees of embeddedness: i.e., every group can have networks more or less overembedded, when inter-firm ties happen almost exclusively within a tight kinship clique (Grabher, 1993; Uzzi, 1996 & 1997); or more or less underembedded, when ties are mainly spot- and market-based with a poor role of in-group bonds. The inclusion of two groups within the same socioeconomic context produces embeddedness patterns based on coevolving, mutual relationships. In short, the embeddedness of group A is interwoven with and codependent on the embeddedness of group B, according to the role played by the kind and features of relationships between A and B (as far as density, homogeneity, redundancy, and power configurations are concerned).

3.2 Super-diversity

A focus on mixed embeddedness requires us to ask what "mix" is under scrutiny. The easy answer is the one mentioned above: an institutional and social embeddedness. But a related question remains: What kinds of institutions and social groups do we have to consider in the mix?

The attention gained by super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) in the last ten years can help frame a better answer, for example dealing with the risk of an over-socialized view of migrant entrepreneurs and an excessive importance attributed to ethnic grouping. On one hand, the focus on ethno-national resources may limit the focus on other cultural resources, e.g., religious ones (Bagwell, 2017). On the other hand, a focus on super-diversity of migrations may challenge the role played by strong ties and in-group solidarity in social networks, enhancing the focus on their internal differentiation (e.g., in terms of gender or social class and concerning the role of various types of ties).

In particular, we want here to stress how a joint focus on super-diversity and mixed embeddedness can be particularly fruitful if applied to three dimensions: opportunity structures and institutional constraints, social networks, and individual characteristics.

As for opportunity structures, mixed embeddedness may be particularly fit to analyse diversity and new migration since the formation of ethnic networks may be secondary compared to the structure of opportunity they meet (Price & Chacko, 2009). Plural flows undergo various positions in the civic stratification. Enduring migrant market niches may have different significance for different groups and

categories (Jones, Ram, Edwards, Kiselinchev, & Muchenje, 2014). Acknowledging factors of diversification within and between taken-for-granted ethnic labels and groupings may provide interesting insights (Barrett & Verzhinina, 2017). For a group of persons that are labelled in the same way, group-making and opportunity structures may differ meaningfully in time not only due to the change of the institutional and economic contexts but also for the joint transformation of their ethnicities.

The number of interesting studies on the evolution of ethnicity in space and time as such — e.g., Gabaccia (2000) on Italian diasporas — and in reference to their entrepreneurial opportunities — e.g., Koning & Verver (2013) on Chinese entrepreneurs in Singapore and Storti (2014) on Italian entrepreneurs in Germany — is growing as fruitful in a mixed embeddedness perspective.

On one hand, various identities and related resources may be strategically mobilized in different manners by migrant entrepreneurs according to network and opportunity structures (Oliveira, 2007; Parzer & Kwok, 2013; Samaratunge, Barrett, & Rajapakse, 2015). On the other hand, specific uses of ethnicity labels in policy making may affect the opportunity structure for migrant entrepreneurship, not acknowledging enough the complexity of migrant and minority businesses (Ram et al., 2013). Recent studies by Aytar and Rath (2012) and Rath, Bodaar, Wagmaakers, & Wu (2018) on ethnic commercial landscapes and the commodification and marketization of ethnicized features sound very promising for enhancing the understanding of mixed embeddedness.

As for social networks, migrant entrepreneurship research often focussed on the in-group, ethnic, bounded networks without a critical exploration of the boundaries and definitions pre-given in-group(s), considering ethnicity as a mono-dimensional concept (Barrett & Verzhinina, 2017).

Equating ethnic resources with social networks may hinder significant advancement in the understanding of the interplay between social and structural embeddedness (i.e., in the very grounds of the mixed embeddedness approach). Even with a view on ethnic ties, they “differ in the resources they possess and can make available to prospective business owners” (Kitching, Smallbone, & Athayde, 2009, p. 695); at the micro and firm levels, ethnic social ties may be used differently, hindering or boosting entrepreneurial success (Marin, Mitchell, & Lee, 2015). This includes relations with various types of contacts (e.g., strong and weak ties; see Granovetter, 1973) and inter-group links, bridging social capital as much as linking social capital.⁵ This means also that not every member of an assumed “ethnic community” enjoys the same position in the in-group and out-group social network.

The plurality of entrepreneurial ego networks should be taken into proper account, considering strong and weak ties, positionality, multiplexity, etc.

Considering ethnic origin as group belonging ignores articulations, complexities, segmentations of identities (Tavassoli & Trippel, 2017), and the role of individual agency, which may turn ethno-national identities into a resource to be exploited or a burden that can affect migrants’ entrepreneurial opportunities, motivation, and patterns, for example through the role of social class (e.g., in terms of family background and education) (Urban & Schölin, 2017), gender (Valdez, 2016), and cohort factors, such as differences between first and second generations (Peters, 2013; Rusinovic, 2008).

3.3 Transnationalism

Following the stress on transnationalism⁶ in migration studies (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007), a growing *corpus* of studies has focused on their economic “double engagement” (Mazzucato, 2008), including cross-border business activities carried out by migrants (i.e., transnational entrepreneurship) (Drori, Honig, & Wright, 2009; Elo & Freiling, 2015).⁷ Transnational entrepreneurship refers to business activities devel-

5. “Bridging social capital” refers to relationships connecting people from various backgrounds and with various social characteristics, and “linking social capital” refers to relationships with institutions and individuals in power positions (Woolcock, 2001).

6. “Transnationalism” refers to the fact that migrants keep links with people located outside the destination country and continue to participate in the life of their country of origin.

7. A similar and promising but rather unexplored research field is to find a convergence between literature focussing on dual embeddedness, transnational links, and effects of migrant entrepreneurship on favouring bilateral/multilateral economic relations, overcoming what in management studies is known as the “liability of outsidership” (Guercini et al., 2017; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009).

oped by migrants in the destination country with business links (e.g., with customers and/or suppliers) abroad, frequently but not exclusively with the country of origin (Drori et al., 2009; Portes et al., 2002).

Researchers in the sub-field of transnational migrant entrepreneurship have sometimes employed the mixed embeddedness approach (Bagwell, 2008, 2015 & 2018; Brzozowski, Cucculelli, & Surdej, 2014; Jones et al., 2010; Katila & Wahlbeck, 2012; Miera, 2008; Pruthi & Wright, 2017; Rusinovic, 2008; Solano, 2016a & forthcoming; Wahlbeck, 2013). To our knowledge, Miera (2008) was the first author to combine the study of migrant transnationalism with the mixed embeddedness perspective on migrant entrepreneurship. In her research on Polish entrepreneurs in Berlin, the author showed that the respondents were embedded in an open transnational market connecting Germany and Poland and in transnational social networks. This mixed embeddedness led Polish migrants to adopt a more transnational business orientation in comparison with, for example, the local-oriented Turkish group of entrepreneurs.

From a theoretical and conceptual standpoint, two main attempts to expand the mixed embeddedness approach in a transnational perspective have been developed.

One of the first attempts was undertaken by Solano (2016a & 2016b), who put forward a model of mixed embeddedness in which he took into account the fact that migrants' entrepreneurial activities can involve several countries and groups of people. The aim was to combine the mixed embeddedness approach with the discourse on transnationalism. In doing so, Solano proposed the concept of *multifocality*. Drawn on the concept of bifocality (Vertovec, 2004) and consistently with the above-mentioned research agenda calling for a more nuanced focus on sociospatial relations, the concept encompasses embeddedness in places and groups. When it comes to their actions in their destination countries (e.g., conducting a business), migrants might be influenced by the various places with which they are connected. Rather than only making reference to the destination country, they also consider their country of origin and, possibly, other countries (e.g., through diaspora). Furthermore, migrant entrepreneurs might be influenced by various groups: co-nationals but also natives, other migrants, etc. The characteristics of various places and groups together create an opportunity structure that goes beyond the one in the destination country. The links with people from those places and groups make it easier to seize these opportunities.

The concept of multifocality is particularly fruitful regarding places. As underlined in the literature (Bagwell, 2015; Jones et al., 2010; Solano, 2016b), it is important not to focus only on the origin-country of destination dichotomy. Rather, migrant entrepreneurs also look at the opportunities and the links in third countries.

In the same vein, Bagwell (2018) proposed the concept of "transnational mixed embeddedness" to explain how Vietnamese migrant entrepreneurs in London conducted their business activities. On one hand, Vietnamese entrepreneurs were influenced by their embeddedness in various countries' institutional and economical settings (transnational opportunity structure), in particular the countries of the diaspora. To avoid the national and local highly competitive markets, Vietnamese entrepreneurs in London decided to expand the scope of their businesses by seeking opportunities in other countries. The extent to which these opportunities could be seized depended on the entrepreneur's transnational social capital. Bagwell found that contacts with extended family spread over Europe were fundamental to accessing opportunities outside the destination country.

Several studies (Bagwell, 2008 & 2015; Brzozowski et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2010; Katila & Wahlbeck, 2012; Maas, 2005; Sommer & Gamper, 2018; Wahlbeck, 2013) provided an empirical foundation for Bagwell and Solano's conceptual proposals: transnational entrepreneurs have links with and are embedded in multiple contexts (the destination country, the country of origin, and other countries, normally through the diaspora). For example, Jones et al. (2010) found that UK-based Somalis employ transnational links (normally diasporic links) to establish and conduct small business activities. In this issue, Wahlbeck (2018) explores the interconnectedness of various scales and the use of transnational social resources within complex opportunity structures.

4 Conclusions

This paper aims to illustrate the mixed embeddedness approach, and it individuates and presents a number of research streams in which the mixed embeddedness approach to migrant entrepreneurship has been implemented and employed and can have further fruitful developments.

Based on a literature review, we found three areas of research that we considered particularly interesting and promising in connection with migrant entrepreneurship and the mixed embeddedness approach: the spatial dimension of migrants' embeddedness, super-diversity, and transnationalism. Of course, these areas represent only three of the great number of domains in which mixed embeddedness can be applied in the field of migrant entrepreneurship. Here we would like to mention some of them.

First, besides its integration with super-diversity, we advocate for focusing on the intersectional dimension of migrant entrepreneurship (Romero & Valdez, 2016) and disentangling the link between various dimensions (e.g., gender, social class, and legal status). Recently, a focus on gender issues in migrant entrepreneurship gained momentum, and it is an interesting start (Apitzsch & Kontos, 2003; Azmat, 2014; Dannecker & Cakir, 2016; De Luca, 2014; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Korpi, Hedberg, & Petterson, 2013; Munkejord, 2017; Romero & Valdez, 2016; Verduyn & Essers, 2013; Villares-Varela, Ram & Jones, 2017; Villares-Varela & Essers, 2018).⁸ Migrants and women have specific vulnerabilities, and they face more difficulties in their labour market integration than men and natives (Apitzsch & Kontos, 2003; Kupferberg, 2003). This difficulty creates a double penalty for female migrant entrepreneurs. The application of the mixed embeddedness approach to this topic might shed further light on the interaction between individual characteristics (i.e., being in a vulnerable and disadvantaged position as a woman and migrant) and the contextual features even though the number and type of dimensions taken into consideration may be strongly increased, providing new insights on the structure of advantages and disadvantages within specific ethnic groups. In research and policy terms, it might be fruitful to focus on various opportunity structures and social relations effects of "diversity" (including its use as a label affecting institutional practice and social action) (Karataş-Özkan, 2017).

Second, another interesting stream of literature refers to returnee entrepreneurs (Dahles, 2013; Mayer, Harima, & Freiling, 2015; van Houte & Davids, 2008; Wijers, 2013), former migrants that decide to go back to their countries of origin and start businesses in connection with the country where they previously migrated. In this case, studies can test the mixed embeddedness approach and the concepts proposed in the field of transnational entrepreneurs.

Third, research has analysed the topic of migrants in developing countries starting a business (Kebede, 2017; Langevang, Gough, Yankson, Owusu, & Osei, 2015; Moyo, 2014; Trupp, 2015). As noted by Kebede (2017), it would be particularly interesting to apply the mixed embeddedness approach to contexts where resources and opportunities are limited, formal institutions are weak, and the informal ones are particularly relevant (e.g., family, kinship groups, and other groups with bounded solidarity).

Fourth, we cannot underplay the advancement that can come from comparing cases, an issue that was clear from the beginning of this approach (with analyses comparing groups and sectors in various national and local contexts) but that probably needs further advancement. For example, limited research compares migrant and native self-employment (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009; Bolzani & Boari, 2018; Canello, 2016; Constant & Zimmermann, 2006; Neville, Orser, Riding, & Jung, 2014), especially in terms of mixed embeddedness (Tolciu, 2011) and the capacity to exploit opportunities (Vinogradov & Jorgensen, 2017).

Fifth, following Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2013) and Granovetter (2017), we advocate for a renewed focus on agency. Although the balance between agency and structure was at the very core of the mixed embeddedness approach, its popularized version and following use seems to focus mostly on opportunity structure and institutional embeddedness. A stronger focus on how migrant entrepreneurs use and create their individual and collective resources and overcome, steer, and change (or, plainly, take into account) the opportunity structure itself with their agency (and under which conditions this may happen)

8. It is worth noting that mixed embeddedness has been sometimes used to explore gender issues in entrepreneurship without any reference to migration processes (see, for example, Jurik, Krizkova, & Pospisilova, 2016; Langevang et al., 2015; Welter & Smallbone, 2010).

may be a promising theoretical advancement (Anwar & Daniel, 2017; Chacko, 2016; Vincent, Wapshott, & Gardiner, 2015).

Lastly, the discourse on mixed embeddedness might be linked to certain topics from the field of entrepreneurship and management, such as firm-level resources, business growth, and business innovation (Canello, 2016; Sahin, Nijkamp, & Stough, 2011). For example, as part of this special thematic section, Alvarado (2018) illustrates how to combine the discourse on innovation with the mixed embeddedness approach to further understand the processes through which migrant entrepreneurs innovate.

In conclusion, the idea that mixed embeddedness should focus on local context institutional embeddedness on one hand and on the in-group social embeddedness on the other may be challenged, providing further advancements (e.g., with the focus on in-group/ethnic-specific institutions and inter-group, ethnic-non-specific social networks) (Jones & Ram, 2010). In that case, mixed embeddedness may fruitfully contribute to a research agenda and a generalized theory of agency and structure in the sociological study of embeddedness. In this sense, mixed embeddedness may be just a specific form of a double embeddedness (i.e., of “the interrelationships of structural embeddedness and cultural embeddedness”) (Baker & Faulkner, 2009). While some authors suggested a link with Bourdieu’s theory, in particular with the concept of *habitus* as a way individuals have of giving meaning to the various worlds they have to deal with, structuring practice (Barrett & Verzhinina, 2017; Forson, Ozbilgin, Ozturk, & Tatli, 2014),⁹ Granovetter (2017, p. 201) tries to reconcile action, networks, norms, culture, and institutions, taking into consideration “complex combinations of economic practices” as assemblages formed by social actors via their networks, using a nonrandom “menu” of viable alternatives. He also suggests “more theoretical attention to the processes that create over long periods of time in a society the particular set or menu of perceived viable alternatives” (*ibidem*, p. 201).

We consider that the mixed embeddedness approach can feed this intellectual undertaking thanks to a renewed, critical focus on migrant entrepreneurship and its relationship with general social transformations. Migrant entrepreneurship, as seen through the lens of mixed embeddedness, can be a case in how alternatives in economic practice are selected. The literature based on this approach that we presented here in short was able to build on it in a fairly creative way, suggesting limitations but also ways to operationalize its use in a number of various fields. The consequent accumulation of knowledge has led mixed embeddedness to become a dominant paradigm in the specific field of research with still-promising paths to explore.

9. For an interesting reflection on the potential linkages between New Economic Sociology and Bourdieu, see Granovetter (2007).

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