

How to attract migrant entrepreneurs to peripheral regions? Evidence from Poland

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The article aims to identify market entrance barriers faced by migrant entrepreneurs and reasons for the attractiveness of specific places when starting a business in so-called peripheral regions.

Research Design & Methods: This article presents the results of a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews, for which 21 migrant entrepreneurs were interviewed in 2019 and 2020 in Opolskie Voivodeship.

Findings: The findings suggest the respondents selected the Opolskie Voivodeship for business activities on the bases of socio-spatial embeddedness. Neither the entrepreneurial ecosystem nor the promising economic situation were identified as meaningful for starting or growing businesses.

Implications & Recommendations: Drawing on the findings, the authors developed practical implications for policymakers. Attention should be given to tools attracting migrants to peripheral regions. Established migrant entrepreneurs in peripheral regions could be integrated into a regional attraction concept and make the local ecosystem more inclusive for this group of entrepreneurs. They may be turned into practice by giving them the right to member and participate in official networks of the economic development agency or the chamber of commerce. In general, the openness of migrants to reach out to support infrastructures for business creation should be actively addressed.

Contribution & Value Added: The research fills the research gaps relating to the spatial dimension and the regional context of the presence of migrant entrepreneurs in the peripheral areas of Poland.

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INTRODUCTION

Even though a few studies on the topic have been published in the past few years (Kordel *et al.*, 2022; Elo *et al.*, 2022; Elo *et al.*, 2019), research on peripheral regions and migrant entrepreneurship remains underdeveloped. In Poland, studies on migrant entrepreneurship and the spatial dimensions also rather tend to focus on larger cities and/or metropolitan areas as Krakow (Brzozowski, 2019) and Warsaw (Andrejuk, 2017; Brzozowska & Postuła, 2014) then on peripheries. However, since Poland has numerous peripheral regions, it is necessary to address the issue there. This article deals with peripheral regions understood as those that are not only rural but marginalized for various reasons, such as the example of Opolskie Voivodeship. The region has been suffering from a brain drain for decades due to strong labour emigration to Germany and Western Europe and currently has the lowest GDP in Poland (CSO, 2022). Moreover, Opolskie Voivodeship is located between two bigger agglomerations which are the region of Katowice and Wroclaw. On the one hand, this means that this peripheral is not visible and that it is not attractive for investors who tend to capitalise on the two large agglomerations and cities. On the other

hand, a highly educated workforce is attracted to the bigger agglomerations and students chose to study there, without considering the existing universities in Opole. Thus, human resource in form of students and experts is less available to Opolskie Voivodeship from the beginning. This again leads to a downward spiral: less available human capital, less purchasing power, less attractive places to live, fewer economic advantages, less good education, less visibility, etc. Therefore, being distressed by a declining economic force, exemplary Opolskie Voivodeship is dependent on immigration and entrepreneurial activities. During the increase in immigration in recent years, peripheral regions, in general, are beginning to participate in the discourse, as migrants can contribute to maintaining or expanding the diversity of peripheral and rural labour markets (Kordel *et al.*, 2022; Schemschat, 2021; David, 2015). While workers and self-employed often compete in larger cities and metropolitan areas, peripheral regions in general offer more potential for trying out business ideas and for start-ups. Here, also migrants as employees and entrepreneurs can contribute to the maintenance of the infrastructure, be creative and live and work at adequate distances. The uniqueness of migrant entrepreneurs' customer base due to diverse products and services (Curci & Mackoy, 2010) can broaden the economic sectors in 'left-behind places.' Migrant entrepreneurs' multifocal embeddedness (Solano *et al.*, 2022), which is the simultaneous involvement with places and people in several spatial spheres such as country of origin (CoO) and the country of residence (CoR) (Henn, 2014) can create new opportunities for peripheries and individuals living there. In this context, Vertovec (2009) discusses the possibility that migrant entrepreneurs' transnational links may broaden, deepen, and intensify economic societal transformation processes. Moreover, such interlinkages allow for the development of trust-based social relations, economic exchange, and activation of regions less attractive for indigenous entrepreneurs (Glinka, 2018).

After years of being out of focus for international migration, in recent years, Poland has become one of the major destinations in Europe for some groups of migrants (OECD, 2021). Apart from Ukraine, the top three nationalities of newcomers in 2019 were Belarus and India (OECD, 2021). With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, since February 2022, increased numbers of women with children have immigrated to Poland. Besides refugees seeking protection, other groups of migrants come to Poland for economic reasons. They are attracted by employment possibilities, higher wages, and higher living standards that Poland offers in comparison to their countries of origin.

Against this backdrop, the present article deals with the attraction of migrant entrepreneurship in the Opolskie Voivodeship (David *et al.*, 2022a; Xavier *et al.*, 2013). Hereby, the focus lies on the identification of pull factors and market entrance barriers faced by migrant entrepreneurs in this peripheral region, who are inspired to start or run businesses outside the country's central metropolitan areas. In so doing, the article addresses the identified research gap which relates to migrant entrepreneurial activities in peripheral regions in Poland and asks the following questions:

1. What originally attracted migrants living in Opolskie Voivodeship to this specific peripheral region?
2. What were their major reasons for starting a business in the Opolskie Voivodeship?
3. What were and are the main barriers hindering migrants to run their own businesses in the Opolskie Voivodeship?

In what follows, we will start with a literature review to position our study in the scientific discourse on migrant entrepreneurship and spatial dimensions. Next, we will introduce our method and the research design, and then our main results. Finally, the article will conclude with a discussion of the findings. The conclusions will draw some implications for policymakers. By linking results to current debates, we will formulate suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inspired by David *et al.* (2022a), in this article migrant entrepreneurship is defined as an umbrella term for the phenomenon of migrants starting and running businesses in CoRs in the first and second generation. In so doing, the authors do not neglect further subgroups of migrant entrepreneurship (David *et al.*, 2022a) such as, to name some, ethnic (Edwards *et al.*, 2016), diaspora (Sternberg *et al.*, 2023

forthcoming; Elo, & Minto-Coy, 2019) or refugee groups (Hartmann & Philipp, 2022). However, these groups do not play a role in the sample used here.

The fact that entrepreneurial activities are always embedded in a context was already demonstrated in studies by Polanyi (1944) and later Granovetter (1985). Both argue that economic activities at large are always embedded in social relations and cannot be taken out of the framework. Gradually, these ideas were translated into other scientific areas and in 1997, Oinas introduced the concept of spatial embeddedness. Against this backdrop, scholars recognise that entrepreneurship in general including migrant entrepreneurs is an important aspect of regional development and influences economic force (Sandoz *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, some posit that spatialities influence entrepreneurs in overall and in that line migrant entrepreneurs' activities in the same manner (David & Schäfer, 2022). The interplay between migrant businesses and the regional dimension becomes particularly clear in times of crisis. Others observe that especially through the many lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic, local embeddedness among and well-being of like-minded people (Andrejuk, 2022; Terstriep *et al.*, 2022) played a big role for SMEs, to which most migrant entrepreneurs belong. For instance, in Germany, specific measures were established for this vulnerable group of start-ups and SMEs (David *et al.*, 2022b). Distinct from earlier crises, the shock caused by COVID-19 forced businesses, especially SMEs and start-ups to handle unexpected changes in almost any area of their business activities (Schepers, 2021; Kuckertz *et al.*, 2020).

Drawing on embeddedness in geography, the concept was introduced by Hess (2004) and further developed into socio-spatial embeddedness. Besides the understanding of how regional environments affect economic activities, this concept was expanded by highlighting the relational perspective on economic actors and firms instead of analysing the geographical dimensions only (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003). In that vein, based on Yeung (2005; 2008) David and Schäfer (2022) highlight 'the characteristics of socio-spatial relations while accounting for power relations and actor-specific practice.' From the spatial perspective, considering relational space as an opportunity structure, Kloosterman *et al.* (1999) introduce their concept of mixed embeddedness describing migrant entrepreneurs in larger socio-spatial contexts. By combining multifocality and mixed embeddedness, Solano *et al.* (2022) argue that migrant entrepreneurs can be simultaneously involved in multiple groups of people and multiple places. This again refers mainly to those entrepreneurs who act transnationally. Transnationality in entrepreneurship describes the business makers who move and act cross-border (Harima & Baron 2020; Portes & You, 2013; Drori *et al.*, 2009; Portes, 2001). In these terms, entrepreneurs being transnational can make an important contribution to the transfer of knowledge over long distances in transnational social spaces (Henn, 2014; Pries, 2001). Since some of the migrant entrepreneurs live transnationally or have a transnational business model, it is these entrepreneurs who are recognised since the work of Saxenian (2007) as main contributors to the growth of regions.

However, it is rare to find topic-related studies in rural areas and peripheries relating to Poland. Still, there are such exceptions as entrepreneurship in border regions, *e.g.* between Poland and Germany (Skraba & Nowicka, 2018) or refugee entrepreneurship in German rural areas (Kordel *et al.*, 2022), the Marche region in central Italy (Brzozowski & Cucculelli, 2020), Baden-Württemberg in Germany (Leicht *et al.*, 2012) or rural immigrant entrepreneurship in Norway (Munkejord, 2017).

Arguing that in the context of regional development, entrepreneurship is a supporting factor (Matejovsky *et al.*, 2014), this, even more, applies to rural and in the case of Opolskie Voivodeship to peripheral regions. To close the knowledge gap related to understanding the contribution of migrant entrepreneurs in peripheral regions, our study can give some hints. While the survey does not address the exact circumstance of how migrant entrepreneurs contribute to the development of peripheral regions, it goes a step ahead and assumes that migrants make a regional contribution as entrepreneurs. Therefore, this article examines how to attract these migrants to peripheral regions and, in the best case, entice them to start up activities. Therefore, this study was intended to analyse the motives of decision-making of migrants for a specific destination, namely the Opolskie Voivodeship. Moreover, we decided to analyse the motives and barriers for migrant entrepreneurship in the Opolskie Voivodeship in connection to the decision to start up the business, particularly in this part of Poland.

Based on this, we formulated the following research questions.

- RQ1:** What originally attracted migrants living in Opolskie Voivodeship to this specific peripheral region?
- RQ2:** What were their major reasons for starting a business in the Opolskie Voivodeship?
- RQ3:** Which were and are the main barriers hindering migrants from running their own businesses in the Opolskie Voivodeship?

Next, we will provide insight into the chosen research method, present the results, and discuss them while developing implications for policymakers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. For this, an interview questionnaire was developed and piloted. The next step was the challenging identification of respondents who fulfilled the criteria of being migrant entrepreneurs in peripheral regions with entrepreneurial activities. To make arrangements with the target group, scholars used their networks and the so-called extended networks (through colleagues, acquaintances, and snowball sampling).

Additionally, contact was made with the Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany in Opole, which regularly organises meetings of German entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of German descent operating in the region (so-called *Stammtisch*). The involved scholars took part in such a meeting, during which they gained several contacts for research. The second institution that was contacted to attract respondents was the Opole Centre for Economic Development (OCRG). In addition, a database of Central Registration and Information on Businesses (CEIDG) was used, which was analysed for names suggesting that an entrepreneur may have a migration history. Unfortunately, a significant number of contacts were outdated, and it was not possible to obtain up-to-date contact details. Further attempts have also been made by using social media – Facebook – through posting information about the research (both quantitative and qualitative) on groups such as ‘Ukrainians in Opole.’ As a result, 21 respondents were selected. The basic characteristics of the respondents and their enterprises are presented in Table 1.

Acknowledging the several different nationalities of the respondents, it was decided not to differentiate them according to nationality or their CoO. The interviews were conducted personally by researchers and by students, who were trained for this purpose. The interviews were guideline oriented. This means, the interviewers received a list of issues to be addressed during the interview but did not strictly stick to an order. On average, the interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were conducted between September and December 2019 and February and May 2020. They were carried out in Polish, as all interviewees expressed readiness to use the Polish language.

The analysis of the interviews was done within the framework of the grounded theory (Hensel & Glinka, 2012). The analysis was performed using open coding and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). To ensure the quality of the analysis, an audit trial procedure and a procedure for cooperation and disconfirming evidence were used (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Firstly, in-vivo coding was performed using MAXQDA software. The coding was approached by individual researchers, coding independently of each other. Following this procedure, during a joint meeting, the researchers double reviewed their codes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- RQ1:** What originally attracted migrants living in Opolskie Voivodeship to this specific peripheral region?

Most of the respondents declared that they decided to start up a business in the Opolskie Voivodeship, because they were already inhabitants of this area. Only three respondents did not previously live in the region. Respondents were also asked about the reasons for choosing the Opolskie as their place of residence. Among the respondents from Ukraine, the existence of a network of contacts was indicated (chain migration), such as friends and family members. This attracted respondents to the region by also simplifying formal administrative matters. Moreover, the same respondents indicated

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

| Item | Nationality | Gender | Previous professional experience or education gained in the country of origin | Sector of industry | Company size |
|------|---------------|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Italy | male | Working in the logistics industry | Transport | up to 9 persons |
| 3* | Ukraine | female | Working in a production plant | Cosmetic | Self-employed |
| 4 | Germany | male | Law studies | Law | Self-employed |
| 5 | Germany | male | Agriculture | Hotel industry, agriculture | up to 9 persons |
| 7 | Ukraine | female | Computer science, studies: finance, Experience as an accountant and material processing engineer | Information Technology | up to 9 persons |
| 8 | Germany | male | Electrical industry | Electrical industry | up to 49 persons |
| 9 | Ukraine | male | Architectural studies | Construction industry | up to 49 persons |
| 10 | Egypt | male | Studies in the field of intercultural communication and art | Catering | up to 9 persons |
| 11 | Libya | male | Chemistry | Catering | up to 9 persons |
| 12 | United States | male | Law | Law | Self-employed |
| 13 | Georgia | male | Management studies | Catering | up to 9 persons |
| 14 | Ukraine | male | Studies | Catering and hotel industry | up to 9 persons |
| 15 | Turkey | male | Catering | Catering | up to 9 persons |
| 16 | Ukraine | female | Librarian | Cosmetic | Self-employed |
| 17 | Turkey | male | Catering | Catering | Self-employment |
| 18 | Ukraine | male | Construction industry technical high school, construction industry | Construction industry | up to 9 persons |
| 19 | Ukraine | male | Construction industry | Construction industry | up to 9 persons |
| 20 | Ukraine | male | Economics | Photovoltaics | up to 49 persons |
| 21 | Ukraine | male | Biology and chemistry academic teacher | Catering | up to 49 persons |
| 22 | Ukraine | female | Product Manager | Florist | up to 9 persons |
| 23 | Ukraine | female | Nurse | Hair and beauty salon | up to 9 persons |

Note: * respondents 2 and 6 were excluded from the survey because they had dual citizenship.

Source: own elaboration.

that originally the regional employment agency assisted them to find employment in companies based in Opole. In the case of migrants from Germany and the United States, a sentimental factor was important. Both respondents No. 5 and No. 12 pointed to Polish origins and family roots because some of their ancestors came from the Opolskie Voivodship. Respondent No. 5 clarified that he came to Poland in the early 1990s during the privatisation of state-owned agricultural farms (PGR) and then, in favourable economic conditions, he decided to start his own business. Respondent No. 12 decided to study law in Poland for sentimental reasons. Respondents from Ukraine, Italy, and Georgia also indicated that they came to Opolskie for a higher education degree. Due to the demographic low, being located between two large academic centres, and the need to counteract the decline in the number of students, Opole universities have been very active in (re-)attracting foreign students for years, which, as research has shown, remain in the region after graduation (David, 2015). For some interviewees, the Opolskie Voivodship was not the first region of residence in Poland. Some of them previously lived in Toruń, Poznań (large cities in central Poland), or Jelcz-Laskowice (a small town in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship). Respondents who did not previously live in the region declared that they chose this area as their spouses came from this area and they considered the target city as attractive. Furthermore, respondent No. 3 not only was from Opolskie Voivodship, but he also obtained assistance from the authorities, and most of his clients were from Opole and its surroundings.

RQ2: What were their major reasons for starting a business in the Opolskie Voivodeship?

The respondents were asked to recall the moment when they decided to start up the business and to explain their motives at that time. Within this area, the distinguished first- and second-order codes are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Motives for starting a business in the Opolskie Voivodeship

Source: own elaboration.

The named motives were divided into internal and external motivations. Among the internal motives, the respondents indicated above all the needs of a higher order, *i.e.*, striving for independence, self-reliance, or the desire to use one's own skills. Respondent No. 9 indicated:

Because I worked in different plants like this in Poland, and I just, I was there just for heavy lifting and not to..., and that forced me to start my own business and just do something myself, create something. And I also wanted to be independent because I usually had to do something that I didn't want to do, for example, various things and it forced me to start my own business and opened my eyes to grow and do something on my own.

On the other hand, personal preferences include the respondents' comments that they have chosen a particular industry because they have always liked performing certain activities.

The second group of reasons were external ones. Most often the respondents indicated a financial, or in a broader sense, economic, motive, but as in the case of respondent No. 19, it was partly connected with the desire to help his family in the home country:

The main factor in establishing the business was the desire to earn more to help my family in Ukraine. I liked working for my current employer and I was treated well, and my salary was paid on time.

In addition, respondents indicated a market gap or high demand for a given offer. As indicated by respondent No. 13:

In Opole, we are the first; we are something else. For example, there is no such bread here as we make in Georgia. There's bread there that... that's so natural. There are no additives, for example, chemicals and such, and that is why it is healthier for people.

Respondent No. 10 also indicated that he changed his plans based on market conditions:

At first, we wanted to sell dresses, but not too much in Opole. By researching the market, we decided on fast food. It's a good location for such a business.

Some respondents suggested that their own business activity was a condition for them to work in their profession:

I cannot be employed as an attorney-at-law. Starting my own business was the only way I could work in my profession (respondent No. 4).

On more than one occasion the interviewees specified that they were guided by a certain combination of internal and external motivation, as in the case of respondent No. 12:

The crucial reason, I can tell you that, above all, was that I needed more autonomy than before. The need to be independent, *i.e.* the need to become independent, to be self-managed, not to be just some cog in another mechanism, *i.e.* an employee in the whole system of a given company, institution, etc. To be able to realise my ideas, to choose contractors or clients on my own and, above all, I won't hide the fact that the aim was also to achieve certain financial independence, not just to manage everything on my own – to shape the directions of actions, but also to work on my own account and, as a result of this independence, to achieve certain income here on my own account.

The analysis of the motives for starting one's own business was made with a division into the nature of motivation, distinguishing necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. This distinction is particularly important because, as the research has shown, necessity-driven entrepreneurship has a lower chance of survival than opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (Brzozowski, 2019).

RQ3: What were and are the main barriers hindering migrants from running their own businesses in the Opolskie Voivodeship?

Another issue that appeared in virtually all interviews was the difficulty of establishing, but also running a business in Poland. Here, three respondents seem to be an exception (R3, R11, R15). Within this area, the first- and second-order codes we distinguished are shown in Figure 2.

The largest group of the barriers indicated were classified as administrative and legal barriers. Legal differences between CoO and CoR were pointed out, which resulted in some adaptation difficulties for migrant entrepreneurs. The excessive distribution of competences between offices was stressed, which was even described as non-functional administration. The legal status of migrants was also named as a barrier, as indicated by *e.g.* Respondent No. 10. and Respondent No. 23 who mentioned the tardiness of public administration and officials' 'arrogance':

The biggest problem is Polish offices. Well, as with those girls who wait for a work permit: by law you wait a month, in the provincial office you must wait six months. For example, I come as an employer.... the applications are not available on the website of the office ... you have to go to the office. And in the office as I understand, the application should be there, lying to take [but it is not there, instead there is] a queue, I wait an hour in the corridor to take the application, I enter the room, and this woman says to me 'Get out of here, I'll call you,' I stood up and said to her 'Excuse me?,' and it began. I sat for an hour in the corridor to take the paper, and she says to me 'Get out of here.' Well, I try not to let myself be pushed around. Because they should be for us, not we for them. I always think like this: according to your institution I don't have a single zloty of arrears, I don't Therefore, if I need it, it is due to me, and I don't have to ask for it. Officially it is 30 days, I will wait 30 days but not 31.

Respondent No. 22 mentioned also difficulties related to the access to external funds to support the business. Since the legal status depends on the legal system in a given country (and is independent of the entity itself), it has been classified as administrative and legal rather than personal factor.

The second group of barriers were identified as individual or personal barriers, among which the language barrier was mentioned most often. This also refers to the fears of attracting customers or the reaction of the competition, including the previous superior.

Further barriers were classified as social barriers. These include manifestations of intolerance and resentments of Polish society as well as Polish customer's lack of trust. As indicated by Respondent No. 18:

The contact with Poles was hard. If you are running a business and you are a foreigner, at the beginning they don't trust you, I don't know, for various reasons. Of course, we were providing our services very carefully and later there were Polish customers because at the beginning our customers were not from Poland. Later, when the customers from Poland showed up, they were very satisfied.

The lack of tolerance in society was indicated by respondents from Germany, Turkey, and Egypt, like respondent No. 10:

Firstly, I think people should change; their attitude is wrong. They can see where we're from and they're getting above themselves.

The last barriers have been classified as market barriers and they include problems with recruiting employees both due to lack of desired qualifications and lack of motivation, especially among Poles. Respondent No. 1 indicated:

Here's the problem in finding a skilled worker in the transport industry, a driver who can drive, but not only going forward, but also reversing to a loading dock, manoeuvre the back of the vehicle, because that is actually a problem. ... Finding people from Poland is getting harder and harder because of the 500+ [Polish benefit program]. At the beginning of the year, I had an employee from Poland. He said that he would rather sit at home than go to work because he gets tired at work. There is also a problem with young people who are not willing to work. ... They don't care [about consequences]. This is a different approach. It could be 10 years of difference between me and those who come to work, but a completely different mentality and different approach. You must know their qualifications well and verify them.

Due to strongly articulated difficulties with starting and running a business in Poland, the respondents were asked about the source of assistance in formal and administrative matters. These sources were divided into institutional and individual. Among institutional sources, the respondents indicated attorneys-at-law and notaries, an accounting office, the City Hall, and universities. Among the sources classified as individual, the following were mainly indicated: friends, other entrepreneurs, including parents and previous employer, wife/partner of Polish origin, the Internet, previous clients, employees, and own knowledge resulting from the profession (lawyer).

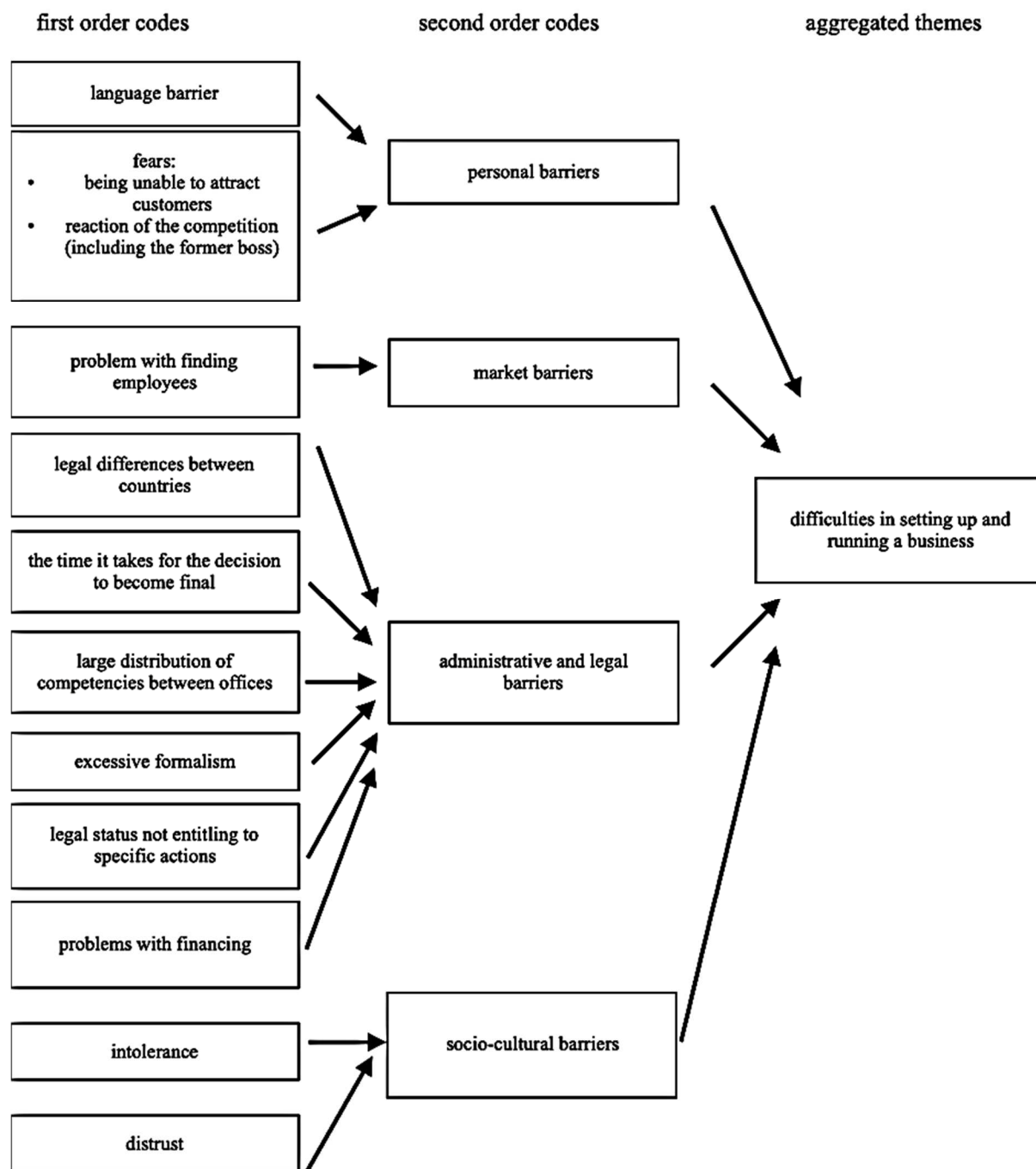


Figure 2. Difficulties in starting and running a business
 Source: own elaboration.

Informal (individual) sources of information prevail over institutional sources, which may suggest some shortcomings in public administration in terms of promotion and assistance to migrants’ wishing to start their own businesses in Poland. It is particularly alarming that despite a relatively extensive network of business support institutions in the Opolskie Voivodship, most respondents declared that they did not cooperate with such entities. Respondent No. 19 even mentioned the fear of co-operation with such entities:

I don’t know any companies that support people like me in running a business. I do everything myself and a friend who knows Polish helps me. I’ve never heard of companies that support people like me. There are of course consulting companies, but they charge a lot of money for

consulting, and they give nothing concrete in return. I didn't use the help of such companies, but my colleagues told me about these companies and cheaters.

The observation that migrant entrepreneurs rely more on personal and family networks than on official resources and support infrastructures is one of the characteristics also identified by Metzger (2016), Leicht *et al.* (2012) and David *et al.*, (2020) for countries like Germany.

Research has shown that migrant entrepreneurship is not limited to large metropolitan areas but also occurs in peripheral areas. In countries, that are rural per se, such as parts of Ireland, this is uncontroversial. However, to answer RQ 1, the migrants interviewed in our study did not select the Opolskie Voivodeship deliberately in terms of starting their own business. The fact that their businesses were in this peripheral area results from their circumstances, which might be them living or studying in this area, or is connected to private or sentimental matters. Nonetheless, one of the respondents indicated that she has her customers in the Opolskie Voivodship. It is interesting that respondent no. 3 revealed that she received assistance from support infrastructure when starting up her business. This may have practical implications for decision-makers. It draws attention to the willingness and openness of migrants to cooperate with offices or entities supporting migrant businesses. The offer of assistance to migrants aimed at activating them by starting up their own businesses could therefore be expanded. To answer RQ 2, two types of motives for starting a business were identified: external and internal. Regarding RQ 3 the following barriers were identified: personal, market, administrative, legal, and socio-cultural.

Entrepreneurial activities in peripheral regions are becoming increasingly important in the public and academic debate, also in Poland. Although large cities and metropolitan areas are the attraction points for crowds of people and herewith for migrants, it is above all peripheral regions that are dependent on brain gain. Our study has contributed to closing the knowledge gap by addressing the questions mentioned above. Based on this, we were able to indicate that for almost all respondents the so-called socio-spatial embeddedness played a role both in the question about the choice of the region and in the question about the reasons for the business foundation. Human relations and a sense of belonging through sentiment were the reasons that created a deep attachment to the peripheral region of Opolskie Voivodeship. Here, our studies are in line with Yeung (2008), and Henn (2014) and show that socio-spatial embeddedness plays a crucial role in business creation. With reference to studies of Kordel *et al.*, 2022 and Elo *et al.*, 2019, our study revealed that peripheral regions can be attractive to migrants setting up businesses, *e.g.*, when it comes to customer base and trying oneself out in the role of an entrepreneur. Finally, in line with studies of Terstriep *et al.* (2022) on migrant start-ups in Berlin, we illustrated that being embedded in a region and being among like-minded people can help to overcome crises and make businesses more resilient.

CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that migrant entrepreneurship can be analysed on several levels with some simplification. The first level is the successful migrant entrepreneurs. They started a business that brings them considerable profits; they develop it by increasing employment or implementing innovation or at least inventions, acquiring new markets, etc. They entered CoR with a specific view of starting a business or with a business idea already in place. The second group are migrants who worked full-time but wanted to try their hand at creating their own business. This was often dictated by the desire to leave dependent employment related to the secondary labour market, *i.e.* those related to unattractive manual work with low prestige and low wages. The third group are people who were 'forced' by the labour market to start a business operation, which is known as necessity-driven entrepreneurship.

As with all studies, also our study comes with limitations. We make no claim to the representativeness of the study. We have presented a small sample of respondents and a great diversity due to their CoO, industries, company size, as well as duration of stay. This can simply be explained by the difficulty in attracting respondents. Notably, some respondents were excluded from the research due to their dual citizenship. The language barrier is the next challenge when conducting research with migrants in general and in our case with migrant entrepreneurs.

We were not able to shed enough light on some topics, but we were able to identify further fields of future research. Further studies could deepen the understanding of the process of attracting migrants to peripheral regions. In the past, some studies on migrants and 'left-behind places' have been conducted (David *et al.*, 2015). However, these migrants, like our sample, had in beforehand ties to the analysed regions. It would be interesting to analyse whether the already established migrant businesses in peripheral regions could attract further migrant entrepreneurs from outside the regions. Next, the group currently requiring special attention in further studies, due to their size and activity in the labour market in Poland are refugees from Ukraine. The analysis of the situation of migrants and refugees from a post-communist country starting their economic activity in another post-communist country, where economic migration is quite a new phenomenon, seems of high interest. Hereby, a focus could lie on the similarities of entrepreneurial cultures and the path dependence of entrepreneurial ecosystems due to similar political and historical circumstances. Another aspect could focus on the openness of the native population in peripheral regions towards foreign populations. It could discuss whether there are tensions here when it comes to migrant entrepreneurship, or whether people are contented when they encounter cultural diversity when it comes to, *e.g.* food diversity.

In view of our results, we suggest policymakers that they should first develop an agenda attracting migrants as a group. Already in the early 2000s, there was discussion about the need to address brain gain proactively and to have strategic plans for it (David, 2015). For migrants, who mostly move to the metropolitan regions, the peripheries can bring advantages when entering the labour market and self-employment. Because of the lower human capital, people can try here things out and implement creative ideas. Second, policymakers should establish migrant entrepreneurs in peripheral regions as integration points for those who want to become self-employed. In terms of chain migration, migrants who have already made it to peripheral regions could attract other migrants and in that sense be seen as door-openers and pioneers to follow. Thirdly, they should actively address the openness of migrants to reach out to support infrastructures for business creation. An inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem could ensure that migrants dare to make use of support measures, so that more opportunity-driven businesses make it to the markets.

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