

Positioning Strategies of Polish Entrepreneurs in Germany: Transnationalizing Bourdieu's Notion of Capital

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Positioning Strategies of Polish Entrepreneurs in Germany: Transnationalizing Bourdieu's Notion of Capital

Magdalena Nowicka

Abstract My contribution studies in-depth how Polish entrepreneurs in Munich, Germany, make use of their economic, social, and cultural capital acquired in Poland and in Germany to position themselves transnationally. I study these migrants' life courses and draw attention to cross-border intersections between their cultural, social, and economic capital with roots in different places. I also throw light on the subjective evaluation of economic capital of migrants in a transnational frame. I discern three types of transnational social positioning of the migrants (single space, bi-local and overlapping), which suggest a new reading of Bourdieu's work that is better adapted to the theoretical challenges faced by researchers who study people in transnational spaces.

Introduction

Many people around the world have ties to more than one locality, and many of these localities are in two or more countries. By now, this fact sounds banal to scholars of transnational migration. While they may argue about the scope of this phenomenon, they are convinced that the consequences of it are quite significant (Vertovec, 2009). These scholars recognize the change in people's life strategies and in the frames of reference for their actions that now stretch between countries. Social scientists who are less often confronted with migrant lives and who are used to analyzing life chances (defined by Max Weber as an individual's access to resources and ability to improve her/his quality of life), social mobility or labor market participation within single nation-states, lack the analytical tools to adequately investigate such transnational phenomena (Weiss, 2005). In particular, social inequality scholars, who look at migrants as an 'exception to the rule' of national belonging, as groups on the margins of national societies, are in need of setting new frames for their research.

Migration scholars could easily give plenty of examples from their research of people who work for a certain period of time in one country, return home for work and migrate

temporarily again, who are sometimes employed legally, sometimes illegally, and sometimes unemployed in one or both countries, who draw social benefits in one place as unemployed while simultaneously being paid under the table in another. When considered from the perspective of one country at one point in time, these people may be categorized as underprivileged or unqualified given their economic or educational attainments, and such analysis is very likely to overlook or miss explanations of why an unemployed father with no access to state social benefits can afford a new car, renovate a house or send children to a private school. Certainly, such people pose a challenge to the established scholarship. The following paper considers exactly these kinds of cases.

My paper focuses on the trajectories of migrant transnational incorporation -- the way migrants are connected to localities and social networks in the home and the receiving country (Glick Schiller et al., 2004) -- and on how the social positions the migrants achieve in both influence each other. In the following, I present the analysis of seven case studies selected from the study conducted by [name of student], the master's student whom I supervised during the 2006/2007 academic year in Munich, with self-employed migrants of Polish origin (author/student, 2007). The primary aim of her analysis was to estimate the impact of the partial opening of the German labor market to Polish citizens following the Enlargement of the European Union to the East in May 2004 (see Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2009) on migrants' choice of forms of employment as well as to investigate the related shifts in the social positions (Hradil, 1987).

In regard to the method of investigation, [student name] study made use of the approach coming from the field of biographical research that has been implemented in migration studies and which focuses on life courses of migrants in retrospect (for an overview of the method, see Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007). With the help of in-depth interviews and making use of the

Grounded Theory (Strauss, 1987;; also Glaser, 1978), she depicted the employment and migration trajectories in the life course of individuals (Pries, 2001). The analysis occurred in several stages in which the phenomena were first identified and labeled and later classified (the so-called open coding – comp. Strauss and Corbin, 1996: 44f). These steps revealed all kinds of employment relations (illegal, wage labor and self-employed) and periods of unemployment in relation to change of residence, the origin and destination of remittances, reasons for changing and forms of searching for jobs, the shape of social networks and their role in employment and migration, and structural conditions influencing employment opportunities, as well as the migrant’s subjective estimations of his or her own situation and prospects for the future. Further, the descriptive concepts were ordered into categories of an abstract character. Subsequently, the categories were compared with each other and with the literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1996: 188f) which allowed for distinguishing three forms of transnational social positioning.

[student name] study revealed a great variation of social, cultural, and economic ties among Polish immigrants in Germany that link them with Poland. The selection of seven case studies on which I base my contribution is informed by the principle of maximal variation (see also Vershinina et al., 2009) in respect to forms of transnationalism among Polish migrant entrepreneurs. The degree of transnationalism is relevant in respect to the possibilities of cross-national validation of country-specific forms of capital as well as in the context of judging one’s own social position according to the rules of the country of origin.

My aim is to present different types of social positioning in multiple locations and to demonstrate their dynamics. I define transnational social positioning as the outcome of intersections and conversions of social, economic, and cultural capital across national borders. In this study, I bring together three elements: 1) different degrees of migrant transnationalism; 2) possibilities for transnational validation of capital; and 3) transnational framing of migrants’

self-perceptions. I proceed with an overview of application of Bourdieu's approach in the context of studies on transnational phenomena, including migration. I then describe briefly my sample and move on to discuss the trajectories and social positioning of the self-employed Poles in Munich. I distinguish a single space, bi-local, and overlapping positioning. Finally, I argue that understanding such positioning requires a new analytical framework. I suggest a theoretical model of thinking about social inequality that draws on Bourdieu's notion of capital in transnational terms.

Theoretical Framework: Capital Intersections in a Transnational Context

Scholars of transnational migration have been strong in their critique of taking the national units as the lens of social science analysis for granted (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). This critique has also found its way to the sociology of social inequality. For example, Beck and Grande (2007) speak of the congruence of the political status and the socio-economic status of a person, which is the widely accepted pattern of class analysis. Accordingly, holders of one passport will be compared with each other in terms of their earnings, education, etc. In this sense, the classical social inequality analysis is doubly exclusive: it relies on the territorial exclusiveness of nation-states (which cannot overlap) and excludes non-nationals (as people assigned clearly to one national territory) from the analysis (Pries, 1997). The reasons why the sociology of social inequality has focused on inequalities inside of nation-states are of a historical nature: the modern equality norms were justified by national movements, institutionalized in the form of national citizenship, and guaranteed, at least to some extent, through the nation-state's mechanism of re-distribution (Bommes, 1999; Weiss, 2005). National statistics of inequality were, thus, one of the instruments of this process, and they remain the main source of information for social science analysis of inequality until today.

Scholarship in transnational migration gave way to a new focus on the nation-state as an actor in the structuring of the social inequality related to migration processes. In this context, Bourdieu's notion of capital was used. Bourdieu (1985) suggested that social stratification is the result of the uneven distribution of four forms of capital. He distinguishes economic (which includes income, wealth, financial inheritances and assets), social (resources based on connections, group membership, generated in social networks), cultural, and symbolic capital. Cultural capital can take three forms: embodied (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body, such as literacy), objectified (cultural goods) and institutionalized (eg. educational degrees). Each of these three forms of capital takes the form of symbolic capital once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. Generally, each form of capital can be converted into the other: having the right social connection may help you to find employment and increase your income and with high income you can compensate for not having friends who help you out, and so on (Bourdieu, 1984; 2006).

With the help of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Nohl et al. (2006) investigated the entry of immigrants into the labor market in the host country. The legal and social recognition of institutionalized cultural capital -- in the form of educational attainments -- is crucial to immigrants' chances on the labor market. In this sense, migration can distort or devalue cultural capital. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) show how the notion of social capital is useful for understanding the modes of immigrant incorporation in host countries. Nee and Sanders (2001) attempt to integrate all three forms of capital in a profile brought by immigrants from different countries to Los Angeles, and then to predict their labor market integration. But while some analyses refer to the possibilities of exchange, trade or transfer of different forms of capital (Skeggs, 1997; Devine et al., 2005; Nohl et al., 2010), they also assume relatively closed entities of nation-states as obvious units of investigation (Kofman, 2008). While researching migrants, these scholars root their analyses entirely in the site of either immigration

or emigration.

It has become almost fashionable to accuse the classics of social theory of methodological nationalism, and this critique has also included Bourdieu. The most common claim is that his work is nation(-state) blind as it does not explicitly consider the workings of nation-states on social fields, habitus, social classes or cultural capital (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). In particular, when defining the notion of cultural capital, Bourdieu had in mind the French academic system, and authors using the concept needed to adapt his definition to different cultural contexts (Lamont and Lareau, 1988).

Bourdieu did indeed think about social class formation within the nation-state framework, but his model is potentially universal in the sense that it could also include sources of capital being produced and utilized in more than one country. More recently, some authors have used select elements of Bourdieu's theory in a global or transnational context and shown how such openings towards intersections of capital across national borders are possible. For example, Weiss (2005) is interested in the possibility of transnational class formation and focuses on transnational lifestyles and careers as a process of group formation that could lead to the establishment of social classes. Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor (2005) emphasize in respect to globalized forms of education that the concept of a field is primarily metaphorical and social and not geographical, and can therefore be applied to spaces that reach beyond the national. A similar idea was presented by Glick Schiller and Levitt (2004), who conceptualize transnational social spaces with the help of Bourdieu's notion of a field and stress that people occupy more than one social field at a time. Kelly and Lusia (2006) chose the concept of habitus to explain that economic, social, and cultural capital does not simply transfer to a new setting but that a process of valuation and exchange continues between the places of origin and destination well after settlement has occurred (see also Erel 2010).

In the following analysis, I complement Bourdieu's notion of capital with Hradil's

(1987) concept of social position. While the first allows me to show the conversions and intersections of each of the forms of capital, the concept of social position helps me to track the social mobility (upward or downward movement of individuals within the system of social stratification in society) of the researched self-employed. Social positions, according to Hradil (2005: 40), can be determined by a variety of factors -- vertical (hierarchical, e.g. wealth) and horizontal (e.g. gender, age), objective (e.g. income, educational attainments, welfare transfers), and subjective (e.g. prestige, discrimination). This understanding of a social position allows us to examine how consistent such positions, determined by a particular set of factors (forms of capital), are, for example, economic vs. social factors. It is particularly useful in a context of migration as such status inconsistencies may occur between countries (comp. Nieswand 2011). In this respect, I diverge from Bourdieu by focusing on inconsistencies of status positions across dimensions instead of stressing the totality of a position. I concentrate on changes in social positions in the process of migration -- and this over time and between sites. I look at the intersections of different types of capital as embedded in social space while also focusing on how geographical locations are crucial to the possibilities for appreciation and transformation of the forms of capital.

Aside from capital conversion across national borders, I also look at how migrants assess their own economic capital. According to Bourdieu (1977, 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), various forms of capital are differently valued and given meaning in different contexts. Subjective perceptions can be understood as a form of embodied cultural capital. Attitudes, interpretations, and definitions of life situations, value-related prioritized needs or aims (e.g. self-fulfillment vs. economic wealth), may gain or lose importance in shaping the social structure of modern societies (Hradil 1987; 2005). Some scholars have shown how subjective perceptions of migrants contrast the 'objective' or 'official' definitions of upward or downward social mobility (Segura 1989; van den Berg 2011).

Bourdieu and Hradil, as well as the new approaches to migrant social mobility, stress the contingent nature of social positioning, which is determined within a specific social and spatial context. This contingency is particularly visible in the case of migrants who ‘switch’ between two or more contexts in the country of origin and arrival (Kelly and Lusia, 2006). It is because they move between two systems of values that are attached, for example, to ethnic ties and bonds (Favell, 2003). The fact of being Polish can be an asset or a constraint when mobilized in Germany. For example, the stereotype of Polish men as trustworthy all-rounders facilitates access to jobs when it is normal and generally accepted for Germans to pay a Polish craftsman under the table (Palenga-Möllnbeck 2012). Thus, Poles can experience a positive intersection of ethnic origin and gender enabling them to improve their social positioning.

Self-employed Poles in Munich

At the time of the interviews, all of the seven respondents -- two women and five men -- were self-employed. All of them came to Germany before Poland’s accession to the EU in May 2004 and two have been living periodically in Germany and in Poland. All of them have Polish citizenship but those who have lived in Germany longer (with one exception) have a work permit or German citizenship as well. One person used to live in Germany illegally. Since May 2004, all of them have a European residency permit and self-employment is an option for all of them (Fihel et al. 2006). Three of our interviewees were self-employed before 2004, and four opted for it after the EU enlargement. They represent different businesses and occupations: a pizzeria (with one employee), a construction firm (as self-employed worker and a company with one employee, respectively), a taxi company (with three employees), a medical practice (with one employee), a cleaning company (with seven employees), and a grocery store (with one employee).

In terms of education, three of the interviewees have a university degree: in medicine (now running her own medical practice); in political science (now owner of a pizzeria); and in engineering (now running a taxi company); one person has tertiary education (as a specialist in heating technologies, who now employs two people in a construction company). Two other people have secondary education (who now own a grocery store and a cleaning company, respectively), and one has lower secondary qualifications (now a self-employed construction worker). Thus, most of the interviewees work in fields that have little or nothing to do with the education they obtained (for more detailed profiles, see [author/student], 2007).

Migrant Trajectories and Types of Migrant Social Positioning

Transnational connections (Vertovec, 2009) are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of transnational social positioning. However, they open up a possibility for the validation of cultural, social, and economic capital in more than one country simultaneously, and the transnational social spaces set the borders for the mental framing of migrants' self-positioning. Some of the dimensions of everyday transnationalism identified in the interviews include family and friendship ties, the usage of the Polish language and media, or religious practices and geographical mobility. However, the interviewees vary strongly in the degree of their transnational engagement (see also Glorius, 2007). While some ties have a durable and regular character, others tend to be more temporary and fleeting.

In the following, I distinguish three types of migrant social positioning: single-space, bi-national, and overlapping which are closely related to the intensity and type of migrants transnational connections. The first type is characterized by few conversions of capital across nation-state borders, and the individuals orient their lives almost entirely towards one country.

Bi-local and overlapping forms of positioning are both transnational but they differ in respect to the degree in which changes capital conversions between two countries impact on the social positioning of migrants. Bi-locally positioned migrants use capital obtained in one country to improve their position in the other; overlapping positioning is a result of continues conversions in two directions, thereby migrants live almost parallel lives, being embedded in two countries simultaneously.

Migrant Social Positioning in a Single Space

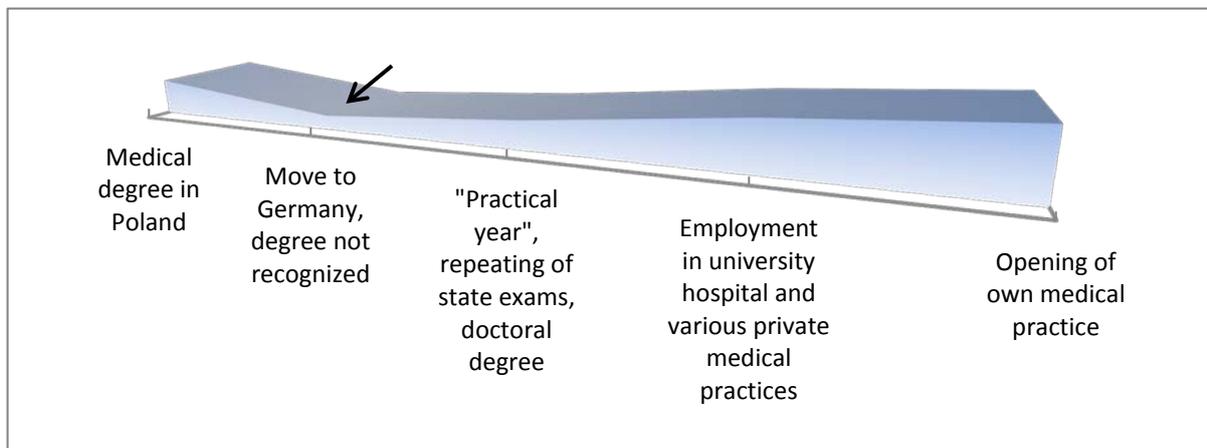
The first three Polish entrepreneurs in Munich -- Alicja, Gosia and Mirek -- have weak transnational ties. Despite the fact that all of them maintain private social networks in both countries and feel strong emotional links to Poland, meaning that their identities and lifestyles have transnational elements, their social positioning is primarily in a single, national, space.

Alicja (figure 1¹) came to Germany immediately after completing her medical studies in Poland because she married a German man. She did not speak German when she moved to Munich and wanted to learn it before applying for a job. Although Alicja's degree in medicine was not recognized in Germany, she is the only person interviewed who currently works in her learned profession. In order to do so, she first completed a so-called practical year in a German hospital, sat the state exams anew, and obtained a German doctoral degree in medicine, which then enabled her to undertake skilled employment in hospitals and private practices in Germany.

Alicja thinks she was naïve (because she underestimated the German bureaucracy), but hard working and strongly motivated to stay in Germany, and that this is why she managed to overcome the difficulties on her way to a professional career in Germany. Emotional aspects are of great importance in Alicja's case as they helped her to bridge the gaps in institutionalized cultural capital (comp. Anthias, 2007). Being married to a German enabled her in many

instances to obtain important information in a shorter amount of time than other migrants, to learn German faster and to find the necessary energy and motivation in a long phase of qualifying as a medical doctor in Germany. Thus, she converted her particular social capital -- marriage with a German national -- to cultural capital.

Figure 1: Alicja's trajectory

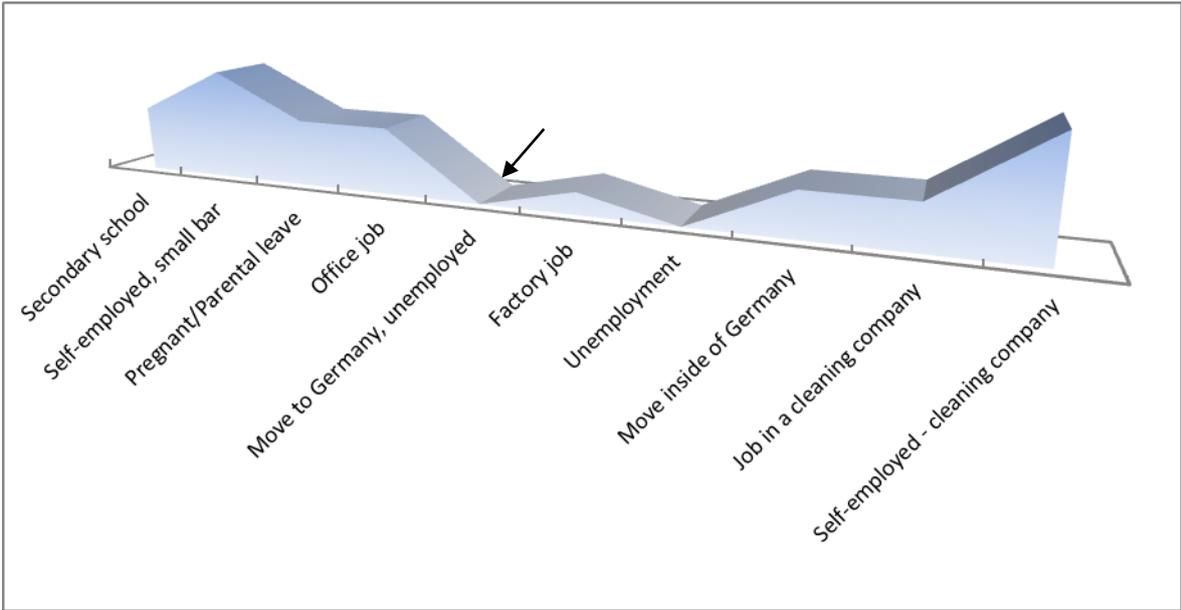


Germany is Alicja's focal point: her private and professional life, her aspirations and career aims are oriented towards Germany entirely. Polish language and culture (primarily religiousness) are a part of her identity, but she does not consider returning to Poland. Her family and friends in Poland are not the ones with whom she would compare herself now. She evaluates her current social position and in particular the success in professional life in comparison to her German colleagues and friends and she is satisfied with her own social position.

Another example is Gosia, who runs a cleaning company. Despite the fact that she obtained German citizenship after migrating to Germany (she was able to prove that she was an ethnic German because of her grandfather's status), her trajectory shows many ups and downs related to moves within Germany, periods of parental leave, and poor German language skills during the first years of emigration (figure 2). Gosia decided to give up the bar she was running in Poland when she was left alone with the two children while her husband went to work in Germany. She took an office job for a while in Poland, but finally followed her husband.

She was not looking for a job in Germany because she stayed at home with the then three children. Later she worked in a factory where her husband was also employed, but this job was very badly paid and she gave it up to care for the children and the household again. Only when her husband found a job in Munich did she move with him and then take a job in a cleaning company.

Figure 2: Gosia’s trajectory



Gosia thinks a comparison of her own situation with that of her family and friends is no longer possible for her. “Too much has changed in Poland,” she says in the interview, and that she thinks she is no longer able to judge the life chances or success of people in Poland. Her aspirations and aims are focused on Germany. She maintains few connections to Poland, visits Poland irregularly, and she has no plans for return. Most of her family is by now located in Germany. She and her husband and most of their friends come from Silesia, a region in Poland with strong historical connections to Germany and partly a German ethnic population (Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2006). Most of them also spoke German in Silesia. Her husband refused to speak Polish after moving to Germany. Like Alicja, Gosia values a Polish way of celebrating and speaks Polish in daily life, but for both women Poland is not a reference space.

The third case is that of Tomek, a mining engineer and, since 1998, the owner of a small taxi company. His trajectory is characterized by a relatively weak transnational engagement as well: he works and invests his earnings in Germany exclusively. His social networks are divided between spheres and countries: his friends are Poles who live in Germany but he sustains ties to relatives in Poland as well; at work, his network consists of Germans mostly, but is limited to clients. The institutional cultural capital -- the university degree that he obtained in Poland - - turned out to be of little use to him in Germany. The divide between the private and business spheres and Poland and Germany in terms of resources and investments results in relatively few possibilities for direct transfer between the types of capital, either within or between the countries. The Polish private and the German business spheres have little impact on each other, and Tomek does not change his social position in Germany or Poland. Tomek stresses that the 'mixing' of engagement in Poland and Germany could result in chaos in his life and he refrains from 'too much' of a transnational way of life.

Unlike Alicja and Gosia, Tomek often compares Germany and Poland. His judgment of success or failure in life depends very much on whether he compares himself with his family and friends in Poland or in Germany. He tends to estimate his position as higher or lower based on the reference group, but he also uses different criteria for measuring his own success. When comparing himself with people in Germany, he takes the material aspects more strongly into consideration, and when he compares himself with relatives and friends in Poland, he tends to speak of life chances. Instead of speaking about himself, he often switches to talking about the opportunities for his own children (comp. van den Berg, 2011) and he compares their situation with the possibilities that his brother's children have in Poland. He is convinced that his children who live in Germany will nevertheless have better life chances because of the greater welfare of the whole country.

These three cases show how, under the condition of weak transnational engagement,

factors internal to nation-states structure the appreciation of cultural and economic capital after migration. They demonstrate that some types of capital are less mobile between countries than others: Alicja's professional degree in medicine is strongly institutionalized by the nation-states and Germany did not recognize her foreign qualifications as a medical doctor; Tomek's refugee status did not allow him at first to undertake legal employment in Germany, and it was only after obtaining German citizenship that he re-trained as a merchant; Gosia's secondary school certificate was recognized when she obtained German citizenship, but could not be fully valorized in Germany. Gosia's case clearly shows how gender might negatively affect the possibilities for capital conversions in a national framework (Sauer 2001). Despite a traditional division of labor within families in Poland (Fuszara 2000), Gosia continued working as a mother of two children. In Germany, higher income achieved by her husband, in conjunction with traditional gender roles, excluded her temporarily from the participation in the labor market; upon return, she undertook work in the sector traditionally dominated by immigrant women (Mayer-Ahuja 2003).

In all cases, migration to Germany was related to a temporal lowering of social position, but all three interviewees gradually improved their status. Alicja's embodied cultural capital enabled her to slowly but steadily improve her position irrespective of national constraints, while Gosia, and Tomek, who was affected by the bankruptcy of several companies which employed him, remained strongly dependent on the current labor market situation (comp. Kovacev, 2010; Nohl, Ofner, and Thomsen, 2010). In these cases, the processes of capital appreciation, transfer, and conversion between the countries are negatively determined by a strict divide that the self-employed make between the private and business spheres between the countries. While private relationships and cultural practices often center on Poland, the economic capital and business networks focus on Germany, and these respondents judge their social position in economic terms primarily according to the rules of the destination country.

Migrant Bi-local Social Positioning

Two other self-employed workers -- Mirek and Piotr -- show a stronger form of transnational engagement. Mirek, a self-employed construction worker, maintains a Polish way of life and he also invests the money earned in Germany in Poland, in order to repay his old bank debt and to financially support his relatives in extraordinary situations such as weddings. He also regularly supports his son who is studying in Poland. Piotr owns a pizzeria in Germany but he also works in Italy and Austria, where he regularly renovates private flats and houses. He invests the money earned in all three countries in real estate in Germany and Poland; he also owns a piece of land in Poland. Like Tomek and Mirek, Piotr's friends are mostly Poles and his clients are mostly Germans, and he maintains strong personal ties to his family in Poland.

Mirek's case shows how economic capital from one country can be converted into cultural capital in another. This form of conversion was proved in research on economic remittances and investments in the education of children or siblings of immigrants (Kelly and Lusia, 2006; also Hanson and Woodruff, 2003). The start-up capital that enabled Mirek to settle in Germany in the first place was from his sister in Poland. Moreover, Mirek makes more use of social capital in Germany than Tomek: his former German clients support him financially in difficult times but also help him out in official matters when his German proficiency is not sufficient.

Objectively, Mirek's economic capital in Germany is low and he has problems paying all his bills, despite the fact that he has managed to gain legal employment and residency in Germany. He tends to compare his current social position to the one he had 13 years ago in Poland, to a time before financial necessity forced him to migrate. His subjective evaluation is that, over the years, he has not gained financial independence. Each time he speaks about his financial situation in Germany, though, he evaluates it positively in comparison to his situation prior to migration: "If you earn a month here and you are young, you can get rich. And if you

work a year long, your life is luxurious. And in Poland? In 20 years there I could even not afford a small, used car. But I worked 10-12 hours a day...” He also believes that he would not have any chance to earn a living in Poland nowadays, and in this respect his social position in Germany is higher than a possible social position in Poland. He evaluates his condition using the rules of the country of origin, positioning himself subjectively in both locations.

For Piotr, living in both countries is the norm. Piotr has constantly exhibited great flexibility on the labor market, both in Poland and elsewhere, as his aim was to have any job and not one that fits with his educational background in political science, which he treats more like a hobby than a profession. He successfully plays on his ethnic origin and masculinity to draw assets from this embodied form of cultural capital; in his case, unlike Gosia’s one, the intersection of gender and ethnicity has a positive character, enabling him to improve his social positioning in Germany. He thinks of self-employment as one of several forms of self-determined work, so for him, self-employment is not just a type of work but a state of mind.

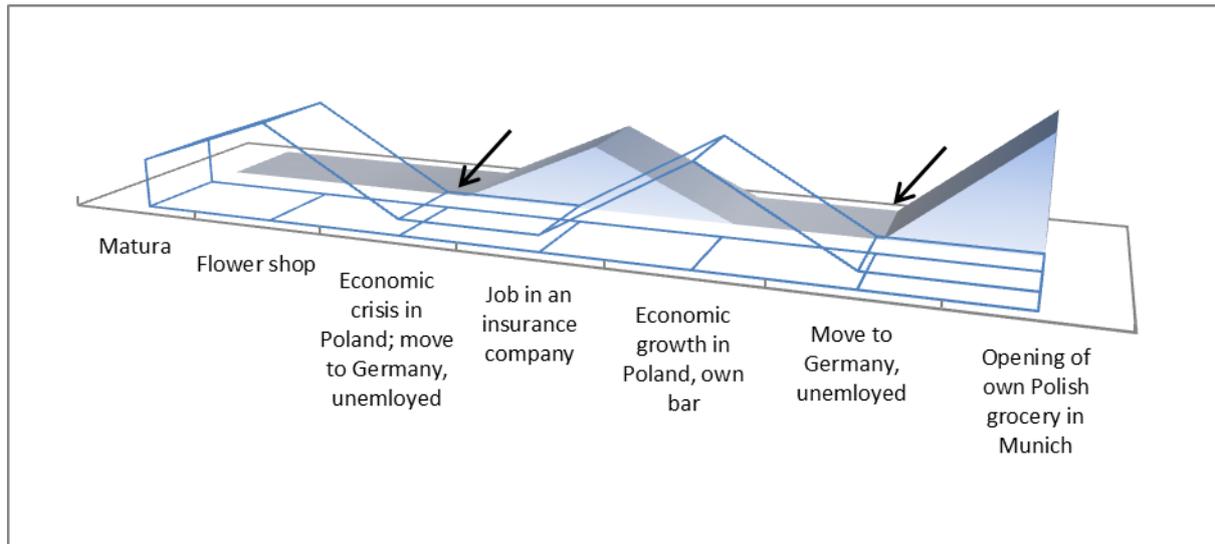
Clearly, the social positions Mirek and Piotr take on in one country influence and complement the positions they achieve in the other country. This type of positioning is thus bi-local and transnational in character. Piotr uses the money earned abroad to buy real estate and land in Poland in order to then achieve additional income; Mirek uses money from his sister to start a life in Germany and returns this investment by supporting his wife and children in Poland, thus changing the status of his whole family, which had hardly any money to buy food or clothes in Poland prior to his stay in Germany. Piotr’s understanding of entrepreneurship as self-dependence -- which can be defined as a form of embodied cultural capital -- allows him to increase his economic capital in Germany and in Poland. For Piotr and Mirek, transnational migration has become a resource through which they can support the transformations of social, cultural, and economic capital across national borders and thus change their status in each country.

Overlapping Social Positioning

Two other examples further illuminate how dynamic such transitions of capital and changes in the social positioning of migrants embedded in more than one country can be. Michal (figure 3), the owner of a small Polish grocery store in Munich, has been commuting between Poland and Germany for the last 20 years. He first came to Germany with his family after the political events in 1980, but the reasons were economic in nature. His limited earnings from a small flower shop in Poland were sufficient to survive on, but his family could not afford any ‘extras.’ Upon arriving in Germany, he was unemployed at first and then worked in an insurance company, a job that was offered to him by a fellow Pole from the region of Silesia. As the political and economic situation in Poland improved in the 1990s, Michal returned to Poland alone while his wife and children remained in Germany. In Poland he owned a small bar which was doing well until shortly before Poland’s accession to the EU. Then he gave the bar up and returned to Germany, where he was unemployed again at first and then became self-employed.

Michal continually looked for new possibilities to improve his social position in both countries. Depending on the labor market and the economic situation, he decided to migrate to Germany, then return to Poland, and finally to re-return to Germany. He regularly compares Poland and Germany and the opportunities and conditions of life in the two places that have been making him switch between the two contexts for years. His family remained in both countries as a stable point of reference and support to him. His current job requires him to travel on a weekly basis between Munich and Poland, from where he imports food to sell in his shop. The idea to sell Polish products was born when he met people in Poland who were looking for possibilities to export Polish ham abroad. Michal would have not decided to do so if not for the steady support in marketing and the transportation of the products by their Polish producer. He is consistently enlarging the number of his business contacts in Germany and in Poland and draws clear benefits from social capital being embedded in two countries.

Figure 3: Michal's trajectory

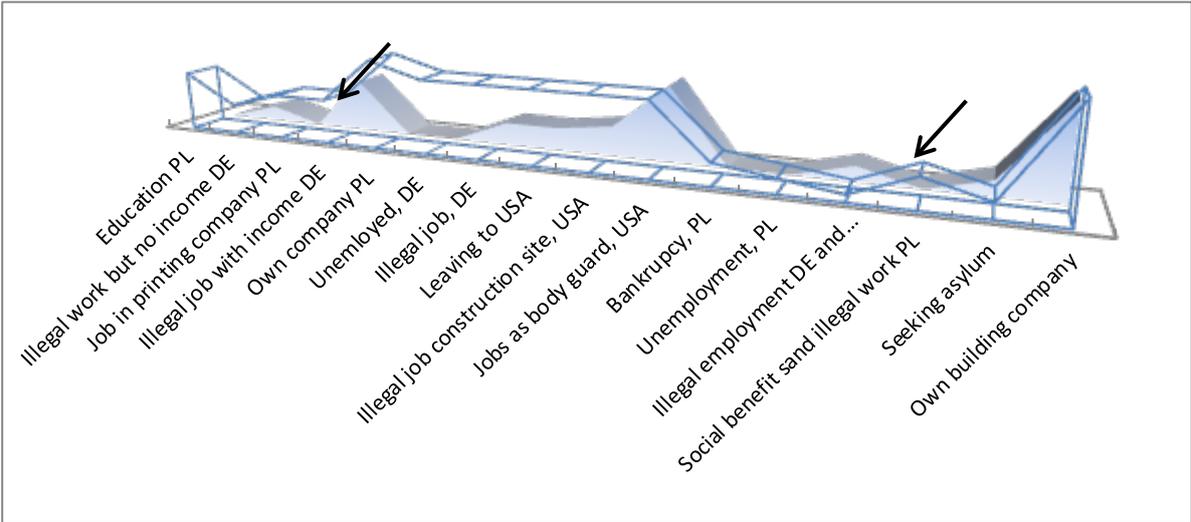


Another trajectory is that of Wojtek (figure 4) who combines periods of legal and illegal employment in both countries. While employed legally in Poland, Wojtek traveled regularly to Germany where he worked illegally; now, he is self-employed in Germany but he receives social benefits in Poland, for health reasons, as he says. When Wojtek came to Germany for the first time in 1981, he was employed in Poland at a printing company. He had a steady income but wanted to earn some extra money in Germany to buy an old Mercedes car. He continued this kind of 'double career' in both countries for another 25 years, with a short stay in the USA. Nowadays he says he is mobile and flexible and that in 'his head' he is in both countries at the same time.

Wojtek's multi-local engagement has the character of adventure rather than of strategy. His life story is full of funny accidents, used and missed opportunities, and people who helped him out in times of trouble. For 25 years, Wojtek has been commuting between relationships, places, and jobs, drawing benefits from every situation, and he treats any employment and any arrangement as temporary. He is flexible and innovative and that kind of embodied cultural capital has brought him success both in the illegal and legal sectors. He is eager to work, no matter in which form, and he considers each investment to be 'a business,' no matter if it is

investing in real estate or a car, which can then be resold at a profit. Money matters to him less than ‘staying in business.’ Sometimes it is more profitable, sometimes less, but Wojtek has fun searching for new ideas and ‘doing businesses.’ He likes being on the road, staying mobile. He could not imagine having an office job and being bound to one place. Often, this kind of habitus is considered typically Polish, both in German and Polish public opinion. A stereotype of a ‘Polish smarty’ who lives on the expenses of the German state was born in the 1980s, when many Polish illegal immigrants received exceptional leave to remain in Germany, the status which allowed them to use social benefits but not to undertake employment. Later, trans-border Polish traders who made their living by selling and buying any kind of goods, some of them illegal, also contributed to this stereotype (Szarota, 1996). Wojtek’s mobility, flexibility in business, and his adaptive abilities associated with the Polish habitus seem to be this kind of embodied cultural capital that helps him to use other forms of capital in a transnational way.

Figure 4. Wojtek’s trajectory



Both cases point to a very complex structure of a steady transfer and conversions of different types of capital between countries. When in Poland, for example, Michal makes use of his social capital (contact to producers of Polish ham) to transform it into economic capital in Germany

(investing in the grocery store). In Germany, he uses the ethnic form of cultural capital (Polish clients) to then transform it into economic capital (income from the grocery store) which he then invests further in Germany but also transfers to his family in Poland. The frequency, durability and intensity of such capital conversions constitute a strong overlapping transnational social positioning.

Conclusions: Social Positioning in a Transnational Research Framework

The seven cases show how migrants sending money to families in Poland and those investing in Poland convert their economic capital from Germany into social, economic or cultural capital in Poland and improve their positioning back home. Even a low income in Germany can be upgraded in this way. The opposite also occurs -- social or cultural capital attained in Poland can be converted into economic capital in Germany and influence migrants' social position there. Thereby, gender and ethnic origin intersect with possibilities for capital conversions; two cases exemplarily show the positive (Piotr) and negative (Gosia) kinds of intersections. In this process, some sorts of capital are more transnational than others, meaning they can be more easily converted and valorized across countries. The possibilities for the appreciation of capital in the migration processes are linked to the form and intensity of migrants' transnational practices and ties, and to their frames of reference and self-positioning within or across nation-state borders. When migrants switch between judging their situation according to the rules of the country of origin and destination, they open up new possibilities for the re-evaluation of their precarious life conditions.

The links between a transnational way of life, the transnational valorization and conversions of capital, and shifting frames of judgment of one's own conditions according to the rules of the country of origin and destination, produce multiple social positions that can

range from being embedded in a single-space, shifting between countries, and overlapping in a transnational social space. This complexity of social positioning and the possible changes (downward or upward social mobility) require new conceptualizations of social inequality.

The existing models of analysis only insufficiently reflect the full scope of possible social positions. For example, a single-space framework that considers migrants as marginal groups (Granato, 2004; Verwiebe, 2004) would exclude most of the interviewed self-employed workers in Munich from such a study, as they have become naturalized German citizens. For migrants, their social position would be considered inside of Germany alone, disregarding their position in the country of origin entirely. From this perspective, for example, Alicja's educational attainments would only be evaluated on the German labor market in relation to a particular legal framework and opportunity structure. This kind of analysis is useful when studying the workings of the nation-state on social inequality (in Alicja's case, a medical degree from Poland not being recognized by the German state) and is particularly suitable when researching one-time migration, focusing on de-skilling or gradual upward mobility, as in Alicja's situation, yet it would be blind to overlapping positioning, as in the case of Wojtek.

The second type of analysis opens up towards international aspects by referring to the (in)congruence of the social statuses (for example, cultural, social, and economic status) of a migrant. Similar to the analysis of the social, cultural, and economic status of citizens in a national reference framework, such country-comparative analysis investigates the social position of migrants in terms of the transition from the country of origin to the country of residence. Alicja, a medical doctor whose life is oriented primarily towards Germany -- in terms of her earning and consuming in Germany exclusively -- works mostly in accordance with her education level. Her cultural and economic statuses are congruent insofar as the salary she achieves corresponds to her level of education. Tomek, on the other hand, who trained as a mining engineer in Poland but who worked on construction sites and as a taxi driver in

Germany, was deskilled in the migration process. In his case, one can speak of a too high or too low social or economic status in comparison with other individuals who possess the same or similar educational qualifications.

Now let us take the case of Wojtek, who owns real estate in Poland but has no income there (he is registered unemployed and receives social support; his retirement benefits will be basic); his economic capital comes from legal and illegal jobs in Germany and the USA. If we analyze his status considering only the Polish national framework, we will not be able to understand it. Also, if we consider his status in Germany only, we can see that he works there and earns decent money which would allow him to rent a flat, but that he in fact shares a small and simply furnished room with two other colleagues. Again, his economic and cultural statuses in Germany do not fit each other. This model can determine incongruence between the statuses but it cannot explain it (comp. Elrick, 2008; Nieswand, 2011).

The more people are anchored socially, culturally, and economically in at least two sites in two or more countries, the less adequate the national framework of reference is for the analysis of their social positioning, as the examples of self-employed workers in Munich demonstrate. A transnationalized analysis is needed which focuses primarily on intersections of education, income, social networks, etc., to explain social positioning that results from a transnational way of life. This perspective in no way ignores the workings of nation-state borders. The possibilities of transfer and exchange of economic, cultural, and social capital are to a great extent structured by nation-states, for example, when labor market entrance depends on the recognition of the person's institutional cultural capital. Seen from this perspective, transnational social positioning means a flexible self-positioning of people (for example, in the form of double households, presence on more than one national labor market), the use of resources in more than one country as well as flexible access to social (for example, through friends or family) or political spaces (Weiss, 2005) in more than one country.

Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital is a useful tool to study social positioning, as demonstrated by the analysis of the exemplary cases of Polish entrepreneurs in Munich. By analyzing how the different forms of capital transfer across national borders, Bourdieu's model can well be adapted to a transnational perspective on migration (see also Erel 2010). Thereby, migration has a double meaning: it disrupts accumulation and valorization of capital but it also enables migrants to strategically employ these resources which are symbolically monopolized within a nation state; this is in particular visible when migrants use the ethnic stereotypes to flexibly react to labor market demands abroad. The potential of Bourdieu's theory for the transnational analysis lies therefore in a possibility for dense analysis of local articulations of particular forms of capital that emerge in the context of ruptures caused by migration and the processes of re-valorization of resources in social fields in different countries.

While stressing the need for a transnational perspective on social inequality, we still need to be aware that not all migrants who develop transnational connections and identities take social positions that stretch across national borders. Therefore, the last proposed model of analysis is complementary rather than supplementary to the other perspectives. Important methodological questions remain regarding how to extend the analysis beyond the level of individual life courses. Careful investigation is required on how multiple scales (national, regional, local, social networks, families, individuals) work in the process of evaluation of each of the types of capital, in particular when migrants switch the frames of reference for their judgments and comparisons. Habitus also needs to be carefully differentiated by gender, age or period of immigration, and the studies should include the sites of immigration and emigration to an equal extent if the picture is to be complete.

Notes

¹ This and the following figures show the changes of social positions in time, from the completion of education of an individual until the point in time of the interview with the respective person. Social position is defined in reference to Hradil (2005) as an intersection of vertical, horizontal, objective, and subjective determinants, with emphasis on income, legal status, and subjective valuation of one's job prestige as described by the interviewed individuals. Figures 1 and 2 show a single trajectory where the move to Germany is indicated with an arrow. Figure 3 and 4 show parallel social positions in Poland (no filling) and abroad (shadowed filling).

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