

## **Polish entrepreneurs in Glasgow and Entrepreneurial Opportunity Structure**

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## ***Polish Entrepreneurs in Glasgow and Entrepreneurial Opportunity Structure***

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### ***Abstract***

#### **Purpose**

To develop a modelised representation of the concept of opportunity structures for Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurs (EMEs) in Glasgow, Scotland, that incorporates the different demand and supply side dimensions influencing entrepreneurial activity.

#### **Design/methodology/approach**

An appropriate qualitative research design was implemented in order to capture and understand the influence of contextual dimensions on entrepreneurial behaviour of Polish EMEs in Glasgow. As part of the abductive and reflective process of the research, 21 semi-structure interviews were carried out in with Polish EMEs who are sole-owners of businesses.

#### **Findings**

By contextualising ethnic minority entrepreneurship, the paper reveals the crucial and ambivalent role played by the community (for resource mobilisation and as the primary market) and by Polish EMEs' perception of the opportunity structure, on their entrepreneurial behaviour. Moreover, it highlights the importance of the household as a contextual dimension on entrepreneurial decision-making among those Polish entrepreneurs in Glasgow.

#### **Practical implications**

Provides a comprehensive and operational model of opportunity structure for EMEs which can be used an operational tool for both scholars in the field as well as by policy makers. The proposed model constitutes a framework for analysing the influence of different contextual dimensions on EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour.

#### **Originality/value**

The contribution is the provision of an original tool to enable further systematic comparative approaches while conducting research on EMEs across different communities and localities.

### **Key Words**

Polish Entrepreneurs, Opportunity Structure, Contextualised Entrepreneurship, Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship.

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## ***Introduction***

The notion of opportunity structure was initially introduced by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) and subsequently developed by Kloosterman and Rath (2001). They claim to have adopted a contextual view of ethnic minority entrepreneurship since the context (and hence the opportunity structure) is a useful lens in understanding ethnic minority entrepreneurs' (EMEs) strategies in the host country (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). The idea of contextualising entrepreneurship research has also been claimed by scholars from the broader entrepreneurship literature such as Zahra (2007) and Welter (2011). This paper argues that the concept of opportunity structure is appropriate for studying EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour and strategies, as it can encompass the notions of ethnic enclave, community (Somerville and McElwee, 2011) (used in this paper to refer to the community of co-ethnics; fellow migrants sharing the same nationality) and group characteristics. These are distinctive features of EMEs compared to native entrepreneurs (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Hjerm, 2004). Thus adopting a contextualised approach is suitable for research on EMEs and comparative work between localities and communities should be encouraged. The contextualised perspective provided by the concept of opportunity structure is therefore a relevant approach to explore and develop. However, the concept as it has been defined so far must be refined and extended by incorporating additional dimensions, thence leading to a multi-levelled (Kloosterman, 2010) and multi-layered (Jones *et al.*, 2014) approach of context in EMEs studies. The paper is structured as follows.

Using the literature on opportunity structure, this paper first identifies the different components and boundaries of the concept. Consequently, building on the work undertaken by scholars interested in the role played by contexts on entrepreneurial behaviour (Sarason *et al.*,

2006; Welter, 2011; Welter and Smallbone, 2011; Zahra *et al.*, 2014), contextual dimensions are highlighted, which will help deepen understanding of the interaction between the entrepreneur and the environment, and be subsequently included into a new representation of the opportunity structure.

Second, the paper makes an empirical contribution to knowledge on the role played by various dimensions of the opportunity structure on EMEs' behaviour. Four main findings stemming from fieldwork conducted among Polish EMEs in Glasgow are discussed in this paper: resource mobilisation, community as a market, the importance of perception of the opportunity structure by Polish EMEs, and the role played by the household dimension in entrepreneurial decision-making. Those findings shed light on identified contextual dimensions influencing EMEs' behaviour.

Third, the conceptual contribution of the paper provides a modelised representation of the opportunity structure that incorporates contextual dimensions relevant to EMEs' behaviour. This representation extends the conceptualisation boundaries of the concept of opportunity structure as it considers the interplay between the entrepreneur and the variety of contexts in which they operate. The claim of the paper is that given the constitutive nature of the relationship between the entrepreneur and their environment (Sarason *et al.*, 2006; Sepulveda *et al.*, 2011; Garud *et al.*, 2014), the representation of the concept of opportunity structure should reconcile demand-side and supply-side dimensions in its scope. Thus, contextual dimensions are organised along divides between market and non-market dimensions, supply-side and demand-side and will also adopt the multi-level strategy proposed by Kloosterman and Rath (2001).

Hence, the paper combines and develops on the different dimensions of the opportunity structure, and proposes a comprehensive and operational model of opportunity structure for EMEs. This model can be an operational tool that can be used by scholars in the field as well as by policy makers. Indeed, the proposed model constitutes a framework for analysing the influence of different contextual dimensions on EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour. This model is

a useful tool for more systematic comparative approaches while conducting research on EMEs across different communities and localities. Moreover, the model acknowledges the importance of individual *perceptions* when referring to the different dimensions of the opportunity structure, and the influence that perceptions have on EMEs' actions. This consideration of idiosyncratic interpretation of the context highlights the importance of communicating policies and support initiatives towards EMEs.

### ***The Opportunity Structure***

When it comes to migrants' reasons for starting new ventures, there is strong criticism of cultural explanatory approaches to entrepreneurship as arguably these approaches attach too much attention to group characteristics (Hjerm, 2004; Deakins *et al.*, 2007). Nonetheless, EMEs are able to identify or create opportunities in their community markets as EMEs have a better understanding of the needs of their co-ethnics (Werbner, 2001; Rusinovic, 2008). This goes beyond the formal shared nationality but also beyond the notion of shared - or common - identity (Ram and Jones, 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2014), cultural and ethnic identity (Aldrich *et al.*, 1985; Werbner, 2001) bounded solidarity (Zhou and Logan, 1989), or enforceable trust mechanisms (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993), through which the EMEs get access to resources. However, these refer mostly to group belonging and residential clustering as means to access to resources such as social and financial capital. Authors such as Rusinovic (2008), Altinay *et al.* (2014) and Foley and O'Connor (2013) take a closer look at the relationship between the EMEs and the (co-ethnic) customers' base. As they argue, tastes and preferences can be better captured by the EMEs due to the shared *contextual reference* between the EME and their co-ethnics. Research on EMEs has so far considered the importance of mobilising specific ethnic resources among the community, either financial support (Smallbone *et al.*, 2003; Zhou, 2004), labour (Jones and Ram, 2010) or more generally co-ethnic social capital (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Deakins *et al.*, 2007; Foley and O'Connor, 2013). While such previous approaches focus

on shared culture, a material-structural approach focuses on the socio-economic context in which the EMEs are socio-economically disadvantaged (Phizacklea, 1990; Barrett *et al.*, 2002). More so-called interactionist approaches stress the recursive relationship between the internal group resource dynamics and the external *opportunity structure* (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Ram and Jones, 2008; Kloosterman, 2010).

The concept of opportunity structure introduced by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) is useful in defining the link between context and group responses to local conditions while exploring EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour. In their view, the opportunity structure is a useful contextual lens which can help in analysing EMEs' reasons to start-up new ventures as well as their business strategies, since EMEs present distinctive features to native entrepreneurs (Ram and Smallbone, 2003; Deakins *et al.*, 2005; Waldinger, 2005; Rusinovic, 2008). Aldrich and Waldinger's (1990) definition of the concept includes two dimensions; market conditions in the host country, and access to ownership as displayed in Figure 1 below. Market conditions relate to the production and demand conditions of a given business environment. Regarding opportunity recognition and market boundaries, this refers to *abandoned niche* shunned by mainstream entrepreneurs in which EMEs start-up their new ventures (Jones and Ram, 2010). The dimension of access to ownership refers to state policies, whether or not they have a direct impact on EME's activity, such as labour market and immigration policies. This is crucial when it comes to researching EMEs since the barriers to enter the labour market impact on the migrant's (or other ethnic minority individual, such as subsequent generations) decision to start-up (Light and Bonacich, 1991; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Waldinger, 1996; Zhou, 2004; Deakins *et al.*, 2005; Rusinovic, 2008). Likewise, immigration policies impact on the identity building of the community (in addition to having consequences on illegal migration and illegal activities, an area explored by Somerville *et al.* (2015) and thence on the resources that members of the community share as a group (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Zhou and Logan, 1989). Interestingly, the dimension of access to ownership also encompasses the competitive aspect of the ethnic markets

(Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990) bounded by location and co-ethnicity (Zhou, 2004). Due to the limited size of the market targeted, there is a risk for EMEs' business to fail or to engage in survival strategies (Waldinger *et al.*, 1990; Light and Bonacich, 1991; Ram and Smallbone, 2003; Zhou, 2004; Deakins *et al.*, 2005).

**Insert Fig 1 about here**

As represented in Figure 1, in addition to market conditions and access to ownership, Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) develop the importance of group characteristics, which apart from their discussion on business enclaves, constitute non-market dimensions of the opportunity structure: settlement location, housing, but also the aspiration level of EMEs in the host country, in other words, their expectations of migration. In the host country, there is a struggle between uncertainty due to migration and the importance of structural conditions. Once the migrants' prospects and plans for return to their home country have vanished, there is an incentive to enter self-employment (Waldinger *et al.*, 1990). What is important here is the attention given to the context while highlighting the responsiveness of EMEs to changing conditions. Nonetheless, the group characteristics are a central focus in the EME literature, especially while exploring the ability of EMEs to mobilise resources from their communities (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Deakins *et al.*, 2007). The importance of co-ethnic networks as part of the process of resource mobilisation has been widely discussed in the literature on EMEs (Waldinger, 2005; Hjerm, 2004; Zhou, 2004; Foley and O'Connor, 2013) and is integrated as part of the concept of opportunity structure in Aldrich and Waldinger's (1990) work. Specifically, it concerns the ability of EMEs to raise finance, access co-ethnic labour, and identify or create opportunities within the community. Per se, resource mobilisation among EMEs is not market specific (see Figure 1 above). Although it might provide resources relevant to the business, sunk capital and resources are commonly shared among migrants or ethnic minority groups. As presented earlier, the community might provide opportunities, labour force, and financial support to EMEs (Werbner, 2001; Zhou, 2004; Rusinovic, 2008; Jones and Ram,

2010). Werbner (2001) refers to community as the *organisational structure*, that either directly provides opportunities to EMEs, or the conditions for them to create their own opportunities within the community niche market.

Thus, the combination of the local conditions and of the group characteristics (including co-ethnic networks) provides the niches to EMEs for starting-up. It can be argued that the organisational structure/group characteristics could be included as part of the opportunity structure as it constitutes another aspect of the system in which the entrepreneur is embedded. This would echo with the *mixed-embeddedness* perspective developed by Kloosterman *et al.* (1999) as their definition encompasses both social relations and the wider institutional and economic contexts (see also, Barrett *et al.* 2002). Likewise, Engelen (2001) advocates for the adoption of a socialised perspective in EMEs research, as the attention given to the structure of social networks can provide a better understanding of EMEs' behaviour, at various stages of the entrepreneurial process.

Subsequently, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) include additional dimensions to the concept of *opportunity structure*. They claim that there is a need to consider the different bundle of resources available to EMEs, which depend largely on other segments of the opportunity structure, such as the accessibility of markets. In addition, they consider the growth potential of businesses as an additional dimension of the opportunity structure (see also, Edelman *et al.*, 2010; Kloosterman, 2010). Indeed, they argue that EMEs' businesses need to be sustainable and provide a relevant income to the entrepreneur to be considered (Kloosterman and Rath 2001). Both elements are deemed essential when looking at entrepreneurs recognising and creating opportunities within limited community niche markets (Waldinger *et al.*, 1990; Rusinovic, 2008); hence, draw attention to the demand-side of the opportunity structure (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001). Nevertheless, they view entrepreneurs as actors who can create their own opportunities (see also, Werbner, 2001), and actively engage in the entrepreneurial process within dynamic opportunities structures.



Importantly, the opportunity structure is situational as it varies across time or place at a national, regional/urban and neighbourhood level (Storper, 1997; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001). Consequently, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) propose three analytical levels to look at dynamic opportunity structures; national, urban and regional, neighbourhood (see Figure 2 below). For the purpose of this paper, the opportunity structure is represented by using concentric circles ranging from the national to the local level. The different dimensions of the opportunity structure are then placed at the most relevant level of analysis. For instance, labour market conditions are mostly a national level dimension of the opportunity structure while spatial concentration of migrants is a dimension that is more relevant to the local level

**Insert Figure 2 about here**

As displayed in Figure 2, the national level of the opportunity structure as discussed by Kloosterman and Rath (2001) includes institutions, laws, regulation, and culture. Focusing on entrepreneurship in transition economies, Smallbone and Welter's (2001; 2011) work highlight the role played by governments and institutions on entrepreneurial behaviour. Likewise, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) recognise the role of national institutions on the various (market and non-market) dimensions of the opportunity structure. Migration patterns (see for instance, de Vries *et al.*, 2015), and national historical background could also be placed at the national level. Indeed, research focusing on entrepreneurship in former communist countries (Smallbone and Welter, 2001; 2011) or on Polish migration (Eade *et al.*, 2006; Drinkwater *et al.*, 2009) reveal the importance of historical contextual dimension on behaviour, for example on trust towards formal institutions (Welter and Smallbone, 2006).

The urban/regional level focuses on the social and economic embeddedness of EMEs' entrepreneurial actions, and draw attention to the local market conditions (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Kloosterman, 2010), including enablers and constraints of the environment, as widely discussed in the wider entrepreneurship literature (Sarason *et al.*, 2006; Welter, 2011; McElwee and Smith, 2012; Garud *et al.*, 2014) This emphasis on the urban/regional level is also

found in recent research on EMEs, such as Deakins *et al.*, 2005; 2009 in Scotland; Sepulveda *et al.*, 2011 in London, and supported the choice of Glasgow as the spatial context for this research.

The neighbourhood level draws attention to the location of businesses owned by EMEs as well as on the importance of the presence of co-ethnic residents in the neighbourhood on the activities and successes of EMEs (Werbner, 1999; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001). This echoes with debates on the ethnic enclave economy, in which EMEs are bounded by (co)location and (co)ethnicity (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Werbner, 2001; Zhou, 2004; Waldinger, 2005). A consideration of social networks (even weak ties) nonetheless points out the benefit of (co)locations and (co)ethnicity as facilitators for the generation of social capital (Granovetter, 1985), although social capital can have a cost (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Deakins *et al.*, 2007). This embeddedness in community networks can constrain further development of the business (*ibidem*; Rusinovic, 2008; Ishaq *et al.*, 2010). However, it gives access to community labour and allows the EMEs to reach co-ethnic customers (Waldinger, 2005).

To sum up, the concept of opportunity structure is multi-levelled, and it encompasses market and non-market contextual dimensions, including the role of community networks, in which EMEs recognise opportunities, and start-up new ventures (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Hjerm, 2004). The concept is particularly useful in a (empirical and theoretical) comparative perspective, as it recognises the importance of localities and community-specific arrangements.

The paper now highlights four distinctive features of the concept of opportunity structure in order to clearly clarify the nature of the concept. First, as it is defined in the field of EMEs research, the concept of *opportunity structure* differs from the neo-classic concept of *transparent opportunity structure*. In fact, a neo-classic approach would assume that actors are rational profit seekers, resources can be transferred easily, information is available to all actors, and regulations are transparent (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001, p. 189). A neo-classical view would not

distinguish between native and migrant entrepreneurs when it comes to access to resources, or ability to recognise or create opportunities. A more contextualised and sociological interpretation of the concept recognises the role played by lack of information, market imperfections, sociological factors (including cultural proximity), and finally *perceptions*. Indeed, perceptions are influenced by the social and societal contexts (Welter, 2011) in which entrepreneurs are embedded.

Second, the opportunity structure is not generic. Indeed, as argued above, the opportunity structure is situational and depends both on the location and the ethnic community considered. In addition, as displayed in Figures 1 and 2, the opportunity structure is a combination of different contextual dimensions operating at different levels (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Kloosterman, 2010). The concept fits within the discussion on contextualised entrepreneurship (Zahra, 2007; Welter, 2011; Zahra *et al.*, 2014). However, the term of opportunity structure is not another term to refer to the *context*, given its multi-dimensional and multi-levelled nature, but rather a tool to capture the multiple dimensions influencing EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour.

Third, the opportunity structure is not static. Indeed, there are macro-level political changes (for instance, the enlargement of the EU to former communist satellites countries), there are changes in economic systems and regulations, in social environments or in market conditions (competition, etc.). To acknowledge for these changing conditions, the concept of opportunity structure must be dynamic in nature. Likewise, the dynamic nature of the opportunity structure is required to capture EMEs' entrepreneurial actions. This is particularly visible when it comes to EMEs' attitude towards opportunities. Like any entrepreneur, they recognise opportunities in uncertain and changing environments. They are not passively responding to static opportunities, instead, based on their perceptions - be they idiosyncratic interpretation of their environment or judgemental decision-making abilities (Casson, 2005; Sarason *et al.*, 2006) - they are alert to opportunities (Ardichvili *et al.*, 2003), or are even creating their own opportunities in the community market (Werbner, 2001; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001). Hence, it is crucial to

consider the interplay between the entrepreneur and the variety of contextual dimensions constituents of the environment in which they operate.

Fourth, the opportunity structure is not another term for *business culture*. Indeed, the focus is on entrepreneurial action. In other words, the opportunity structure concept is relevant when EMEs start-up or develop their businesses. National culture is then to be understood as one of the contextual dimensions. Indeed, although rules regulations are influenced by culture, and although culture can be a useful tool of analysis when looking at informal institutions, its role can be acknowledged as part of the historical and social contexts (Welter, 2011), or social and institutional environment (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001).

How to embed the concept of opportunity structure within debates on contextualised entrepreneurship? How to build an analytical framework that would include opportunities, resources and outcomes? In doing so, which dimensions should be added to the notion in order to fully acknowledge the co-constructed nature of institutional, regulatory, and social arrangements and the entrepreneur? Whereas research on EMEs mostly focuses on the resource mobilisation aspect of entrepreneurial activity through the community of co-ethnics (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990), various authors discuss the multiple dimensions of contextualised approach in entrepreneurship research (Zahra, 2007; Welter, 2011; Zahra *et al.*, 2014). Others identify a set of enablers and constraints provided by the environment or the system (Sarason *et al.*, 2006; Garud *et al.*, 2014), or refer to barriers and favourable criteria to develop an entrepreneurial mindset (McElwee and Smith, 2012).

As Kloosterman and Rath (2001) argue there is a need for empirical evidence regarding the demand-side of the opportunity structure. In addition, they claim that there should be further attention given to the interplay of actors, social networks, and opportunities (*ibid.*, p.198). Interactions between the entrepreneur and the opportunity structure should be further explored in order to better capture the way EMEs actually recognise or create opportunities in a given

opportunity structure. This focus requires an analysis of cognitive processes of entrepreneurial behaviour (McElwee and Smith, 2012) as the interaction between entrepreneurs as actor and the opportunity structure is based on the entrepreneurs' idiosyncratic interpretations of the opportunities and of the venturing process (i.e. of the opportunity structure as a whole) (Sarason *et al.*, 2006). This paper is not concerned with the psychological dimension of entrepreneurial behaviour; nonetheless, the perceptions of entrepreneurs are influenced by contextual dimensions, such as historical and institutional backgrounds, their social and societal environment (Welter, 2011). Indeed, Welter and Smallbone (2006) and Welter (2012) highlight how historical background can influence entrepreneurs' attitudes towards the state and trust in business relationships. The familial and household dimension can be added to this list to understand entrepreneurial perception of the opportunity structure. Finally, mention should be made to the multi-faceted barriers (McElwee and Smith, 2012) faced by entrepreneurs in the different opportunity structures, which further highlights the situational nature of the concept. Since entrepreneurial behaviour is contingent to a specific opportunity structure, as highlighted by Welter (2011), contextual elements, such as gender stereotypes, can be either constraints or drivers to entrepreneurship in different spatial contexts. Thus, this research aim at answering the following research questions: what are the contextual dimensions of the opportunity structure influencing the entrepreneurial behaviour of Polish EMEs in Glasgow. And what is the role played by their perceptions of these various dimensions on their entrepreneurial activities?

### ***Research Methods and Data Source***

#### **Background**

This research is designed to capture and understand the influence of contextual dimensions on entrepreneurial behaviour of Poles, who arrived in the UK after the EU-enlargement former Easter bloc countries in May 2004, and who started-up their business in 2005-2008. At least

400,000 *registered* workers joined the UK labour market between 2004 and 2007; an influx that has exceeded the numbers forecast by UK government officials (Düvell, 2004; Home Office, 2009; Institute for Public Policy Research, 2010). However, there is scant knowledge on the population of Poles who started their business in the UK: indeed, Poles cannot be distinguished in the Census as they appear as 'other Whites'. At the regional level there are only few official sources of information concerning the Polish community in Scotland, and even less concerning the population of Polish entrepreneurs.

Glasgow is a large metropolitan area, in which many Polish migrants (and businesses) are located with around 5,000 registered Polish workers who arrived after 2004 (Home Office, 2009). Furthermore, the Polish community is active in the area, as demonstrated by the activity of the Polish Club, and of Internet portals such as glasgow24 or emito.net (Glasgow section). The embeddedness of the lead researcher in these networks provides a deeper understanding of the social contexts in which Polish EMEs operate. In addition, capturing a concentrated population in a specific spatial and temporal context increases the validity and reliability of the results. Polish entrepreneurs interviewed are primarily economic migrants who secured a job in the UK prior to emigration using employment agencies based in Poland, usually as factory or construction workers, butchers, or cleaners. Originally employed in low-skilled and low-paid occupations, they started their businesses as a response to job dissatisfaction. In terms of demographic characteristics, Polish EMEs in Glasgow are on average slightly older than the population of newly arrived Polish migrants in the UK, which is mostly comprised of persons in the 18-34 age group (Kaczmarczyk, 2008; White and Ryan, 2008; Drinkwater *et al.*, 2009). Importantly, since this research is focused on contextual dimensions influencing entrepreneurial behaviour, it is worth noting that large majority of Polish entrepreneurs interviewed are engaged in stable relationships (19 out of 21).

## **Data Collection and Sample**

Data were collected during a qualitative fieldwork conducted in Glasgow in 2008 and 2009. The fieldwork consisted primarily of 21 semi-structured interviews with Polish entrepreneurs who are sole-owners of a business registered in Glasgow. Moreover, these interviews were complemented with informal discussions with the entrepreneurs, their employees, or with the entrepreneurs' partners when possible, as a mean to capture their contextual experience (Cope, 2005; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Leitch *et al.*, 2010). Participants were selected from informal conversations with members of the community and two key informants, other were identified using Polish Internet community portals and newspapers. Finally, a few interview contacts were identified using a snowballing technique during the fieldwork until saturation (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). From 35 Polish businesses identified in Glasgow, 21 entrepreneurs engaged in a range of sectors from hairdressers to IT companies were compiled (see Table 1 below). Following a phenomenological approach, interviews focused on the entrepreneurs' account of their contextualised and temporarily situated experience in the context of migration and start-up in Scotland; a 'photographic slice of life' (Cope, 2005, p.169).

**Insert Table 1 about here**

Semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 to 120 minutes were all conducted in Polish language by the lead author in order to improve the quality of the collected data (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977), using a full handnotes technique developed in France at the Centre de Sociologie des Organisations (Sciences-Po-CNRS, Paris). Since the interviewee is largely taking part in the interview process, an important part of the interview was dedicated to non-directed questions in order to let the interviewee develop freely their views and thoughts (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977; Cope, 2005).

As part of the abductive and reflective process of this research, data collected during interviews, observations, and informal discussions were rigorously coded, categorised, and then organised into an explanatory scheme (Cope, 2005; Leitch *et al.*, 2010; Klag and Langley, 2013; Corbin and Strauss 2014). Finally, the narratives were contextualised and analysed in relation to

the entrepreneurs' environment with particular attention given to Polish EMEs' experience and perception of the different contextual dimensions that were identified, such as spatial, social, familial, historical, and institutional dimensions (Welter, 2011). Thence, findings emerged from the data as a step to theorisation (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Leitch *et al.*, 2010) as part of the iterative process of discovery (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Klag and Langley, 2013).

## ***Findings***

This section builds on the main findings of the fieldwork and focuses on Polish EMEs' perceptions and on their contextualised experiences of the entrepreneurial process. Four main dimensions of the opportunity structure revealed during the data analysis process are presented in this section: resource mobilisation, use of the community as a market, *perception* of the opportunity structure, and importance of the household context on entrepreneurial behaviour.

### **1. Resource Mobilisation**

First, like EMEs from (the majority of) other communities (see for instance, Smallbone *et al.* 2003), Polish EMEs do not access formal sources of finance and support prior to start-up or for later business developments: for the purpose of their business activity, they show a marked reluctance to access institutions of business support and finance, which might be a legacy of the communist era affecting trust towards institutions (Welter and Smallbone, 2006). In addition, the *liability of foreignness* (see for instance, Zaheer, 1995) would explain why Polish EMEs in Glasgow have little knowledge of what institutions such as Business Gateway<sup>1</sup> can provide. Although they formally register their activity, they are reluctant to contact banks or formal agencies in any way for their business.

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<sup>1</sup> Business Gateway is a publicly funded business support institution in Scotland. Among other services it provides advice and training for new businesses.



Polish EMEs lack awareness of these institutions, but also demonstrate a lack of willingness to engage with any formal institutions. One explanation lies in the distrust towards institutions in post-communist countries. Although many of the participants are too young to have clearly remembered the communist era as adults, eighteen of them were either engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Poland prior to emigration or have relatives/close friends operating as entrepreneurs. The lack of trust towards formal institutions clearly came out during the interviews. Either they have deliberate strategies to avoid formal institutions or (more frequently) they (subconsciously) do not actively seek help from those institutions. For instance, when asked about the existence of Business Gateway, an interviewee answered:

*No, is there such a thing? Here they do not give me credit. Why? We do not know. I don't have a credit card. P. Bodyshop.*

This is confirmed by key informants' experience of interaction with Polish entrepreneurs in the region:

*Poles are not really engaging with us. If they come [interviewee's emphasis], they ask if there is any funding. The Poles have the attitude that they will do it, they want to do it, they will go for it anyway. They come and ask us: Is there anything we can get? But they are going to do it anyway. In other words, they come and ask us: What can I get to do it better or quicker? Quickly, they realise that we provide support but they already know what they want. They do not come back to us. R. Agency for start-up support.*

However, unlike EMEs from other ethnic groups, they do not seek for financial support within their community of co-ethnics. This is partly explained by the level of mistrust between Polish migrants expressed during interviews and discussions. Interestingly, post-2004 Polish migrants have an ambivalent relationship with fellow Poles in the UK<sup>2</sup>; even though they socialise (almost exclusively) with co-ethnics for emotional and social support, they tend to distrust fellow Poles

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<sup>2</sup> This is confirmed by other studies on Polish migration in the UK (Piętka, 2011).

when it comes to finance or to business-relevant advice. Several respondents expressed it in a very explicit way:

*A Pole is a wolf for Poles.* L. Lawyer for Poles.

*I would not trust another Pole for Business.* A. Construction.

In their account, contacts with fellow Poles are limited to social relationships;

*Yes, of course I do have contact with the Polish community... Actually not really. All my contacts are private. We could say I have contacts with friends. They do not have any meaning for my business.* K. hairdresser.

Nonetheless, Polish migrants in Scotland are embedded in the Polish community social networks. This starts at the emigration stage. Like many fellow migrants, the interviewed Polish EMEs relied on the migration industry, i.e. a set of *ad hoc* institutions, to secure a job in the UK before emigrating (see also, Garapich, 2008). Once in the UK, they sought information and practical support within community networks, such as the Polish Klub or Polish migrants' Internet portals. These Polish informal networks for new migrants, such as *emito.net* and *glasgow24.pl* provide information for post-2004 Polish migrants (jobs, companionship, tips, or social life) and serve as advertising platforms for Polish businesses.

Interestingly, Polish EMEs rely on the Polish community for labour. Indeed, they trust co-ethnic employees, and get access to co-ethnic labour through personal relationships with fellow members of the local Polish community. This means that trust is generated through shared identity (being Poles in the UK), as well as through shared experience of migration. These more intimate relations - in the sense of Granovetter (1985) - generate trust. The social context in which Polish entrepreneurs are embedded allow them to access a community-specific resource:

in that case; labour<sup>3</sup>. In the participants' words, the reliance on co-ethnic workers can also be explained through shared expectations:

*I have three employees. They all are Polish girls. I would not trust a Scottish hairdresser. They are too lazy. They do not know what it is to work hard [...] I know them, I mean, we know them [researcher's note: his wife and himself] from friends. K. Hairdresser.*

To sum up, historical and social dimensions influence resource mobilisation among Polish EMEs in Glasgow. First, they do not rely on formal sources of institutions and support for their business, because of deliberate strategies, or because of lack of awareness of those institutions. Second, the findings reveal the ambivalent relationship with fellow Poles. The impact of the social embeddedness of Polish EMEs in their community of co-ethnics explains their lack of reliance on the community for finance or business support although they still rely on co-ethnic workforce.

## **2. Community as a Market**

Likewise, in spite of ambivalent relationships with co-ethnics, Polish EMEs target the community as their market at the start-up phase, based on their understanding of the needs of the community in Scotland.

They tend to serve their own community due to *cultural proximity*. First, they share a common language and this removes an important cultural barrier for migrant consumers. The fieldwork highlights that Polish entrepreneurs in Glasgow have poor English language proficiency, like fellow Polish migrants in the UK (Ryan *et al.*, 2008; Weishaar, 2008). This is one of the reasons explaining their employment in low-skilled/low-paid occupations in the UK labour market prior to start-up. Thus, according to the respondents, Polish-owned businesses will attract Polish

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<sup>3</sup> Other research on Polish entrepreneurs in the UK confirm the reliance on co-ethnic labour (Vershina *et al.*, 2011; Lever and Milbourne, 2014; Knight, 2015).

customers because of the shared language and shared understanding (in other words: shared culture).

Likewise due to shared culture, Polish EMEs are able to spot opportunities within the community niche market. Indeed, for most of the participants, the Polish community is the primary or even the only market targeted. Although local clients are potentially available, the businesses studied strongly rely on the fellow Polish migrants as customers.

*Almost all our clients are Poles. I think it is because of the language barriers. Sometimes I have to ask three or four times to understand a question with the locals [...] We are trying to reach more and more locals with the advertising, the flyers. M. Garage.*

Most of the entrepreneurs serve the Polish community niche markets with ethnic goods, such as food, Polish computer programs, or with services matching specific needs of the community (e.g. legal advice, car repair, hairdressing).

Second, it is easier for a new entrepreneur to trade within their community of co-ethnics because they have a better understanding of its tastes and needs (in other words: a shared contextual reference achieved through shared identity, and shared experience of migration) than their British counterparts do. However, in some cases, Polish businesses face competition from other ethnic minority run businesses e.g. Pakistani delicatessens employing Polish people to sell Polish goods. For instance, Polish EMEs know where and what product to order from central purchasing agents or directly from suppliers in Poland.

The combination of shared national identity, shared language, shared cultural references, shared experience of migration and shared understanding between Polish EMEs and their co-ethnic clients can be grouped under the notion of *cultural proximity* as a contextual dimension of the opportunity structure in which Polish EMEs operate.

### **3. The Importance of Perception**

The findings highlight the importance of *perception* on the assessment of the opportunity structure by Polish EMEs. Importantly, the dimensions of the opportunity structure are *perceived* by the Polish EMEs through their idiosyncratic interpretation. In addition Polish EMEs compare the Scottish opportunity structure with the situation of entrepreneurs in Poland.

*If I compare my situation of entrepreneur in Poland to the one here, I must say that it was a very good surprise for me. In Scotland, you do not need to pay to start your own business. You do not need to worry. In comparison, there is a huge number of documents needed plus multiple costs [...] Here I can improvise. This system encourages businesses.*

D. Bookshop.

Their perception of the Scottish opportunity structure is shaped by the historical (i.e. memories or perceptions of the Polish entrepreneurial environment, as well as by migration experience) and social contexts (including the Polish community in Glasgow) in which they are embedded, as well as by their personal entrepreneurial experience in Poland (when applicable).

A common statement made by the participants reveals the perceived ease of starting and running a business in the UK. Furthermore, participants only required a small amount of financial capital at the start-up phase. Market dimensions of the opportunity structure are depicted in an even more favourable light by Polish EMEs given the tax system in Scotland, small businesses benefit from discounts in their business rates through the Small Business Bonus Scheme and VAT exemption. Self-employed status also provides the individual with income tax credits.

All participants confirmed the ease of starting-up a new venture in Scotland. They also emphasised the small amount of paperwork required:

*Yes, it is straight forward. At the beginning, there is only the language barrier. Only the language barrier has prevented me from starting up earlier or doing it faster. I.*

Hairdresser.

*It was really easy. Generally it is straight forward. I am self-employed which makes it even easier. Registration is done through the Internet, it is far easier from what I have hear about it in Poland. P. IT.*

*Yes, roughly £5000, nothing more. That's all we needed to rent the local, buy the desks and laptops as well as the printers. K. IT.*

Likewise, there are fewer controls to the business in the UK compared to Poland, and in Polish EMEs' view, controls in the UK primarily aim at helping the business rather than sanctioning. Hence, Polish EMEs perceive the opportunity structure as extremely favourable to new venture creation, especially in comparison with the situation of entrepreneurs in Poland. Indeed, most participants contrast their entrepreneurial experience in Scotland with the situation of entrepreneurs in Poland. Indeed, six interviewees had run a business in Poland, whereas twelve had friends or relatives currently running businesses in Poland. This embeddedness in different institutional and social contextual dimensions in two different opportunity structures shed a favourable light to the Scottish opportunity structure. Perceptions of the opportunity structure by Polish EMEs emphasise the enablers of the environment over the constraints.

Their perceptions allow them to recognise or create opportunities within the community niche market. As mentioned above, Polish EMEs are able to understand the needs of the community; based on their interpretation of the local opportunity structure, they identify opportunities that might not be visible for native entrepreneurs, such as a Polish-language boxing school or Polish IT shops.

#### **4. The Household Dimension**

The fourth dimension of the opportunity structure highlighted in the findings relates to the importance of the household on entrepreneurial behaviour. The fieldwork reveals that the entrepreneurial and (household) settlement strategies of Polish EMEs are intertwined. In

particular, the role of spouses or partners is crucial in understanding their decision to start-up and develop businesses. The shared/joint household is a highly significant decision-making unit for Polish EMEs.

Polish EMEs cannot be solely viewed as individuals operating within specific social and economic contexts, but as households operating within these contexts. In addition, the objectives of any entrepreneurial decision taken by Polish EMEs in Glasgow are lifestyle and household-focused. For instance, start-up motives relate to job satisfaction and stability, family reunion, settlement, and income generation in order to pay for mortgages.

The decision to start-up is a household decision whether the husband or the wife eventually starts-up. Starting-up is a consequence of job dissatisfaction, as most of Polish EMEs taking part in this research - like fellow post-2004 Polish migrants in the UK (Garapich, 2008; Drinkwater *et al.*, 2009) - were engaged in physically demanding and lower-status activities, such as factory-work, construction, cleaning, or butchering before starting-up. They see entrepreneurship as an improvement of their work and (consequently) of their life conditions. Wives especially push their husband to find less physically demanding activities. In addition, starting-up is suitable for the family, making this decision to be categorised as life-style entrepreneurship (which is not specific to EMEs but equally applies to mainstream entrepreneurs).

*Starting my Driving School was also for the family. The children go to School during the day and I work [laughter]. I can pick them up from school. I decide about my schedule. It is really convenient.* M. Driving School.

Importantly, these decisions rely on the parents' perception of the household situation, thus, taking children (and school), stability of the household, couple relationship, mortgages or other settlement elements, as crucial factors into consideration when deciding for entrepreneurship.

The household context influences entrepreneurial behaviour, too. In addition, the decision to start-up aligns with household settlement strategies. Indeed, starting-up appears as the best

lifestyle decision. The fieldwork shows that Polish EMEs' households usually have bought houses or flats in Scotland, and have to repay for mortgages. At the same time, children start going to school, learning English and socialising (D'Angelo and Ryan, 2011; Ryan and Sales, 2013). Hence, the couple is taking the decision to settle-down. It becomes difficult for them to consider staying in low-skilled/low-paid occupations in the long term. Entrepreneurship becomes a household decision, which takes place while incremental commitments are building up. Lifestyle entrepreneurship also reinforces the settlement decision as it provides a better status to the entrepreneur, as well as (often) a better income, and better and more flexible work conditions. As a consequence of the migration experience, Poles originally lack access to suitable occupations in the UK labour market. The decision to settle and the one of starting-up a new venture come simultaneously. This emphasises the importance of the embeddedness of Polish EMEs within their household on the entrepreneurial activity of Polish EMEs. The next section integrates the additional dimensions discussed above into our proposed modelised representation of the concept of opportunity structure.

### ***Discussion***

This paper aims at revisiting the concept of opportunity structure in order to provide an operational tool for comparative studies in EMEs research. The proposed model of opportunity structure is stemming from previous developments of the concept as discussed in the literature and as presented earlier. It is complemented by the different contextual dimensions of the opportunity structure revealed during the fieldwork. Thence, the model (Figure 4) is a visual representation, combining previous dimensions embraced by the concept as defined so far (Figure 1, 2 and 3) and additional dimensions highlighted by the fieldwork. Those dimensions are incorporated in a comprehensive and multi-levelled representation (Figure 4).

**Insert Fig 3 about here**



Figure 3 is a combined visual representation of the concept deduced mostly from the works of Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) and Kloosterman and Rath (2001). This representation functions as a basis for the development of the proposed comprehensive modelised representation of the opportunity structure.

Figure 4 is the outcome of an analysis of the opportunity structure, complementing the model with seven additional dimensions induced by the findings of the empirical work presented in this paper. Hence, as discussed previously, these dimensions are added to the concept of opportunity structure in order to present a comprehensive model to be used for comparative studies as advocated by Kloosterman and Rath (2001) and Kloosterman (2010) for comparison at international level. This model can be used for inter-group or inter-localities comparative studies (even within the same country).

**Insert fig 4 about here**

The first dimension added is the *community as a market* highlighted by a number of studies (for instance Werbner, 2001; Zhou, 2004; Rusinovic, 2008) and confirmed by the fieldwork. As presented above, Polish EMEs target the community niche market at the start-up phase. Arguably, this dimension relevant at the local level is more specific than the one of access to ethnic customers presented by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990).

The second added dimension is the *cultural proximity* shared with co-ethnics (national level). Although mostly located within the demand-side dimensions, cultural proximity is at the interplay of the EME and their market. Furthermore, cultural proximity is unavailable to native entrepreneurs (Light and Bonacich, 1991; Werbner, 2001). It can be linked to a form of cognitive knowledge of the market since EMEs *know/understand* the needs of their community. This shared contextual reference enhances the EMEs' ability to recognise or create opportunities within the community niche market (Rusinovic, 2008) Cultural proximity also explains access to labour through trust mechanisms (Welter and Smallbone, 2006; Jones and Ram, 2010).

Furthermore, two additional dimensions of the opportunity structure influence the development of the entrepreneurial mindset among EMEs (McElwee and Smith, 2012): community support and the historical context. EMEs - as migrants - seek for *community support* for emotional and social needs as documented in the migration literature (White and Ryan, 2008, for Poles in the UK). The findings also reveal that this emotional stability is crucial in understanding Polish EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour. This feeling of security is encouraging Polish EMEs to start-up, as they change their settlement strategies from economic sojourners to settlers (*anonymised*).

Likewise, the *historical context* in which EMEs have grown up, been educated, and worked in, influences the entrepreneurial mind-set. This dimension is located within non-market and supply-side part of the visual representation. The findings highlight the importance of historical heritage from the communist era on entrepreneurial behaviour in countries from the former eastern bloc. Likewise, Smallbone and Welter (2001; 2011) argue that ambiguity and uncertainty but also the perception of the role of the state have shaped entrepreneurs' perceptions and attitudes (that is: mindset) as well as their attitudes towards trust (ibid., 2006). There is a propensity for Polish EMEs to avoid formal institutions, as well as to rely on their own ethnic community members, when it comes to accessing finance. This advocates for integrating the historical dimension in the model.

The next three dimensions added to the model is the recognition of the role of *household* on EMEs' entrepreneurial decision-making. This is directly connected to *settlement* and *migration strategies*. As highlighted in the findings; Polish EMEs cannot be solely viewed as individuals, but instead as households operating within a given opportunity structure. Entrepreneurial decision-making is, in fact, household-led and household-focused. This corroborates Welter's (2011) claim to further explore the household dimension of entrepreneurship, as the household context greatly influences entrepreneurial decisions. The alignment of household settlement strategies with the entrepreneurial process contributes to providing the contextual drivers for

EMEs to start-up. Hence, household is a dimension of the opportunity structure, and an analysis of household living conditions (in the local area) and settlement strategies (in a specific city or region) might inform scholars about influential factors of business start-up. Moreover, the household dimension is relevant at the local level (start-up in a specific street), but also links with settlement strategies at the urban/regional level (for instance in Glasgow), and with initial migration strategies at the national level (as the initial decision to migrate was to migrate to the UK, not specifically to Scotland).

Last but not least, the notion of perception is integrated in the model as an external element to the opportunity structure, emphasising the role played by perceptions of the opportunity structure on EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour. In other words, the EMEs' idiosyncratic interpretations are both *influenced by* and *influencing* various dimensions of the opportunity structure. For instance, growth potential is actually subjective and depends on each entrepreneur's perceptions. Likewise, without engaging in a discussion of opportunity recognition in this paper, it is worth noting that entrepreneurial alertness to opportunities is shaped by interpretation of the context (Sarason *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the potential to identify and recognise pre-existing opportunities in different contexts (Shane, 2000) is influenced by household, historical background (de Vries *et al.*, 2015), and social relations with the community (Welter, 2011). Thus, the model of the opportunity structure presents the different dimensions of the concept, whereas perceptions is an external factor that influences and is influenced by specific dimensions. Therefore, the model displays the interaction between the opportunity structure and the EMEs' perceptions. This interaction is centred on entrepreneurial action, i.e. starting-up and later business developments.

## ***Conclusions***

This paper discusses and refines the concept of *opportunity structure* by exploring the definitions provided in the literature and by integrating those dimensions in a modelised representation. This modelised representation is complemented by dimensions emerging from

new empirical findings on Polish EMEs in Glasgow. The modelised representation of the opportunity structure (Figure 4) extends from the mixed-embeddedness approach (Kloosterman *et al.*, 1999; Sepulveda *et al.*, 2011) and contributes to discussion on contextualised entrepreneurship (Sarason, 2006; Welter, 2011; Garud *et al.*, 2014; Zahra *et al.*, 2014) applied to studies on EMEs. This representation considers the mutually constitutive nature of various contextual dimensions and thence reconciles and incorporates demand and supply-side factors as part of the opportunity structure. It can be a highly useful analytical tool for researchers and practitioners interested in exploring the variety of contexts influencing EMEs' entrepreneurial behaviour. Although Kloosterman and Rath (2001) mention the usefulness of the notion of opportunity structure for comparative international research on EMEs, it can also be applied when comparing across communities and localities (also at regional and local level). As this research is spatially and temporally situated, it provides a contextual understanding of the entrepreneurial behaviour of Polish EMEs in Glasgow. Limitations of this qualitative abductive research designs relate to the lack of hindsight on the population studied on a longitudinal basis (post-2004 Polish migrants starting-up their businesses) and on the lack of comparison with other localities (hence the call for more empirical work). However, the risk of over-contextualisation is overcome since as Welch *et al.* (2011) argue the experiences of Polish EMEs is contextualised, and their relationship with the environment is part of the process of understanding, i.e. the identification of the influence of the various dimensions of the opportunity structure in which they operate (Leitch *et al.*, 2010). The modelised representation does not raise the claim of completeness, but rather gives a basis for further discussions and improvements and calls for the importance of more empirical evidence to further refine the model. Especially with regard to the role of contexts in EMEs perceptions and behaviour, further regional evidence is needed to even better reflect the opportunity structure.

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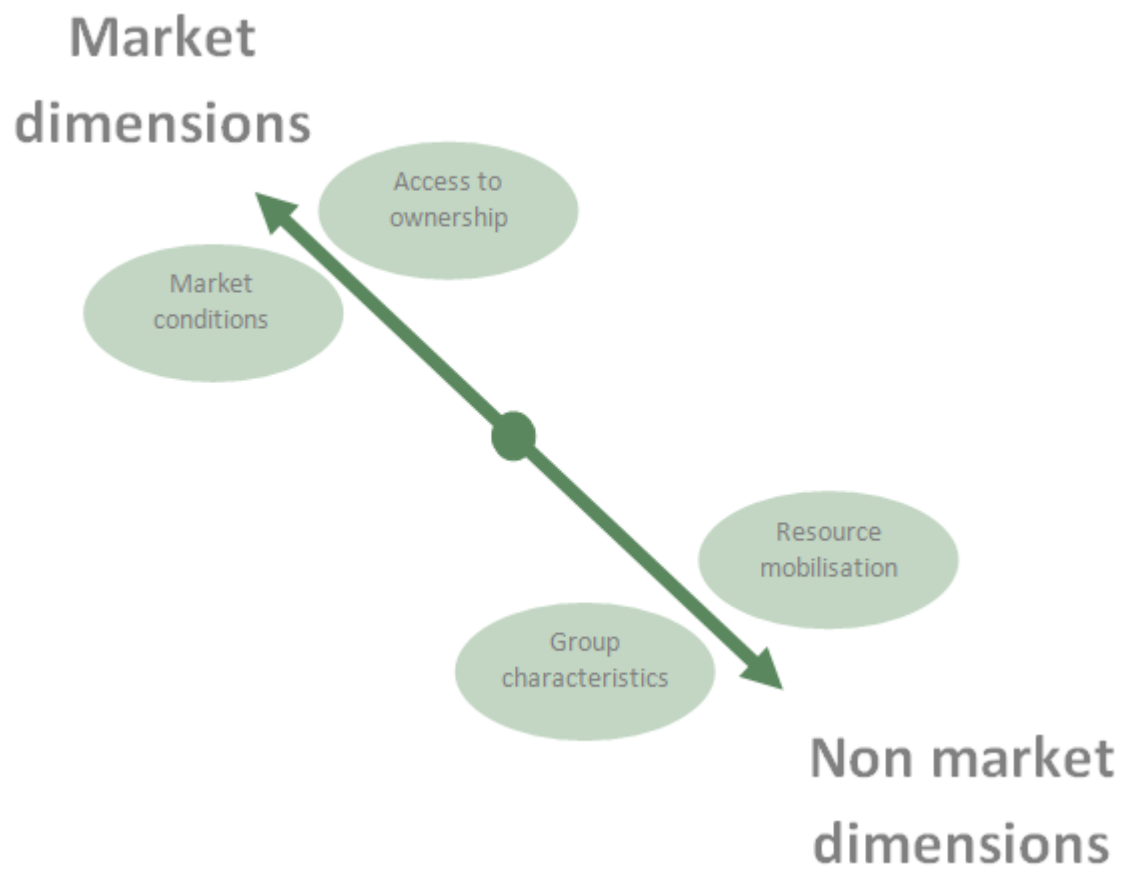


**Table 1: Profile of Polish EMEs in Glasgow**

| Type of Business  | Age, education, year of arrival | Gender |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| S. computer-shop  | 30s, P/G degree, 2005           | M      |
| M. garage         | 20s, U/G degree , 2004          | M      |
| L. travel agency  | 60s, University degree, 1970s   | F      |
| B. delicatessen   | 20s, UK P/G degree, 2004        | M      |
| U. book-shop      | 40s, P/G degree, 2006           | M      |
| M. hairdresser    | 20s, Student, 2007              | F      |
| P. body-shop      | 30s, College degree, 2004       | M      |
| A. construction   | 30s, Secondary school, 2004     | M      |
| K. hairdresser    | 40s, Secondary school, 2004     | M      |
| M & I, restaurant | 40s, University degree, 2005    | F      |
| L. legal adviser  | 30s, P/G degree, 2004           | F      |
| H. legal adviser  | 40s, P/G degree, 2002           | M      |
| P. construction   | 30s, Secondary school, 2005     | M      |
| I. Hairdresser    | 20s, U/G degree, 2007           | F      |
| A. Boxing School  | 20, Secondary School, 2005      | M      |
| K. IT             | 20s, P/G degree,                | M      |
| R. garage         | 30s, Secondary School, 2004     | M      |
| A. Hairdresser    | 20s, student, 2005              | F      |
| M. Driving School | 50s, P/G degree, 2005           | M      |
| M. Delicatessen   | 50s, University, 2006           | F      |
| P. IT             | 20s, P/G degree, 2005           | M      |

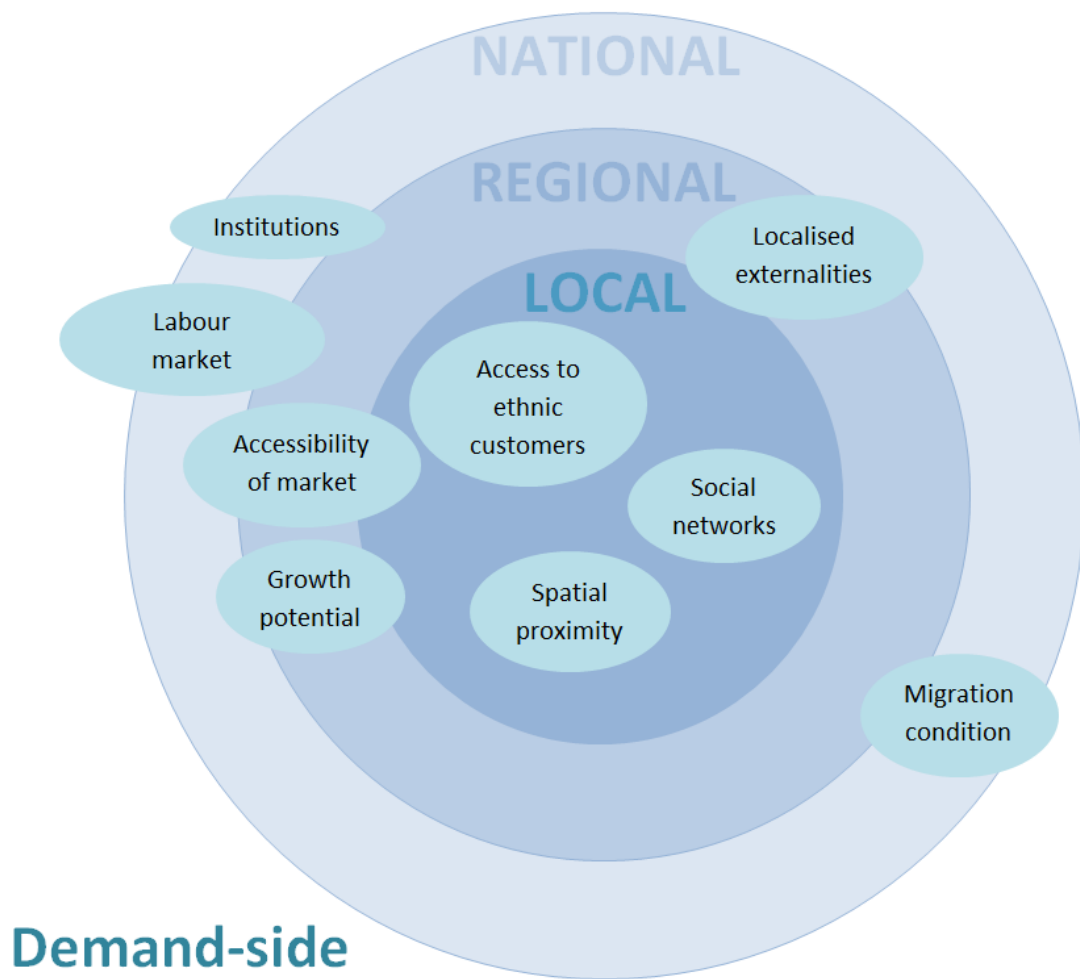
**Figure 1: Visual representation of the opportunity structure after Aldrich and Waldinger (1990)**

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**Figure 2: visual representation of the opportunity structure after Kloosterman and Rath (2001)**

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**Figure 3: combination of the dimensions of the opportunity structure by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) and Kloosterman and Rath (2001)**



**Figure 4: The modelised representation of the opportunity structure**

