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# Revision of Pull and Push Factors to Migrant Entrepreneurship: The Case of Sub-Saharan African Entrepreneurs in Finland

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*Migrant entrepreneurs proved to have various motivations for self-employment. In relevant studies of the last four decades, these motivations have been traditionally classified into push and pull factors. In other words, entrepreneurial activities of migrants have been explained through a recognized opportunity or an economic necessity. Nevertheless, as research indicates reasons for self-employment are often mixed. Moreover, a clear distinction between pull and push factors remains a topic of hot debates. This article intends to make a contribution to the discussion on migrants' motivations for entrepreneurship. It also has an ambition to offer another perspective on both reasons for self-employment and migrant entrepreneurship per se.*

## Theoretical framework

The division into pull and push entrepreneurship was introduced in 1980s. The pull factors commonly contained a desire for independence, monetary gains, family-related reasons and professional self-realization. The push factors mostly encompassed previous employment-related reasons such as dissatisfaction with work conditions or downward job mobility. The approach proved its relevance by providing valuable insights into success rate of migrant businesses. For instance, it

was claimed that pull enterprises had higher rates of survival compared to push ones.

In later studies, methodological ambiguity of pull-push approach raised justified questions. Among other shortcomings of the paradigm, the fact that there can be one single motivation for entrepreneurship appears to be over-simplistic and often comes under attack. Indeed, the respondents of relevant studies frequently mentioned multiple reasons for their self-employment. These findings, nevertheless, didn't undermine a popularity of the binary division. On the contrary, the scholars started paying more attention to, for instance, combinations of these factors among various social groups. As a clear case in point, lately, gender differences in motivations have come into focus. It was discovered that women are more inclined to mention both push and pull factors while men note various pull factors as main inspiration for starting up an own company.

Over-simplicity of the binary division is not the only recognized weakness of the approach. Another shortcoming was found to be an ambiguity of distinction between pull and push factors. Dawson and Henley claim that, for example, monetary gains can be defined as both pull and push factors depending on an interpretation of a scholar. Just to

clarify, monetary rewards as a motivation for entrepreneurship can be defined as both financial necessity (a push factor) or financial opportunity (a pull factors). The same ambiguity can be found in the cases of work conditions, family-related reasons and personal autonomy, Dawson and Henley argue.

All the above-mentioned facts demonstrate some challenges in practical application of pull and push approach to migrants' motivations for self-employment. However, due to the lack of an alternative in relevant research, the approach remains extremely popular and almost unrevised since its very emergence to date. Scholars attempted to avoid its pitfalls by introducing even more complex methodologies. To resolve ambiguity of distinction between pull and push factors, the researchers tried to contextualize informants' answers and define a type of a factor with the help of in-depth reading of qualitative data. Apparently, it may often lead to even more subjectivity and confusion.

### Black Sub-Saharan African entrepreneurs

The current study is based on in-depth semi-structural interviews conducted with black Sub-Saharan African entrepreneurs in urban areas of Finland in 2017-2018. All informants were first generation migrants. Their age varied from late 20s to late 40s with majority being in their 30s. Out of 15 interviewees one third was represented by black female entrepreneurs and two thirds by male. The respondents operated in various business sectors such as retail trade, business consulting, manufacturing, catering, art and entertainment.

Among other questions, Africans were asked about their motivations for self-employment. They mentioned various reasons for engaging into entrepreneurship. The number of reasons noted by one informant varied from one up to five. Most popular motivations proved to be contextual opportunities, professional realization, unemployment and family-related reasons.

An attempt to classify mentioned motivations has reconfirmed ambiguity of pull-push division. For instance, a shop owner Ann named a desire to build a better future for her kids as the main reason for self-employment. Was she pulled into entrepreneurship being a source of better well-being for her family? Or was she pushed into self-employment as the living conditions were unsatisfactory? Another popular answer to the question on motivations was to realize one's professional potential. Were these people pulled into en-

trepreneurship to live up to their potential? Or were they pushed as working environment constrained them in their professional activities? Interestingly, the above described motivations embracing dual interpretations were often the single reasons for self-employment mentioned by informants.

Dawson and Henley claim that these ambiguous answers, nevertheless, can be classified with the help of a wider context they were mentioned in. Basically, this methodology implies that each motivation boils down to one single cause, either pull or push, which must be directly or indirectly mentioned by an informant. Nevertheless, the reality is that migrants themselves may have mixed feelings about actual reasons for their self-employment. Moreover, those reasons can be imaginary experiences as well as experiences really lived through. For instance, one of my informants, business consultant Kevin, beautifully explains how expected unemployment and imagined inequality in the labor market, a push factor, may turn into looking for contextual opportunities, an originally pull factor:

So, <...> I just gave myself you know the beginning, an assessment, what I would, what I could do, what are my chances of getting a job if I were to get a job. So, when I saw that, okay, maybe, that is you know it's just not going to be possible. And when I figured out, maybe, *that is not true but that's what I think, that's what my thoughts*. And then I quickly I begin to think, what else could I do? <...> What are the opportunities out there for me? And I begin to think that, okay, as an entrepreneur, it's the question of how much value I can create, right? And once that is done no one can stop it.

Can it be stated that Kevin was pushed into entrepreneurship due to his assumption that he would not get a job? Or was he pulled as the actual reason for self-employment became identifying contextual opportunities?

Together with highlighting importance of imagination in a migrant's economic decision-making process, the case of Kevin raises another novel question of relations existing between various factors. These relations can be complex and intertwined. For now, what we can see from the above-mentioned example is that a motivation can serve as a catalyst for engaging into self-employment in a context of other conditions. Indeed, similar to the case of Kevin, unemployment and contextual opportunities were mentioned together in answers of other interviewees as well.

## Discussion and conclusions

As the data reconfirms, migrants do have multiple reasons for self-employment. The motivations can have ambiguous, dual nature, where a clear line between pull and push factors might be impossible to draw. Moreover, the binary division appears to be over-simplistic and misinforming, forced by scholars' subjective interpretations rather than naturally suggested by the data. In short, if pull-push division is to be used in relevant research, it should be done with total acknowledgement of all the above-mentioned limitations of the paradigm.

As the findings demonstrate, the motivations for migrant entrepreneurship are the result of not only objective social conditions but also imagination, future projections and personal perceptions of migrants. In other words, some of the reasons might stem from real, lived through experiences, others can be based on a migrant's knowledge and beliefs. These facts highlight complex, multilayered decision-making process taking place in economic life of migrants.

As individual perceptions of immigrants proved to play an important role in their economic decision-making, this direction of research appears to be relevant and thrilling. The questions why and on what grounds certain reasons are imagined will provide us with crucial insights into would-be entrepreneurs' characteristics and experiences. Moreover, as it was stated, unique relations between various reasons seems to be another overlooked subject of high significance.

For instance, as the current research outlines, some of motivations might serve as catalysts in decision-making process. In the collected data, contextual opportunities became a catalyst during the times of factual or imagined unemployment.

All these findings inspire a shift in perception of migrant self-employment. Migrant entrepreneurship appears to be a result of complex decision-making process of immigrants. The role of individual agency and personal beliefs in this process should not be underestimated. In the light of these facts, migrant entrepreneurship should be conceived as strategic or alterative rather than forced or encouraged.

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