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Katrin Sontag

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the Migration of the Highly Skilled

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Budrich UniPress Ltd.

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# 1 Introduction

The topic of migration of the highly qualified or highly skilled has recently pushed its way into the focus of debates in migration studies in different disciplines, as well as onto the agendas of international organizations, political campaigns and media. It has attracted attention not only in the context of increasing migration, globalization, and internationalization of corporations, but also in the context of events such as the economic crisis of 2008, when highly skilled people left countries that were most severely affected by the economic downturn. In Switzerland, around half of the incoming migrants have a university education (nccr – on the move, 2017).<sup>1</sup> And, as in other OECD<sup>2</sup> countries, the rate of persons with tertiary education is higher amongst migrants than amongst the general population (Aratnam, 2012, p.129; Dumont & Lemaitre, 2005, p.24). Migration of the highly skilled is a growing research field within migration studies in the social sciences, and yet it is only during the last years that ethnographic studies have started to explore the topic.<sup>3 4</sup>

This book is based on a qualitative cultural anthropological study that is in turn part of a larger project designed to achieve a deeper understanding of the processes of movement of highly skilled people in different professional

- 1 Pecorao observes a steady increase in the number of highly qualified migrants for the years 1990-2000. In 2000, the percentage reached 60 %. Based on the definition of the “Canberra Manual” (OECD/Eurostat, 1995) for highly qualified professionals, he states that 21.1 % of all foreigners held a tertiary educational qualification and 36.6 % were highly skilled in the year 2000 (Pecorao, 2007, pp. 4-6). Aratnam notes in his study of highly qualified foreigners and the Swiss job market of 2012: “In 2010, 32 percent of foreigners over the age of 25 had a tertiary educational qualification as compared to 29.6 % of the Swiss. It must be noted, though, that in absolute numbers, the number of highly qualified foreigners is much smaller than that of the highly qualified Swiss (with or without migration background). For foreigners account for around 23 percent of the resident population and around 28 percent of the working population in Switzerland” (Aratnam, 2012, p. 129, my translation).
- 2 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- 3 A number of research projects on highly skilled migrants funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation at the University of Basel in Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology have started since 2013, namely “Emigration from Switzerland” by Walter Leimgruber, Aldina Camenisch and Seraina Müller; “The mobility of the highly skilled towards Switzerland” by Walter Leimgruber, Metka Hercog and Laure Sandoz (nccr – on the move); “Narratives of identity, multi-sited biographies, and transnational life-modes of highly qualified migrants: two case studies” by Jacques Picard, Hélène Oberlé and Haddy Sarr; “Roots becoming routes: Mobility, place and transnational social spaces between the Americas and Switzerland” by Angela Sanders, which started in 2011; and the independent project “Globally mobile corporate executives and the impact of relocation on families” by Shabih Zaidi.
- 4 For further studies on highly qualified migrants see: Sunata, 2011; Favell, 2008; Kreutzer & Roth, 2006; Beaverstock, 2005; Yeoh & Khoo 1998; Findlay, 1995.

fields<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the research project is also designed to discuss different concepts and theories of migration and mobility studies, and their applicability and further development in the light of this research field.

The study presented here focused on a particularly mobile group: migrating entrepreneurs of “born global startups” – enterprises that work internationally from the beginning. This means that not only are the people mobile, but their enterprises operate translocally and transnationally too. Migration in general, and migration of the highly skilled in particular, are often discussed in terms of national economic effects. A study that takes its starting point in individual life narratives contributes to understanding the individual and social consequences of globalization. What do forms of mobility and migration mean for individual self-perception, identity, professional fields, relationships, work, and life plans? How do people with mobile lives position themselves with regard to local, national or global frameworks? How do they interpret professional frameworks such as entrepreneurship? What is identity attached to? What does a self-made job look like? How are new (local and global) economic structures evolving?

The research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of recent migratory processes and their consequences and looks at moving people and their mobilities on a micro level, but also at the institutions and structures on local, translocal and national levels which influence their movement, entrepreneurial activities and thinking (Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2008).

Some of the findings in this book may give ideas for future forms and values of social life, and may suggest ways in which people may determine their identities, their sense of belonging, their livelihood and social relations. This is all the more important as mobility and migration have greatly increased during the last decades and will in all likelihood increase in future. Moreover, the research may contribute to a better understanding of translocal entrepreneurship and of mobile and flexible ways of creating work environments.

## 1.1 Research Question

How do highly skilled startup entrepreneurs experience, create and make sense of the processes of work migration? This was the initial question of the

5 The project presented here was part of the larger project “Living and Working in Different Places: biography and work migration of the highly qualified – a perspective from cultural anthropology” sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The project was carried out by Monika Götzö and Katrin Sontag between June 2012 and September 2015 with Jacques Picard and Walter Leimgruber as advisors. Monika Götzö focused in her study on mobile academics working at universities (see Götzö & Sontag, 2015a, 2015b).

project, which was then investigated under the following aspects: How do the protagonists migrate, which forms or migration play a role and how are they carried out? How is migration and movement interpreted biographically? How are images of the self and other constructed? What role do concrete and virtual spaces play? What does the work environment and daily life look like?

During the course of this study, there was lively debate about the three main concepts of the initial research question of “migration”, “work” and “highly skilled” and the ways in which they could be put to use. It was an interesting dialogue between emic and etic understandings of the terms, with a constant search for and negotiation of other concepts which might help shed light on the different dimensions of this field. How can we deal with the concept of migration today and within the framework of this study? What exactly is work if interlocutors, who appear to be constantly working explain that what they are doing is not work, but fun? What do we mean by “highly skilled” on the level of ethnography, how can this concept depict personal biographies of education, career and meaning? During the analysis of the fieldwork data and the engagement with various theoretical approaches, it became obvious that these concepts needed further clarification, or needed to be replaced by other, more specific terms, as will be shown in the following chapters. The reformulated question hence reads: “How do founders of born global startups create and experience movement?”

As for the definition of “highly skilled”, we started out with the rather broad definition from the OECD, as it was published in the Canberra Manual. Highly skilled people, so called “human resources in science and technology” are here defined as people who have “(a) successfully completed education at the third level in a S&T [Science & Technology] field of study;” or are “(b) not formally qualified as above, but employed in a S&T occupation where the above qualifications are normally required” (OECD/Eurostat, 1995, p.16).

## **1.2 The Field: Professional Groups**

The field of this study was constructed around a professional group of entrepreneurs. Topics related to migration often focus on ethnic or national “groups”. But our intention in this project was to experiment with a different construction of the field. We wanted to build on debates of the last decades that have renounced the equation “national group = similar culture and behavior” as an essentializing understanding of identity and culture, because such an equation neglects heterogeneity, processes of transformation, interconnectedness, interaction and individuality. By constructing national or

ethnic groups as entities of migration research, this categorization is reproduced as parameter of difference.

Taking our cue from current anthropological theoretical discussions on identity, transnationalism, trans- and multilocalism as well as concepts of intersectionality, we wanted to avoid recreating target groups based on “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Instead, we started out from professional groups. Nationality or places of origin were not considered as criteria for constructing our samples. Our intention was to leave the question as to whether nationality or ethnicity play a role in the self-construction of the actors open to research, and not to limit our study as a result of this understanding of grouping. We wanted to investigate the significance of different kinds of migration and therefore did not want to limit ourselves to any particular path of migration<sup>6</sup>. Instead, we included people from our chosen professional groups who had experienced any movement during their lives. This cuts across criteria such as nationality, place, languages, gender, and age. And we wanted to be sensitive to potential intersections of factors. Yet the idea was not to establish a new perspective of research design focusing on professions, but rather to explore flexibility and to see how a different construction of the field influences the angle under which the results can be seen (Götzö & Sontag, 2015a/b).

The target group of the present study consisted of highly skilled migrants who work as entrepreneurs in so-called “born global startups”. These are innovation-oriented startups, in fields such as IT, life sciences, medical technology, consulting, online trade, development cooperation or event organization, which are set up internationally from the very beginning. Born global startups are seen as a specific kind of enterprise, which have developed during the last few decades, boosted by new possibilities in communication and travel. This group is particularly interesting as far as research into migration of the highly skilled is concerned, as the members seem to exemplify globalized approaches to work, worldwide networks and mobility to a special extent. Moreover, this group is growing, rather young, and insights into their understanding of life and work might thus provide a glimpse into how mobility and work might develop in the future.

### **1.3 Methods: Biographical Interviews**

In early migration studies, migration often had the character of an once-in-a-lifetime event as observed from the perspective of the “receiving society”. What mattered then was the phase of assimilation or integration in the place

6 For definitions of migration see chapter 5.1.

where people had arrived. The study of migration was in fact a study of immigration, a study of “foreigners” (Hess, 2010, p.12).<sup>7</sup> During the last few decades, encouraged among others by postcolonial studies, critical migration studies, constructivism as well as deliberations on methodology, some of the research has shifted from studying such specific settings of immigration to studying processes. This means, for example, studying the complexity of transnational social fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), in which people keep moving, even though, from a perspective of immigration, they appear to have arrived in any given place. Another debated concept is that of identity, which is now seen as a process, constructed, created, ascribed, rather than as a given (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Approaches such as transnationalism and simultaneity (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), translocality (Appadurai, 2010 [1996]), and multilocal living (Hilti, 2009) are important in this context.

For the design of the larger research project, we chose an approach that allowed us to view migration as a process instead of pre-defining it as an event or a state of being, with a beginning and end. We wanted it to allow us to gain an insight into the actors’ perspective on multiple migratory movements, transnational connections, personal semantics and daily life (Götzö & Sontag, 2015a/b). This is why we chose to work with biographical narrations. This study is based on biographical interviews with entrepreneurs that included subsequent questions about their experiences of migration, founding their businesses and living their daily lives.

In addition to yielding a processual view onto migration, a biographical perspective allowed us to place migration into the context of a person’s life. Scholars of migration have criticized the fact that migration research often adopts a perspective in which migration is seen as “the other” as opposed to “the normal”: the settled. They have instead argued for taking new perspectives: “studying through migration”, “studying from the perspective of migration” (Hess, 2010), or employing perspectives such as “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus, 1995; Welz, 1998). For all this, it can still be difficult to leave a perspective “onto” migration. A biographical perspective, though, allows one to place migration in the context of a person’s life and to investigate its relevance and significance for the individual actors. Furthermore, the biographical perspective makes it possible to use the concept of intersectionality in its most ethnographic sense, i.e. to avoid re-creating standard categories such as nationality, gender, age, and instead to extract those categories that matter in the field (Tuider, 2011).

7 An example of a contrasting approach is the project “Auswanderung aus der Schweiz” funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation at the University of Basel, Institute for Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology that focusses on emigration from Switzerland. It started in 2013 and is conducted by Walter Leimgruber, Seraina Müller, and Aldina Camenisch.



Moreover, it is not only the biographical construction itself, but the mode of this construction, its *constructedness*, that is of analytical relevance. Levels of construction become apparent when looking at different connotations of the term biography itself: “the cultural practice of ‘life (de)scribing’ and the described, lived life of concrete individuals” (Dausien, 2004, p.314, my translation). Furthermore, the constructedness encompasses the situation of the interview and the perception of the interviewer. In addition, it includes the constructedness of biography as a literary genre (Bourdieu, 1985). And it relates to what has been called *Biographizität*, the inner patterns of meaning-making which a person uses in order to organize and make sense of life narratives. As Alheit defines it, “*Biographizität* means that we can reinterpret our life in the contexts in which we (have to) spend it, and that we experience these contexts themselves as formable and shapeable” (Alheit, 1995, p.300, my translation). Thus, not only does the biographical perspective on migration accounts contribute to a processual perspective of identity, but, at the same time, biography as a technique of describing life is hybrid in itself and leads to a reflexive analysis (see also chapter 3). As Picard writes: “Every biographical procedure mediates – implicitly or explicitly – between irreversible life events, social places and semantic forward-, backward- and re-interpretations by the concerned and acting persons themselves” (Picard, 2014, p.186, my translation).

## 1.4 Structure

In the following chapters, I shall present material from the field as analyzed using the process of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) and interpret it in the context of different theoretical frameworks, discussing which concepts and models might be helpful in understanding and interpreting the material. This procedure pays homage to the call for multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995; Schönberger, 2007), not just in the sense of following people, objects and stories, but also on a conceptual level, by approaching any given topic from a number of different sides. In fact, the comparative recency of the topic calls for a very open search for concepts and a discussion of migration, mobility, work, and “highly skilled” and offers an opportunity to revisit a number of anthropological debates. Of course, an open discussion of a limited number of concepts will inevitably touch on and reproduce other concepts that cannot be discussed here to the same extent. Referring to entrepreneurship and mobility, for example, taps into an influential narrative of modernity.

At the outset, two main theoretical fields provide a frame: migration and entrepreneurship studies. While the main focus lies on migration and will be

discussed in more detail in the final chapters, both fields are inter-connected, so the book will shed light both on migration in the context of entrepreneurship and on entrepreneurship in the context of migration. In fact, the cases of this study do not really sit comfortably neither in the classic understanding of migration as a one-way movement, nor in the classic anthropological studies of ethnic or immigrant entrepreneurship as business that is carried out by or for a certain ethnic group. Bringing these perspectives together by contextualizing born global startup entrepreneurs in their mobility and their multifaceted transnational connections, allows us to move beyond some of the classic, and indeed beyond even some current points of focus and limitations in both fields. The following chapters are organized into three main parts:

1. Research setup and context: chapters 2-3
2. Discussion of the material: chapters 4-8
3. Theory discussion and conclusion: chapters 9-13

Chapter 2 is an overview of the research field and its background as we constructed it for this project. I will look into political and economic contexts and developments, the perspective of economics, and trace debates in ethnic entrepreneurship studies within the social sciences. Chapter 3 explains the methodical approach and the research procedure.

Chapter 4 introduces the protagonists and describes the different meanings of migration within their narration and summarizes different ways of “doing migration”. Chapter 5 explores the ways in which people move, and opens the concept of migration towards mobility. It addresses mobile ways of living not only with regard to geography, but also to social life, culture, cyber space, time and income. The meaning of local places and personal spaces of movement is the focus of chapter 6. Different forms of local mooring, and the connection between cities and their business opportunities are explored. Chapter 7 explores the question of how people orientate themselves in mobile circumstances and opportunities, and puts forward different types of orientation schemes. Chapter 8 looks at the surrounding economic and social structures, which in fact can be seen as places from which to observe how new structures come into existence, sometimes very rapidly indeed. Both personal networks and institutions of the startup scene are portrayed.

The last four chapters (9-13) focus on the theoretical debate and review past and current developments within migration studies (chapter 9 and 10). Chapters 11 and 12 deal with the term “highly skilled”. Chapter 11 focuses on its pitfalls and its applicability to research questions, and investigates the role of qualifications and how protagonists see themselves in the narratives collected. Chapter 12 discusses the epistemological side, the heritage of perspectives such as “highly skilled”, by referring to the debate around “studying up”. Finally, chapter 13 presents a summary and concluding remarks.



## 2 The Field

The woman standing next to me was slowly sipping her coffee. We were at a conference on migration and started to talk about our research projects in the crowd during the break. She told me about the group of migrants she studied and then asked: “And what about you? Which group do you study, where do they come from?”

### 2.1 Defining Professional Groups

This question exemplifies a prevalent notion of migration and migration research: It is about groups. And it is mostly about groups assumed to share origins. This corresponds of course with the world view and the anthropological research perspective of the 19<sup>th</sup> and parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of splitting the world and its people into categories and tying culture, ethnicity and political and geographical place together. Corresponding research practice, anthropological knowledge and the authority of the researcher has been based on his or her presence at a certain place (Picard, 2014, p.189).

Yet, even though the paradigm of the settled as primary point of reference has been under debate, and research has shifted towards studying movement, change and interrelations, the entity on which migration research is often based still reproduces this classical idea of looking at somehow contained communities. And this applies not only to “migrants”, but also to “non-migrants”. Here, too, a group (of which e.g., the researcher is part) is implicitly constructed in face of “the other”, implying a “cohesive societal whole” as “receiving society” (Anthias, 2011, p.41). Choosing “ethnic groups” as the point of departure cannot but reproduce these groups. Frederic Barth already pointed out in his famous introduction to the volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* from 1969 that social and cultural groups are not congruent in a culture-essentialist manner, reflecting understandings of cultures as homogenous containers; containers which correspond with territories and are – and can only be – determined by a norm of sedentariness. In fact, Duchêne-Lacroix, Hilti, and Schad (2013) write about the double container perspective of sedentariness, which refers firstly to the nation state as basic entity and secondly to the fixed residence and household as the accountable bureaucratic unit that made sedentariness the measurable and necessary norm. They argue that this often does not correspond to actual living patterns. In the 1980s and 1990s, also as a consequence of the end of the cold war, different analyses and models have been put forward to widen the theoretical toolbox and account for issues such as the heterogeneity of societies (Geertz,

1996), the imaginativeness of nation states (Anderson, 2006) or the processes of globalization.

The point is, as has been discussed before<sup>8</sup>, that research designs often lag behind current theoretical considerations. This project puts forward an attempt to follow up on this debate and leave the reference of national, ethnic, “arriving” or “receiving” groups as basic categories. At the outset, our<sup>9</sup> intention was to find out more about the ways in which highly skilled people migrate, what meaning migration has for them and how they construct their identities and images of themselves and others, as well as what meaning places have. We thus tried not to confine our research design to reproduce ethnic or national categories, but rather wanted to find out if and which roles such categories play.

Inspired by the analysis of Sami Mahroum (2000), we decided to split the larger research project into different groups of professionals. Mahroum introduced a model of five groups of highly skilled migrants, whereby he took his cue from the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) (OECD/Eurostat, 1995): 1. Managers and executives, 2. Engineers and technicians, 3. Academics and scientists, 4. Entrepreneurs, and 5. Students. These groups, Mahroum argued, have different motivations, aims and preconditions for their migration and mobility. He identified different push and pull factors as well as policies, which interest and affect the different groups. For the group of entrepreneurs, which this study was going to focus on, he argued that governmental policies such as visa, taxation and protection, financial facilities and bureaucratic efficiency as well as flexibility of human resources management, and the factor family are amongst the most important push and pull factors (Mahroum, 2000, pp.28-29). In migration research, work and profession have been a focus of study, as well as publications by political institutions (Mahroum, 2000; Salt, 1992). Yet while Mahroum and others write about push and pull factors in this context, the present study did not focus on push and pull factors from the outset. We rather tried to contextualize motivations for moving and look at the complexity of individual migration strategies.

For the present part of the project, I thus chose within this professional group of entrepreneurs those who moved and who are at the same time running born global startups – enterprises that are active internationally from the beginning. The startup entrepreneurs are not a group in the classical sense of people of a similar occupation, trade or expertise, but rather a group of people

- 8 Sabine Hess: Oral presentation at the conference Spektrum Migration: Perspektiven auf einen alltagskulturellen Forschungsgegenstand, titled “Forschungsperspektive Migration. Reflexive Ansätze in einem kulturanthropologischen Forschungsfeld”, Tübingen, November 15, 2012.
- 9 Referring to the project “Living and Working in Different Places: Biography and Work Migration of the Highly Qualified – a Perspective from Cultural Anthropology” by M. Götzö and K. Sontag funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

in a similar professional function: founding and leading a business. And, as the research showed, at the same time this function has a connecting effect in building communities and shaping identities.

Apart from these rather abstract considerations, the approach proved to be a sensible one, and also an interesting topic for discussion during fieldwork. There was, for example, a situation with an interview partner who had already participated in a study on highly skilled migrants. He pointed out that he felt discriminated against by research that concentrated on him as a successful immigrant. Firstly, this showed him that he was not integrated properly – as he receives special attention because he is an immigrant – and, secondly, that his fellow countrymen and women are usually regarded as less successful and so somebody who is successful seems somewhat outstanding. He was positively surprised when I told him about our approach of looking at people who move – regardless from where, for how long or where to. Another interview partner asked me whether I had selected him only because of his physical appearance, and again I told him that I had selected him because of his business and internet presence and because he had some movement in his biography, regardless across which boundaries. Thus, apart from insights we hoped to gain about the migration processes of highly skilled people beyond the concept of ethnic groupism, this approach already created a more open interview situation.

## **2.2 Context: Entrepreneurship since the 1990s**

In order to better understand the entrepreneurial culture and scope I encountered in my fieldwork, this section (2.2) will focus on some of the historic background, followed by a discussion on definitions of what a startup is in section 2.3. The final sections provide a background on scientific debates on entrepreneurship in economics (2.4), with reference to neoliberalism (2.5) and in the social sciences (2.6).

The idea of entrepreneurship experiences a new peak in the 1990s and the startup entrepreneurship takes off. The 1990s are a turbulent decade shaped by political, economic, social and technological changes. Politically, the end of the cold war opens markets, changes economic systems and leaves capitalism as the main economic principle. At the same time, the internet spreads, bringing along a major shift of information accessibility. Also, ways of travel and transportation become easier. New markets emerge and international markets homogenize and certain business sectors, like IT, experience special growth rates, with inventions and new developments (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Venture capital, again in the 1990s, becomes a more popular model of investment, creating chances for non-mainstream ideas with

high risk factors. Even though venture capital was not an entirely new phenomenon, it spread in the US in the early 1980s with a number of amendments. After a slump in the late 1980s, the venture capital market grows steadily until the burst of the dot-com bubble in the 2000s (Engelhardt & Gantenbein, 2010, pp.56-57). Yet, after this crisis, “one major trend emerged in the venture capital market – an increasing globalization of investments”, as economists Engelhardt and Gantenbein (2010, p.58) argue.

In Europe, as Engelhardt and Gantenbein (2010) state, the situation after the Second World War is less entrepreneur-friendly than in the US. They describe how a number of factors, such as the close link between industry and politics, the emphasis on social welfare or the comparatively low esteem of entrepreneurship as a profession hinder extensive new entrepreneurship from evolving. In addition, tax regulations do not encourage any venture capital investment. Yet, starting in the 1980s in the UK with amendments in the tax regulation and support of entrepreneurial activities, the venture capital system spreads within Europe in the 1990s (Engelhardt & Gantenbein, 2010, p.60). The venture capital movement reaches Switzerland a bit later, following an amendment in 2000 of the *Pensionskassen* (pension fund) and the introduction of a new form of venture capital company, also in 2000 (Ibid., p.65). Even though most of my interview partners are not financed by venture capital, but by more low-key investments or grants, this development depicts how political, legal, technological and financial factors together created a more entrepreneurship-open atmosphere during the last decades.

Looking at Switzerland in particular, the economic landscape undergoes major changes in the 1990s. Big companies restructure, merge or outsource (David, Ginalski, Rebmann, & Schnyder, 2009, p.212). In fact, as David et al. argue, the Swiss style of capitalism changes from a rather organized “insider oriented model” between the 1930s and 1980s, which was shaped by a “network of interlocking directorates between Swiss companies” (David et al., 2009, p.198) and was largely independent from international relations, towards a rather liberal market- and shareholder oriented form. This goes together with governmental deregulation and liberalization policies in the 1990s (Ibid., pp.197-198). It corresponds with a time of increasing competition and market pressure.

David et al. also attribute this change to the changing business elite. They state that firstly the educational background of managers changed, and more people obtained MBAs or financial expertise – and thus connected with the Anglo-Saxon shareholder model of capitalism. Secondly, more foreigners held board positions in Switzerland, and they were less tied into traditional networks: “Until the 1980s, Switzerland could be classified as a corporatist, cooperative or coordinated market economy where non-market mechanisms of coordination among economic actors played a major role in the organization of the economy” (Ibid., p.197).

Parallel to this restructuring process, the unemployment rate in Switzerland rises above 5%, something previously unknown in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and job positions become more flexible (Schallberger, 2004). The pressure for further education rises and in the field of education, there is a major shift taking place: at quite a fast pace, *Fachhochschulen*, universities of applied sciences, are developed. The aims of this development are, amongst others, the enhancement of Switzerland as a business location, the upgrading of applied education, and compatibility with EU education (Pätzmann, 2005, p.43).

At the same time, the number of self-employed persons and new entrepreneurs increases, and theorists connect this with the processes of restructuring (Schallberger, 2004, p.12). As Schallberger and others have argued, founders at this time, were and are still stylized as either “heroes” (Ibid., p.13) or “remedy” (Kennel, Leimgruber, & Schärli, 2013, p.2), carrying the promise to solve contemporary economic difficulties. Hessler, in her study on founders in Germany, describes how the classic image of the entrepreneur as a rich and exploiting figure is not politically correct any longer, and that it is becoming more positive (Hessler, 2004, p.13). Startup support structures emerge in Switzerland. As far as administrative prerequisites and paying tax is concerned, the state strives to make things easier for founders. And the institutional landscape of support organizations for startups also grows and becomes a structured professional environment in itself.

The image of startups as “economic cure” is of course debatable. Schallberger (2004), in his study on young entrepreneurs, identifies and debates three problematic myths in the “heroizing” discourse around founders of enterprises: innovation, job creation and success stories. Firstly, he argues, it is not only the young companies that are innovative, and innovativeness cannot be measured by their existence. Rather, traditional companies need to be innovative, too. Secondly, young enterprises are not creating as much employment as expected. Thirdly, success stories of enterprises such as Facebook are rare and most enterprises rather consist of a single self-employed person (Ibid., p.13). Schallberger concludes: “The public celebration of founders also has an ideological component. The well-being of the Swiss economy, it is suggested, lies in the hands of every individual” (Ibid., p.13, my translation).

In the canton Basel-Landschaft, for example, the number of new enterprises was twice as high as that of business failures in the years 2001 to 2003. Yet, during the next few years, both numbers drew nearer. In the years 2004 to 2006, and 2009, new businesses dominated slightly, while in the years 2007 and 2008 the failures dominated (Statistisches Amt Kanton Basel-Landschaft, 2011). Swiss-wide, based on the data of 2008, the survival rate of newly founded enterprises after 1 year was 80.7%, while after 4 years, 60.6% were still alive (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2015).



To provide a more general orientation in terms of companies in Switzerland: there were 564,000 enterprises in Switzerland in 2011. 65.1% of these were small enterprises with less than two full time job positions. One third had 2 to 49 employees. Only 1.4% had between 50 and 249 employees and 0.2% employed more than 250 people full time (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2013a). Small and medium sized businesses are thus very important in the Swiss economy.

When it comes to new foundations, in 2011, 11,531 new enterprises were founded in Switzerland. Statistics show that the number of international founders was quite high: in the first six months of 2012, 31.3% of all founders were not Swiss citizens. Around half of these came from the neighboring countries Germany, Italy and France. Moreover, most founders were male. In 30.5% of cases, women were part of the founding process, but only 17.1% of all enterprises were founded by women alone, while 69.5% were founded by men alone. As compared to 2010, the percentage of enterprises founded by men alone remained constant, while a slight increase can be seen in the percentage of female founders (in 2010 it was 16.2%) (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2013b).

## 2.3 Defining “Startup”

Not every business is a startup. The term startup points to a specific kind of young enterprise. What makes a startup a startup is described using different characteristics from different perspectives, as the following quotes illustrate: The Swiss Startup Monitor, an initiative of public and private stakeholders, created to research and monitor the Swiss startup scene, bases its research on the following definition: “A start-up is a young company that was founded to pursue an innovative and/or technology-driven business idea” (Swiss Start-up Monitor, 2016). The following two voices come from within the startup community and emphasize the startup experience rather than the format itself: “A startup is a human institution designed to deliver a new product or service under conditions of extreme uncertainty,” writes Eric Ries, startup entrepreneur and blogger on startup issues in his blog. He continues: “Startups are designed for the situations that cannot be modeled, are not clear-cut, and where the risk is not necessarily large – it’s just not yet known” (Ries, 2010). Adora Cheung, cofounder and CEO of Homejoy, says “Startup is a state of mind”.... “It’s when people join your company and are still making the explicit decision to forgo stability in exchange for the promise of tremendous growth and the excitement of making immediate impact” (Robehmed, 2013). The concept of startup is part of a wide public discourse and is being used by entrepreneurs themselves. The differing descriptions of

the notion of startup, as mentioned above, can be interpreted as revealing the dynamics within the “scene” on the one hand and the concern to actually create an identity or stability beyond the image of a classic entrepreneur on the other.

I based the initial choice of interlocutors on the definition of the Swiss Start-up Monitor, with the addition of the criterion of international activity from the beginning – born global. The entrepreneurs interviewed thus were running startups that were:

- below 7 years of age,
- innovation or technology oriented,
- built to scale,
- born global.

Obviously, these criteria stem from economic definitions and studies of startups in this discipline are often based on criteria such as age, growth, innovative power, and profit. However, from a cultural anthropological point of analysis, different aspects move into the foreground and will be explored in the coming chapters. Thus, in order to widen the research perspective in the process of theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) and gain a broad perspective on potentially important topics, people whose startups crossed the boundaries put forward by the definitions were also interviewed. This included one person who was running a business that was older than seven years and someone who had just closed down his business. It also included two businesses that were not born global. I also widened the sample under the impression that founders themselves have different definitions of what a startup is. One founder, for example, told me at a networking event that he had been running his business for five years. He had thirty employees and everything seemed stable and settled for quite some time. So I remarked that he probably would not consider his business a startup anymore. He disagreed and explained to me that he saw himself at the critical point of taking a step into a larger expansion, and this moment of uncertainty and venturing into something new made him see his business as startup again. The founder who had just given up his startup because it was not feasible, was also not an active entrepreneur. However, his identity as an entrepreneur and his drive to network, be active within the startup landscape, and start the next venture were strongly apparent. Being an entrepreneur seemed to be more than merely a profession to him. This kind of extension of the meaning of startup into a lifestyle, personal identity and vision also showed up in some other interviews.

## 2.4 Approaches from Economics: Born Global<sup>10</sup>

Meyer and Sidler state that around 30% of all young enterprises in Switzerland had an international orientation in 2009 as compared with 25% in 1999 (Meyer & Sidler, 2010, p.46). Such companies that work internationally right from the beginning are called “born global startups”, “born globals” (Rennie 1993), “international new ventures” (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994), or “born global firms” (Wessely, 2010). They have been – since the 1990s – recognized as a rather contemporary phenomenon. They attract attention in public, as well as scientific debates as they work against the general assumption of economic theory that international enterprises are established companies that expand stepwise and slowly into international markets.

As described in section 2.2, a number of new possibilities came up in the 1990s that facilitated the general and born global development of start-ups. The internet was surely an important factor for born globals, when a new way of doing business became available for IT companies but also for other firms that make use of communication media to sell, produce or co-work. As the internet per se is a global device, working globally became an easy and realistic, not to say self-evident option. One of my interlocutors expressed his discomfort with the label “born global” for something that in his daily life is totally normal with the words: “I find this term absolute bullshit. In the internet, for success on a larger scale, internationality is a pre-condition” (Sontag, 2016, p.149).

Moreover, authors point to the importance of the founders themselves and their personalities and international biographical experiences and international orientation (Lehmann & Schlange, 2004; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Because of this, there are also less “intercultural challenges” for born globals, as Lehmann and Schlange (2004) argue in their study on the internationalization of small and medium enterprises. The economists Oviatt and McDougall, in their much observed article from 1994, on the emergence and elements of born global startups, describe the situation as follows:

However, recent technological innovation and the presence of increasing numbers of people with international business experience have established new foundations for MNEs [multinational enterprises]. An internationally experienced person who can attract a moderate amount of capital can conduct business anywhere in the time it takes to press the buttons of a telephone, and, when required, he or she can travel virtually anywhere on the globe in no more than a day. Such facile use of low-cost communication technology and transportation means that the ability to discover and take advantage of business opportunities in multiple countries is not the preserve of large, mature corporations. New ventures with limited resources may also compete successfully in the international arena. (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994, p.45-46)

10 Some of the content of chapter 2.4 (esp. para.1,3) has been published in an earlier version in Sontag, 2016.

One of the interlocutors remarked that Switzerland is a good place for international ‘startupping’, because, in his view, working multilingually is something that people are used to:

Yeah, so the products we are making have to be global. So it means building up a distributor network internationally. So we have a deal with a distributor in Hong Kong, by sort of coincidence. We’re doing deals also in like Scandinavia and in Europe, it does involve lots of international connections. I think there Switzerland has another advantage, because everybody speaks at least three or four languages. It means it’s not a surprise when something has to be translated or when you’re writing software that you should design it knowing it has to be translated. Within the company we can cover, natively English, German, French, Italian, Polish.

In my study, I used this concept and perspective from economic theory to further define the target group I wanted to look at. Just as we avoided national or ethnic groups in the research design in the study of migration, thinking from the economic concept of born globals and incorporating some of its historic background created a more suitable starting point than the classical anthropological approach of ethnic entrepreneurship, as will be further discussed in section 2.6.

## 2.5 Neoliberalism

The topic of global entrepreneurship can be connected to debates around neoliberalism in various ways. Yet I deliberately did not choose neoliberalism as a theoretical framework from the outset for three reasons that relate to three different ways in which the term is used.

Firstly, neoliberalism<sup>11</sup> is understood as a political and economic system on a macro level. I will point to a few arguments here, but it was beyond the scope of this project and its research questions to analyze this connection on a macro level. During the last decades, political actions towards market liberalization went along with decreasing economic regulations, privatizations,

11 The concept of neoliberalism emerged in the 1930s and was meant to describe a third way apart from capitalism and communism. It was contested from the beginning and different schools emerged in favor of more or less state control. Some of these neoliberal ideas were implemented as a social market economy in post-World War II Germany. Since the 1970s, the term has been picked up again and mostly refers to the de-regulation of markets. In the 1980s, it was part of the British and US American economic strategy to decrease the control of the state and the unions. Worldwide, ideas of privatization and deregulation were enforced as conditions for loans by the Structural Adjustment Program of the IMF and the World Bank. These measures have been criticized for their partly devastating consequences. One of the major accelerators for neoliberal ideas and actions was, in the 1990s, the collapse of socialism, the end of East-West tension and with it the idea that capitalism was the only successful system.

decrease of the social welfare state and the economizations of different aspects of society such as culture, science or social services in various countries. In the 1990s, the popularity of neoliberalism co-occurred with the support of entrepreneurship and the growth of the startup sector as described in chapter 2.2. Governments provided support or training programs for entrepreneurs and the narratives around young entrepreneurs changed into a new positive quality. Different views are possible regarding the neoliberalism of startup support. It can be seen as a promotion of neoliberalism, as the offered state support is never long-term, but rather a boost in the beginning in order to enhance entrepreneurial, neoliberal activities. And it surely does point towards a neoliberal logic of stronger individual responsibility instead of state or company-based responsibility. Moreover, this support of self-employment was discussed as a neoliberal policy, as it drove people out of government dependency on social welfare. In Germany, this debate arose around the so called *Ich-AG*, a program that offered financial support to unemployed people and thus influenced the unemployment statistics. Yet it might also seem like a contradiction to neoliberal logic that the state, at least in some European countries, is involved in funding, supporting and promoting startups and thus, this kind of entrepreneurship does not prosper on its own in a deregulated free market space.

Secondly, neoliberalism is used in the sense of an attitude or behavior of individuals. On this level of individual attitudes and perspectives, entrepreneurs move within a time in which the logic of economization and neoliberalism is quite influential. They move within a liberal or neoliberal market logic that seeks advantages and profits, and promotes self-reliance and individualism. And the act of founding is an act of claiming individual responsibility, which is interpreted positively in this scene. Yet the concept of neoliberalism is not sufficient to explain or describe the logic individual founders apply and create, and their self-understanding. It is too simple to state that everything is basically neoliberal. Different kinds of logic or strands of discourse must be considered when trying to understand the founders' motivations, goals and self-understandings. "You must have an irrational belief in the future in order to found a startup", one of my interview partners said, when I asked him about neoliberalism. And even though "personal greed" plays a role for him, this irrational belief, in his opinion, contradicts the rational neoliberal logic. As will be shown in chapter 7, the orientation schemes and motivations of founders go beyond neoliberal ideas and reflect a variety of personal deliberations, goals and experiences. Each person combines an individual set of opinions and beliefs towards "doing economy", some of which may also conflict with neoliberal ideas, such as solidarity, social justice, sustainability, social change or personal fulfillment. Main streams and counter strands of the discourse, and also more ancient discourse strands, meet in individual attitudes. One of these streams is an older understanding of the (often patriar-

chal) figure of the entrepreneur as a person who feels him/herself responsible for their employees and looks after them and their families. Another stream of discourse surely has to do with questioning established structures of power and dependency in conventional companies, but also in other institutions such as universities, as some of the entrepreneurs deliberately left promising university careers. Furthermore, the strand of discourse of pushing knowledge and innovation can be connected with older ideas of the creation and promotion of knowledge that was not necessarily connected with economic interests. Thus, on the level of individual motivations and biographies, I did not find any “pure” neoliberal logic, but rather ideas from different strands of discourse, a mixture of beliefs, combining various influences, worldviews and goals. The concept of neoliberalism thus helps in shedding light on political circumstances and atmosphere, but it does not sufficiently describe the phenomenon of founding on a micro level.

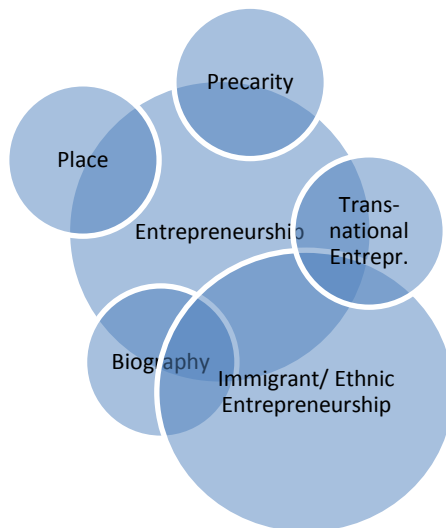
Thirdly, the application of the concept of neoliberalism is tricky and debated in cultural anthropology. In some ways, it seems to have become the new global metanarrative of the world we live in. It is used on a micro, meso and macro level and with a wide range of meanings. Counter movements are then often described as those of solidarity or sharing economy. This wide distribution of the concept is difficult, for one, because a concept that is applicable to almost any context may lose analytical precision. Secondly, because at some point there is no stance outside of neoliberal thought anymore. Thirdly, because it simplifies. Nuances of living, of ‘doing’ economy and of self-construction that may be related to other influences of cultural and personal heritage may become difficult to trace. As Jessop argues: “...neoliberalism may serve more as a socially constructed term of struggle (*Kampfbegriff*) that frames criticism and resistance than as a rigorously defined concept that can guide research in anthropology and other social sciences” (Jessop, 2013, p.65). In an anthropological research situation, a constructivist approach to dealing with this term, its historicity and aims seems sensible. I agree with critiques such as the one by Daniel Goldstein (2012), who argues for a more situated approach or “decolonialising of neoliberalism” (p.304) that treats neoliberalism, or rather the discourse around neoliberalism, as a research topic rather than as a perspective. And Reichman (2013) discusses the immediate connection that is drawn between entrepreneurship and attitudes of neoliberalism and prompts us to focus on practices instead of attitudes. “What do entrepreneurs do?” (p.560) is the question he puts forward; the classic question, which opens new ways of thinking about entrepreneurship.

It is worth exploring these discussion around neoliberalism in greater depth and it does of course pose an important political and historic framework, yet, in the present study, the focus was put on movement and space and only touches on neoliberalism.

## 2.6 Entrepreneurship in the Social Sciences

In publications from the side of economics and entrepreneurship research, born global startups as well as their founders are mostly described and analyzed in a rather functionalist manner with regard to their characteristics, success factors, and the challenges of this way of internationalizing (Wessely, 2010; Holtbrügge & Wessely, 2007; Lehmann & Schlange, 2004; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Oviatt & McDougall, 2005; Neubauer, 2011). In the social sciences, the focus is quite different. The following illustration shows some of the salient research perspectives from cultural anthropology and related disciplines.

Figure 1: Research Areas Regarding Entrepreneurship - Social Sciences



Source: author

A large body of research focuses on immigrant or ethnic entrepreneurship. More recent developments in this debate employ a transnational perspective, a biographical perspective on entrepreneurs, or a focus on networks and settings, in which entrepreneurs move. The following section will mainly focus on these approaches. Apart from this cluster of scientific discourse, research

on entrepreneurship focusses also on the self-employment of migrants and precarity, or the meaning of place.

Early economic anthropology did not pay much attention to the figure of the entrepreneur. It was rather the forms of economic exchange and the ways in which different societies are economically organized, as well as the question if and how Western economic theory is applicable to different societies, that was of interest. Companies and the size and kinds of companies (such as startups, small or medium sized enterprises), concepts borrowed from economic science, were not much part of this perspective. The questions, simply put, would rather be: what kinds of exchange processes take place, how, between whom and for what reason. It was important in this study to remember these questions and to not necessarily take the economic concept of entrepreneurship or startup as a natural starting point. In the 1950s and 1960s, the entrepreneur attracted attention in anthropology in a much wider sense, as an agent of change. Stewart traces this strand of research back to the post-Second World War interest in understanding social change and economic development and argues that the understanding was rather broad and included, for example, political actors (Stewart, 1991). In his reflections on the lack of enterprise-oriented anthropology, he comes to ask:

Why, then, has there not emerged a genuine business anthropology? Possibly the explanation lies in ideology, or in the liberal arts horror of the business school curriculum (although there are other ways anthropologists could learn about business), or, perhaps, in exogenous factors that led to a decline of interest in entrepreneurship. Whatever the cause, the result is an entrepreneurial opportunity to bridge between these spheres of intellectual exchange. (p.75)

Studying immigrant entrepreneurship from the side of social sciences in the Netherlands, Rath and Kloosterman (2000) argue that “during the leftist 1960s and early 1970s, entrepreneurship was definitely unfashionable” (p.662). Only in more recent decades did a field of research open up that deals with organizations and enterprises (Götz, 1997; Lemberger, 2007; Yanagisako, 2002), focusing on the organization, or the enterprise-culture. Yet here also, the focus does not particularly lie on the figure of the entrepreneur as the owner or head of a company.

The most dominant perspective in the study of entrepreneurship originates from a mix of sociological, ethnic and racial studies, as well as geographers’ and anthropologists’ contributions and dealings with immigrant or ethnic entrepreneurship. In the US, this strand of research is mostly traced back to Light’s *Ethnic Enterprise in America* (1972). Light and Bhachu (1993) see this connection between immigration and entrepreneurship as an important one in view of the question of immigrants’ social and economic integration (p.12). They argue that California especially provides a context of a high density of self-employed – amongst immigrants as well as locals. And Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward (1990) argue: “Ethnic entrepreneurship is



important because it is one way immigrants and ethnic minorities can respond to the current restructuring of Western industrial economies” (p.15). Zhou (2004) identifies the questions of why migrants are more prone to become entrepreneurs and why some migrants are more prone than others, as key questions in this field (p.1046). In the Netherlands, Rath and Kloosterman (2000) pose the question, “which socioeconomic paths of insertion in Dutch society have been accessible for newcomers” (p.658).

Bun and Hui (1995, p.523) argue in their review on immigrant entrepreneurship studies that two issues led to the development of the research field of ethnic entrepreneurship: Immigrants were strongly involved and exploited in low-wage or temporary jobs and they were strongly represented in the sector of self-employment.

In the latter case, the somewhat contrary suggestion is that migration and immigration as social processes bestow on immigrants as groups a sociological advantage in the form of an internal ethnic cohesiveness and collectivism, which appears to be conducive to doing business. (Bun & Hui, 1995, p.523)

Bun and Hui distinguish structural and cultural approaches as two major strands in the theoretical discourse, which are linked in an “interactive approach” (Waldinger et al., 1990). The cultural perspective focuses on ethnicity as culture and the resources and advantages that are put into practice, such as values, capital, labor, or information flows (Bun & Hui, 1995, p.523). Structural approaches rather focus on context conditions, restrictions, and disadvantages, but also on opportunities, which influence immigrants’ business endeavors. The authors conclude: “We thus have two contrasting images of ethnic entrepreneurship: one of *human* emancipation and possibility, the other of *social* entrapment and impossibility” (Ibid., p.527).

Yet Bun and Hui also point to the “phenomenon of new middle-class migrants” (p.528). These immigrants, the authors claim, are less prone to sticking to ethnic groups and are rather “making inroads into the economy as well as imposing new patterns of consumption and lifestyle on the established community” (p.528). Moreover, they emphasize an increased mobility of migrants and their assets, migrants thus being more likely to move more than once. They argue that this poses new questions to the understanding of migration in general, as more factors come into play and “the attraction of a host society may be a function of the availability of opportunities for entrepreneurship”. They call for a “broader explanatory model” (p.528) and state that “bigger, more global players” (p.529) are underrepresented in research, as it concentrates on small businesses.

In earlier studies, the notion of ethnic entrepreneurship was based on the perspective of immigration as well as a national political and economic context. In contrast to this approach, the perspective of transnationalism acknowledges the increasing globalized and transnational situation of migration and entrepreneurship (Zhou, 2004, p.1054; Zhou & Tseng, 2001). Zhou

and Tseng (2001) identify a “new type of immigrant entrepreneur whose well being in the New World depends heavily on their connections to the Old World” (p.131). Based on their studies of Chinese high-tech and accounting firms in Los Angeles, the authors develop their argument about the dependency of these entrepreneurs on transnational – but at the same time also local – relations. They point to the fact that “localization is catalytic for effective transnational networks or practices” (p.132). In these studies, a conceptual opening takes place to include more than the “receiving” side into the study of immigrant entrepreneurship. Yet the focus on ethnic communities as basic analytical entities remains.

The problem with the perspective of ethnic entrepreneurship is that it cannot but reproduce its own conceptualizations and thus the controversial concept of ethnicity. And at this point, it is useful to incorporate trans-disciplinary approaches, such as the economic concepts of entrepreneurship and born global entrepreneurship, which would start by looking at market and profit possibilities and then explore influential factors and networks instead of starting off with an understanding of ethnic networks from the beginning.

Rath and Kloosterman (2000) in their review and critique on immigrant entrepreneurship studies in the Netherlands propose a rather wide-ranging “plea for a break with the research tradition which has developed during the last fifteen years in the Netherlands” (p.669). They analyze different research periods within the social sciences and their close link with government finances and thus interests and policies. They evaluate the outcome of the previous research periods in the Netherlands rather critically as “one-sided, local and theoretically not very incisive” (p.668). In particular, their critique also addresses the re-creation of an essentialist understanding of ethnicity by approaches that focus on ethnic and cultural factors. They propose a six-fold opening of the research perspective, some of which are also incorporated into this study. This perspective focusses on the person as an entrepreneur and on his or her entrepreneurial actions, “embeddedness” (p.670) in social networks (producing social capital), the economic surroundings and networks, the connection with larger processes of transformation, the surrounding legal and institutional setting, and studies that make international comparisons.

Kontos (2003) further elaborates on the biographical aspect of embeddedness, referring to the dimension of biographical resources, which include amongst others family structures and conflicts. She specifically argues for a recognition of motivation as a biographical resource for entrepreneurial activity instead of focusing merely on class or ethnic resources. In fact, she exemplifies how lower class and ethnic resources, as derived from an individual’s biography, can lead to high motivation and entrepreneurial success, precisely because entrepreneurs work to increase social recognition – against their educational status or their family logic (Kontos, 2003). Brettell and Alstatt refer to the critique by Rath and Kloostermann and the concept of embed-

dedness, and build on it by incorporating Kontos' suggestion of a biographical embeddedness in their study on immigrant entrepreneurs in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in order to bring to the forefront aspects such as motivation and agency of the individual person turning to entrepreneurship. They define motivational resources, "the strong inner drive to be one's own boss" (Brettell & Alstatt, 2007, p.388), as a major factor, which different cases in their study share. Moreover, they state that "individual characteristics (motivation, experience, creativity, and sacrifice) are as important as group characteristics" (Ibid. p.395). Reichman, in his study on the sea cucumber trade, points to another perspective: to look at entrepreneurship as part of a greater global economic and political dynamic. "In this view, entrepreneurs are the vectors that bring about systemic change, but they are not the force that animates change itself" (Reichman, 2013, p.561). All three approaches and concerns are reflected in this study.

The approach in this study on entrepreneurs of born global startups from a perspective of migration is thus to combine descriptions by economic sciences (founders of born global startups) and by migration studies (highly skilled migrants). (High-tech) startups analyzed from this perspective still pose a research gap and even the transnational approach within ethnic entrepreneurship studies is limiting in that it allows for border crossing activities, but still focuses on ethnic groups, instead of focusing on the business itself and asking which kind of networks and structures exist. In this study, groups such as university alumni, scientists in the same field, co-startuppers, startup support systems and customers (not defined by their ethnicity but by their interest in the product), friends and family form networks that support a business. Moreover, taking a more global perspective, it becomes difficult to define who is a migrant, as lots of entrepreneurs move back and forth between different countries, and the ethnic or immigrant perspective might eclipse the fact that similar ways of networking and operating exist between entrepreneurs no matter which ethnic label or immigrant status may be attributed to them. In the global situation as it has developed rapidly over the past decades and with this focus on highly skilled groups of entrepreneurs, it is worthwhile to work with transdisciplinary concepts.

Yet the two main lines of argument of traditional ethnic entrepreneurship research are still valuable, just in a wider sense. None of the businesses I was in contact with were ethnic in that they catered for a certain ethnic group or in that they relied on ethnic networks in their business connections or the employees they had. However, groupism as far as a certain education or certain experiences is concerned, or networks that might go back to college times, do present structures in which people move and in some cases it is precisely here that "skills" in the sense of education and institutions such as universities play an important role. The second argument, that labor market discrimination pushes immigrants to found, is also not totally outdated even in highly

skilled sectors. This is especially true for people with a regionally specific education such as lawyers, teachers or doctors who, depending on where they come from, may not be allowed to practice under different national laws even if their profession is in demand. Other discriminations are not only migration-based, such as difficulties for women in general or for those who left their careers to take care of children to return to their career. Still others may be sought-after employees and would have no trouble making a career within a larger company or university, and yet the idea of joining a larger context just does not suit them.

## 2.7 Conclusion

One of the opportunities of this study lies in combining migration and mobility studies with entrepreneurship studies. The theoretical contributions from migration and mobility studies provide a larger theoretical framework for understanding (ethnic) entrepreneurship through their critical assessment of categories such as ethnicity, and through their view on globalized, translocal and transmigratory movements. It draws on transnational and transmigratory frameworks, but again does not apply these to any one ethnic group, but rather to the individual entrepreneur and his or her social and economic context. And it opens these concepts into a global perspective, taking criticism on methodological nationalism seriously and thus focusing not on immigration into a certain national setting, but rather on migration, as a movement by people who are entrepreneurially active – no matter from where to where. It is through this opening that social and economic networks as well as categories of identity and belonging can be explored apart from (predefined) settings of ethnicity, culture or immigration.

Regarding entrepreneurship, the study takes its lead from research on born global startups from economics. It combines these contributions from economics with critical approaches from entrepreneurship studies in the social sciences, takes social and economic embeddedness into account (Rath & Kloosterman, 2000), and focusses on biographical trajectories and embeddedness (Kontos, 2003), as more recent entrepreneurship studies within the social sciences have suggested.



## 3 Methods

### 3.1 The Sample

The sample of interview partners followed the idea of theoretical sampling of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999), taking into account the variety of individual situations and topics. The general structure of the sample includes founders from different ages, gender, business sectors, with children and without children, nationalities, born global and not, different sizes of enterprises, and different stages. The following figure provides an overview of the interview partners.

Figure 2: Overview Interviews with Founders

	M/ F	25- 35	35- 45	45- 60	Company Size (People)	Prior Startup Experience	Children	Business Sector
1	M		X		11	X	X	Medical technology
2	F			X	2	X	X	IT
3	M	X			9	X		Social business
4	F			X	1	X		Adult education
5	M	X			7	X		IT
6	F			X	1			Event Management
7	M		X		3 plus freelancers			Medical technology
8	M	X			4			Biotechnology
9	F			X	1		„Patchwork“	Consulting
10	M	X			3	X	X	Consulting
11	M			X	100	X (exits)	X	Biotechnology
12	M	X			2	X (exit)	X	IT

Source: author

While most enterprises were in their first years, one had just shut down and one was eight years old. Some entrepreneurs also had prior experiences of founding successful enterprises or of failing. And for some, it was the first business they founded. Some came straight from university or still had a

position at university, and others had worked in small or large enterprises before. The businesses were either self-financed, or financed with investors, support organizations, and public or private grants (see chapter 8.2). In terms of the size and kind of business, the startups can be categorized as follows:

Figure 3: Overview Company Sizes

No. of Employees	No. of Companies
10-100	1
2-10	8
1	3

Source: author

I also conducted interviews with experts who were working in the startup context, such as a consultant from a public agency, a manager of a startup co-working space, a founder of a startup support center with training and co-working facilities, and a coach. The following figure presents an overview of interviews with experts working in the startup context:

Figure 4: Overview Interviews with Experts

No.	Focus
1	Co-working space, coaching; private institute
2	Public consultancy
3	Foundation with social focus
4	Co-working space, coaching; partly private, partly public

Source: author

In addition, I conducted participant observation, had informal conversations and followed forums, newsletters and other media. I also took part in startup coaching myself. Section 3.2 focuses on the interviews, 3.3 on further field-work, 3.4 on the analysis and 3.5 adds a short self-reflection.

## 3.2 Interviews

I found my interview partners and field using channels such as internet blogs and forums, online business networks such as LinkedIn and Xing, the web spaces of startup organizations and hubs, and also at events, exhibitions, talks, and workshops and through personal networks.<sup>12</sup>

### Interviews with Entrepreneurs

The interviews were conducted as open narrative interviews (Schütze, 1983) starting off with an open question on the person's biography and then moving on to inquire more deeply about aspects of the narration, trying to discover and follow the topics most important to the person. In some cases, the biographical narration was over quickly, almost in the form of a CV, while in some cases it became a very personal interaction and self-reflection. I attempted to formulate questions as openly as possible to get an understanding not only of the content of the narration, but also of the ways in which people would organize their life story in the interview with me; if they would choose what Bourdieu (1985) has called the literary genre of biography or "biographical illusion", or if they would choose other ways of valuing and arranging content that was important to them.

Some founders I interviewed have done this before – talked about themselves, put their life into a form for others to understand and reflect on how and why the founding came about. Some narrations thus sounded like they had been repeated often. The biographical narration, the founding idea and the company's biography seem very much interlinked – not just logically and timewise, but also emotionally. The search for the self, for meaning and self-expression and the marketing of these elements and the company that came out of it sometimes merge in these narrations. In fact, "story telling" is also a coaching method to improve the marketing of a business, for example by telling one's own life story. Yet even though entrepreneurs may be even more aware than other professionals of the "self -marketing" character of a biographical narration, there were also interesting moments, when people said something that emerged just in that moment of interaction. This could be a certain self-realization or reflection triggered by the conversation.

A biographical narration, of course, is always a construction from a certain current perspective onto the past, in the present moment when it is told. Its value lies in opening a window into the present outlook on life, self, values, meaning, the past and the future (Jureit, 1997; Picard, 2014; Blumer-Onofri, 1994). As Knudsen (1990) puts it: "Thus, given its situationally constructed nature, a life history is not a story of life but rather a conscious, or

12 E.g., [www.startwerk.ch](http://www.startwerk.ch), <http://blog.inno-swiss.com>, [www.startup.ch](http://www.startup.ch), [www.startupday.ch](http://www.startupday.ch)



even unconscious, strategy for self-presentation, a legitimization of moves and counter-moves and of projections for the future” (p.122).

The biographical approach helped to look at the processual character of migration embedded within a life span, not to understand migration merely as an “event”, but as a process, as transnational theorists have argued (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p.1012). Secondly, it was a way of looking at different paths and forms of migration within a life, following the question – talking from the present moment – of how a person experienced movements that are differentiated in theory. These may be in forms such as long term migration, circular migration, transmigration or multilocality. Thirdly, biographical narrations in a way provide a multi-sited and mobile perspective, following John Urry’s claim for a new paradigm of mobility or Kurt Lewin’s understanding of time and space as fields of thought and social movement. In cultural anthropology there is a debate on studying through the perspective of migration (Hess, 2010, p.9), autonomy of migration (Bojadžijev & Karakayali, 2007) or multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), which also indicates a shift of perspective – from a sedentary perspective of scrutiny towards a perspective that is itself mobile, following actors and their ways of life. Biographical narrations are mobile and multi-sited not in terms of “being there”, but in terms of travelling in inner topographies, in time and imagination. They provide a glimpse into a protagonists’ perspective on daily life, on the past, the present and the future in different places and, in doing this, put forward constructions of the self and the other. People may remember the way they thought of or perceived something some time ago, how they could not have imagined or how they planned their current situation, thus revealing different views within one person and processes of meaning making (Fischer-Rosenthal, 1990; Dausien, 2004; Picard, 2014), as well as their *Biographizität*, which means their way of understanding their agency and interpreting their biography (Alheit, 1995, 2003).

Even though the biographical approach thus provides a mobile research perspective, it is at the same time a genre that provides a certain continuity and steadiness as far as processes of meaning making, arguing, creating and orienting oneself are concerned. The narratives, as Köstlin argues, represent something steady in mobile times and lives:

Modern stories want to be grounded, locally moored, historic. And thus we also deal with ourselves. The keyword biography has already been mentioned. It encompasses the attempt, even if no local stability can be created and realized, to at least find a common thread in life and through it construct a kind of justification for a style, a consistency of life for oneself and others. In this respect, biography is closely linked with mobility, in which we all live (even when we stay in one place). (Köstlin, 1995, p.29, my translation)

Furthermore, the narrations also reveal interactions with surrounding structures (Picard, 2009) and a situatedness within far reaching events. We described these structures as a *spatiality regime*:

We define the concept of a “spatiality regime” as the set of conditions, rules and habits activated in a geographic, social and biographically situated framework which allows, influences or forces the mobility and anchoring practices of specific people for a specific period of time. Such rules derive from the political, bureaucratic or economic situation from institutions, etiquette, habitus and norms. A spatiality regime is not a geographic space or place itself, but the spatiality of this place, generated by its practices and its social preconfiguration. (Duchêne-Lacroix, Götzö, & Sontag, 2016, p.275)

Far reaching events, which influence the period of time of the biographies I worked with are, for example, processes of economic restructuring in Switzerland and Europe during the 1990s, the emergence of startup support organizations and programs or the economic crises. Approaching the topic through biographical case studies revealed not only individual narratives, experiencing and shaping of daily life, but also ways in which people react to and deal with political and legal frameworks as well as societal discourses.

Apart from the very open biographical questions, the interviews also included questions about migratory experiences, the meaning of specific places, daily life, relations and networks as well as questions regarding the business idea, set up and development and left space to find and follow topics and perspectives I did not know I was looking for before. Parts of the interviews could have the character of what Girtler has called ero-epic conversations (Girtler, 2004).

People participated in the interviews for different reasons. One interview partner remarked that my request seemed strange and interesting (as compared to usual requests regarding topics like management) and he thus responded instead of just clicking it away. Others were used to doing research themselves and by doing the interview with me they wanted to support a scientific project or even the next generation of researchers. Others were just friendly and yet others were interested in discussing results with me or using the contact with me as networking possibility.

## Bias

As far as the sample is concerned, I am aware of a strong bias. When it comes to globalization, some voices focus on its qualities of flows, connections and vanishing boundaries, while others emphasize existing or increasing boundaries, inequalities and disconnections. This report may read at times like a plea for a world without boundaries. This has something to do with a bias within the sample: the people I met and interviewed in Europe are either European or Swiss or came from outside the EU for their education or for love. It is not possible to enter Europe or Switzerland purely with the idea to found a (small) startup. There surely are other founders who would migrate to Europe if they could, but they cannot enter. To start a business, someone must be in Europe already and subsequently start the founding process, or must have an enterprise sending him or her to Europe to build up a branch or

affiliate enterprise. The kind of migration and mobility in this study is thus a very privileged one.

A second bias, and this is true for most studies of course, is that people who participated in interviews or talked to me at other events are people who are open and willing to spare their time and to share their story. For them, and this might be specific, being interviewed was nothing strange and most of the people I talked to got interview requests from journalists or did PR on their own. Some, as the respondent mentioned above, found my request strange or interesting, or might have been curious for some new experience or approach.

The third bias is that I talked to people who were either successful in launching their businesses, or who were in the beginning and hopeful, or who were so convinced of this way of life that even a failure did not stop them from starting their next business. There will be many people who have failed and decided to quit entrepreneurial activities and these cases are not included in this study.

Finally, and in connection with these topics: the interview partners and other actors I got to know in the startup context talked about entrepreneurship with a positive attitude and often in a mood of engagement, enthusiasm, dynamism or hope, rather than about the downsides, which I see as part of a “startup habitus”. This “mood” probably also directed my attention to aspects such as agency, doability, choice and mobility and influenced my way of interacting, speaking, analyzing and writing.

### Mental Maps and Lego

Depending on the situation, I also worked with other methods such as mental maps. I asked my interview partners to draw the places or paths they moved in. In one case, I asked for a line chart of someone’s life and then asked about the kind of experiences and feelings of each period of life, which the person had drawn. I also carried Lego with me and in some cases asked people to build a symbol for how they see themselves, following the ideas of David Gauntlett (2007). Lego is also used in management training in order to trigger a playful and open state of mind. For some of my interview partners, it elicited childhood memories and made them smile. And yet, it is also a tool that provides the possibility to form, create and express current ideas. I included this material in the analysis. Such small interventions were sometimes helpful in finding new aspects or moving the conversation into a new direction, even when someone said, for example, “no, thanks, I cannot draw”, because the conversation then took up new speed, as the person went on “but, I can...”.

## Interviews with Experts

Apart from the startup founders, I visited four private and public support organizations offering co-working spaces, coaching, mentoring, or consultations. I interviewed four experts and had a number of informal discussions with others. These interviews and conversations focused on the setup and services of the specific organization they worked for, its aims and motivations, their view on the development of the “startup scene” over the last decades, as well as the network and actors in the context in which they worked.

### 3.3 The Field and Participant Observation

The field was broken up into single interviews, events and encounters, most of them punctually clocked. In contrast to classical ethnographic research, it seemed puzzling in the beginning not to have a physical space, “a field to hang around in”. Ulf Hannerz attributes this limitation in doing participant observation to the “setting of modernity” (Hannerz, 2003, p.211) and remarks:

There are surely a great many activities where it is worthwhile to be immediately present, even actively engaged, but also others which may be monotonous, isolated, and difficult to access. What do you do when ‘your people’ spend hours alone at a desk, perhaps concentrating on a computer screen? (p.211)

Scholars have demanded to involve a greater variety of sources and data in fieldwork, if the classical claim of intensive participant observation cannot be followed (Eriksen, 1995; Gusterson, 2008; Hannerz, 2003). This happens to a certain extent automatically in a web-linked world. In this study, the navigation within the field took place to a large extent online, with webpages of startups, of startup related organizations, blog posts, online CVs, links between and profiles of founders and related people on platforms such as LinkedIn or Xing – places in which the founders moved. Moreover, there is a lot of accessible marketing material available, in the form of brochures, flyers or little giveaways. Both online and print channels also point to public events, workshops and fairs that are easily accessible. In addition, organizations such as Startup Monitor publish their own analyses of the field. Finally, the topic is covered in a range of general media. These sources and documents were also taken into account in the study.

With some interlocutors, it was easy to make an appointment, while with others it took a longer period of correspondence and organization, as they were travelling a lot and tried to fit the interview in between other shifting appointments. With some people again, I had very friendly email and sms

exchanges, but in the end the interview never took place. In any case, meetings were limited in time; most were appointments in between other appointments and took 1 to 2.5 hours.

The more classical way of doing ethnographic work in anthropology, of course, is determined by the presence of the researcher in a given local field over a longer period of time, possibly a full year, during which they would undergo a socialization process in a nutshell, while participant-observing different areas of life and carrying out conversations and interviews in the process, wherever possible and useful. This classical focus on a single location of ethnographic fieldwork is challenged in two ways. Firstly, from the aspect of space, the study of mobility and migration is limited, if researchers are not moving or not following people into other physical or virtual spaces. Secondly, from the perspective of time, ethnographers may get squeezed in between other appointments. With the interlocutors in this study, there was mostly no possibility to get to know each other in some relaxed common context, visit each other a couple of times or even go for walks, as I was used to from previous research. It was about making appointments. Only in two cases, a longer exchange and friendship developed. At the same time, the field also expanded into the virtual level of the internet, where I found contacts and gathered information on people and their companies, and it also became tangible at events and workshops and through informal communication. The field was thus constructed through my physical and virtual movements, collecting and connecting biographies of people who were related in a way, but never actually came across each other. Yet the temptation to assume a coherent field from the outset is there. In order to avoid generalizations and simplifications, one can go back to Kurt Lewin's actor-centered understanding of a field (Lewin, 1963). For Lewin, the field consists of a person and their environment. It contains all factors that have an effect on a person's behavior at a given moment. This concept helps to focus in more depth on single cases instead of directly assuming a general "field", in which a number of actors are moving under comparable circumstances.

To get a small glimpse of the environment the interlocutors normally moved in, I asked them to pick a place for the interview that was important to them or had some meaning for them. At the same time, I thought of this as an "anchor", which might elucidate stronger tales of self than a new place or a university office. Thus the interviews took place in offices, labs, cafés, coworking spaces, a garden and even an exhibition. The experts were also interviewed at their offices or co-working spaces.

As mentioned before, the field was best accessible via startup forums and events. There are a number of exchange platforms and blogs on the internet, some of which I followed in order to get a better understanding of the topics that people discussed, and the way in which they discussed and presented their ideas and concerns. I was also interested in observing which specific

media and networks existed or were used (e.g., TED talks<sup>13</sup>). I picked some interlocutors from among the authors, or used articles, comments, and websites of competitions and hubs to find interlocutors and select them as broadly as possible. Moreover, there were meetings, evening events, startup workshops and conferences, which I attended again as access points to gain a better understanding of the context and to have a number of informal talks with founders and other stakeholders. I attended a startup fair in Zurich, a startup day in Zurich, a startup workshop in Bern, networking events in Basel, a regulars' table for young entrepreneurs in Basel, an event for university students, networking events for expats, and an expat fair. I also visited co-working spaces and followed one such co-working space over some time, talking to the managers and stakeholders, visiting the location and taking part in events.

In addition, I participated in two startup coachings myself during the research period: a coaching session in a startup hub in Switzerland, where I learned what it meant to start a company in Switzerland, and extensive coaching with a German coach who lived in India at that time, so that the coaching took place via skype. Lastly, before starting this research, I worked with two startups in different business phases and was able to observe their strategies and developments by being myself an employee and consultant. Moreover, I had started a business myself and had exchange with colleagues, friends and relatives who were working as entrepreneurs.

So, the development is ambiguous: on the one hand, "fields" like this are difficult to "hang around in" and thus the classical way of gathering information becomes more difficult. On the other hand, a part of this field is much more easily accessible and available through the internet or openly communicated events and products as there is an interest of startup support institutions and startups to present themselves. In fact, sometimes the field rather started following me – with newsletters and invitations and sometimes also requests.

### 3.4 Analysis

I recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim. In the analysis, I paid attention to three dimensions. Firstly, I worked on the content with the analytical and hermeneutic stages of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999), probing the material from different perspectives and distilling and

13 TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) started off as a conference in the USA. Today there are TEDx events all over the world covering many different topics with the aim to spread ideas and foster change. Presentations from these conferences are published on the internet.

connecting important categories. Secondly, I was interested in how people went about constructing their narration: which argumentative and explanatory patterns they used, which events they emphasized or explained, where things were clearly structured and where information just poured out. Thirdly, I followed social factors such as age, gender, family status, business stage and size, and migratory paths (see figure No. 2). The analyzed interviews were combined with material that I derived through other methods, such as mental maps and Lego, as well as field notes, and information from other sources such as web spaces and publications.

Discussions and interview analyses within the larger project group certainly proved helpful. Moreover, there were also discussions with interview partners, who were scientists themselves and posed important questions or even discussed results with me. The interlocutors' familiarity with research procedures and methods and the interest in abstract discussions may also be something that is specific to a field like this one.

### 3.5 Self-Reflection

Ethnographic research is always also a personal journey. Sympathy, interest, and also biographical backgrounds play a role. I could also be labelled a highly skilled migrant. I have a German passport, was born in France, lived in Germany, India, Iceland and China and came to Switzerland for this project. In addition, I worked in the private sector and went through the founding process of a business the year before starting this project. So in this way, this study was conducted, one could say, as a "study through migration" rather than a study on migration in two ways: setting migration as "the normal" (Hess, 2010, p.6), seeing through the eyes of migration in the design of the research and in my perspective of being a migrant myself. In fact, at the first evening event I attended, I struggled with this situation, as there were two voices within my mind – one wanting to get on with my project as a researcher and the other interested in meeting people I could be friends with and networking for myself in a new place. Taking up such different roles, identifications and perspectives, being a PhD researcher, a coachee, a founder, an "informed expert" or coach, could be interpreted as part of Marcus' understanding of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995):

In conducting multi-sited research, one finds oneself with all sorts of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments. These conflicts are resolved, perhaps ambivalently, not by refuge in being a detached anthropological scholar, but in being a sort of ethnographer-activist, renegotiating identities in different sites as one learns more about a slice of the world system. (p.113)

Certainly also age and gender played a role. Both factors are quite visible in the startup scene in general and also in my interactions. There are more male than female entrepreneurs, as stated in chapter 2.2, and there are also visibly more young than older startup entrepreneurs. I could see that some of my interlocutors checked my profile on Xing or LinkedIn before they agreed for an interview and knew that I was a young woman, thus fitting into the category “young”, and into the rarer category “female”. Apart from the very individual and personal chemistry of the interaction, these criteria, as well as my background, will have also influenced the response to an interview request and the interview itself.





## 4 Biographical Contexts of Migration

Nine short portraits of interlocutors build the beginning of this chapter. They are meant to introduce the sample in its broadness and depict individual paths and meanings of migration. The second part of the chapter deals with the question of how the interlocutors migrate and presents six types of migration strategies.

### 4.1 Short Portraits

#### Christopher

I meet Christopher<sup>14</sup> at the co-working space where he works and we sit down at a nearby café. Christopher is in his early 30s, lives in Switzerland and grew up in Switzerland. He holds two degrees from a renowned university. His master program was set up internationally. During his studies he lived in another town in Switzerland, in Asia as well as another European country, before he returned to the town where he grew up and founded his business together with a partner who was living in Asia. Just two weeks before our meeting, the founders had closed their business down, because it did not work out, after a few years of work. Christopher talks about the fast winding up of the business, and also mentions the tight financial situation in which he now finds himself. He may have to take on a job to solve this situation, he explains, implicitly confident that he will get one. However, he also has new entrepreneurial plans.

Christopher's company product connects with his hobbies and not with his university education. He remarks critically that university education has not helped him much in developing his entrepreneurial ideas. Formal education, to Christopher, rather feels contradictory to his entrepreneurial aims, knowledge and spirit. To my open introductory question – that I am interested in knowing something about his life – Christopher answers with a narration that is structured as follows: he explains his entrepreneurial passion and traces it back to his family background, and he mentions steps and turning points in his education and career. He mentions the place in Asia, but only to explain about the network he found there. When I ask about his moves and living places, two moves especially seem to matter: the start of his university education, when he left his parents' home and gained freedom, and the stay in

14 The interlocutors are anonymized. Information may be omitted, slightly changed, or generalized.

Asia, where he met the people who inspired him to found his business. Apart from these aspects, he comments on the move to Asia rather laconically:

The change was really nothing special. The worst was the weather, apart from that, well, different country, different customs, interesting, travelled a lot, well, I had been on long trips before, that made me resistant. Travelling, I think we get back to the topic, why I am an entrepreneur, travelling is freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Still, there is the town in Switzerland where he grew up, which he appreciates as a base to which he returned after his stay in Asia: “Exactly, I went back home, I love [city], it’s got a bit of everything, and a great quality of life, good home base, expensive home base.” Switching to a different place in the near future is possible for him though, depending on professional opportunities.

### Virtual Multilocality as Work Base

Christopher’s business was set up multilocally, together with his partner in Asia and employees in Eastern Europe. His partner moved once more internationally during this time. The teamwork, the regular weekly meetings and also the sales of their product took place completely online. It was the time he spent in Asia, though, which enabled him to meet his partner and connect with the network he needed in order to set up this business. One global entrepreneurial association became especially important for him:

This gave me access to a world which I didn’t [know] before, where there are many people who, like me, don’t look for the standard way, but who go their own way and make things possible, which many people don’t see, thinking out of this little box, and try, yeah, to change something in this world, sounds a bit fancy.

This network of entrepreneurs, which is supportive and inspiring to him, is spread out across the world and communication takes place mostly online.

### Mobility as Component of Entrepreneurship

Christopher sees himself as entrepreneur. In this position he connects ideas, people, finances and places online and virtually in his daily work. Even though from a perspective of migration, he is settled back in his “home base”, his daily life is a mobile web-life. Places, colleagues and customers, ideas and strategies that are separated by thousands of kilometers, are very close, while geographically close relationships may appear further away, as most of his day takes place in the office. There is not much time for friends or social

15 As some interviews were taken in German and some in English, all German interview clippings were translated into English for better readability. Also for better readability, repetitions, broken sentences, fillers and other sounds were omitted and not all omissions are marked.

life offline. He describes this focus on his work also as lonely at times. Christopher comments on his daily life as follows:

K.: What does a typical day look like for you?

Christopher: It doesn't exist. The easiest answer so far. Daily routines don't exist, but yes, it was a bit shaped finally when we had staff by managing them, giving them tasks, controlling how everything worked out, and above all, being available, when they had questions. And otherwise it really depended on what was necessary. When fundraising, then we had only meetings, when producing, then we had only a closed door and headphones, like, leave me alone, I want to work on the product. It's a stupid answer, but really, there is no typical day. It's long. In the first year, we surely worked every day 14, 15 hours. And then at some point, we were a little bit out of puff and then, yes maybe 10, 12 a day, but 6, 7 days a week. Yes, but it is not the same, because, you do it for yourself and not for somebody else. Well, it's always a little difficult to explain that it's not a lot of work, but that the work is the actual thing you want to do. (Sontag, 2016, p.154)

Christopher talks about his daily life here as dynamic and changing and he mentions long working hours and an understanding that does not differentiate much between work and life outside of work. This mobile lifestyle will be the topic of chapter 5.

Natalie

Natalie was born and brought up in Germany and just moved back. She is involved in two multilocal companies and has a second home in Switzerland. For our meeting, she chose a café downtown in a big German city, which is a famous meeting point for those in the startup scene. She is 55 years old and has moved ten times in her life. She previously moved as child with her parents, but most of her moves were due to the relocations of her husband. Natalie has three children. She was trained academically for a profession, which is locally bound and which she could not practice in the different stages of the family's moves.

Engagement with Places Depending on the Duration

Natalie explains how the length of a stay and its limitation in time influence her feeling of belonging to a place and her engagement with the place. Shorter stays for her are like a "summer breeze" or a touristic feeling, while she connects longer stays with a deeper social engagement and also the possibility to be politically active and to vote. Before her move to Germany, she was based in Switzerland. She says about this stay:

I think, an important factor is, how long, the time horizon you have. If you know it's a very limited time, then you don't lose this tourist feeling. I am just visiting. Let's observe everything carefully and let's be very open and curious, I want to learn everything about the place where I am now and if you stay longer, this changes. ...

That you read the newspaper and start thinking about, if you would vote now. At some point you have a clear idea how you would decide or how you would vote in Switzerland and it affects you more, you lose this kind of observing position. And it was very clear for me, if I had stayed in Switzerland, I would have wanted to vote at some point.

Independent of the duration of her stays, she describes it as an impulse for self-development and reflection:

Very exciting was for me the attitude towards the family. We were in [country] with very young children and I had a very Schiller-like idea of motherhood, and to experience that, to talk to the mothers, who would seriously blame me that my children would not succeed, because I didn't place them in an all-day kindergarten at the age of six months, I found extremely exciting and to realize that whatever I had thought of as god-given, because I had grown up this way, the other person did not think of as god-given at all, but it is totally determined by culture.

Yet this kind of continuing process of interest and interaction with her surroundings is also a challenge for her and she says: "But also this feeling of, now it becomes too much for me. I need this, for once, to not be flexible, not adapt, and not be positive, and not call myself into question continuously." And she describes how she withdraws to things that feel familiar and known from time to time.

### Founding as Way of Creating Independent Structures

Natalie's moves are due to her husband's work, but her own activities as business founder are closely linked to this lifestyle. Firstly, because of two intersecting restraining factors: She left her profession to raise the children and her qualification was locally restrained. The longer this situation lasted, the more difficult a career come-back became, even in the place where she studied. Secondly, she also describes the founding as a consequence of her moves, and the business ideas and the network which she collected on the way. Thirdly, she points to the fact that it is an "easy way out" as she creates her own structures and does not have to fit into existing structures. Reflection and reorientation are essential parts of life for her. She ascribes these to her time as a mother, changes within her family, changes within her professional biography, as well as her international mobility.

Michael<sup>16</sup>

Michael spent his childhood and teenage years in a small place in Europe and moved for his university studies for the first time into a bigger city. He chose a program at a business school which allowed him to go abroad for several

16 This section has been published before in German in Götzö & Sontag 2015b and as short example in Sontag, 2016 with slight changes in the different versions.

semesters and also for internships. During his studies, he thus spent one to two semesters each in four different places in Asia, America and Europe. He continued with another degree in another country. When his wife was offered a position in Switzerland, he moved together with her to a Swiss city. Michael's company has four offices, and at one of them we met on a sunny day in the garden.

### Mobility as Base for Professional and Family Requirements

Michael selected his moves carefully with the aim of gaining useful and varied experiences and competences. His migration originated from the wish for cultural mobility or mobility of his (self-) education. He wanted, for example, to get to know different forms of organizations and thus chose different work- and study contexts for his moves. During these stays, he developed his business idea, last but not least on the basis of his criticism of circumstances he experienced. He started to implement his idea while he was at university. His moves thus are motivated by curiosity, but also by a conscious plan to increase his competences.

His last move was due to his family, as he moved with his wife when she found a position which matched her interests. They chose the actual location of their apartment on the basis of its connection to international traffic. Michael found out about business conditions and placed his office in a town across the border in a neighbouring country. He thus commutes across an international border to work almost every day.

Today, his company has nine employees spread across four locations. Not least because of this situation, his current work life is very mobile. He commutes internationally to his main office. He also travels in order to visit his other offices and customers, sometimes a few weeks in a row. And he also moves virtually, more than half of his work takes place in "virtual space". Added to this, Michael emphasizes that he enjoys bringing people together and being around different people. For Michael, mobility is the connecting piece or the dynamic between his different private and professional interests and needs.

### Sedentariness as Part of Mobility

Apart from this high mobility, Michael also keeps going back in his narration to his "hometown" and his youth, from which he derives a certain feeling of "being grounded". He describes this as an important element in his life as entrepreneur which he acts on, for example through keeping close personal contact with his employees and business partners. Sedentariness or a certain kind of immobility thus constitute an intrinsic part of his mobile lifestyle. Apart from his connections to his hometown, which remains important even

though he does not live there anymore, and thus represents an emotional rather than geographical sedentariness, he also talks about the way in which he creates a home for himself in his apartment as creating a “calm anchor”. This includes for example music, books, and sports. His apartment is his local anchor and he tries to keep it separate from his mobile work life. In contrast, Michael talks about the impulses that inspired him during his university studies:

The way of thinking that I learned there is very, very strong: You can make something of yourself, it is an entrepreneurial way of thinking. So, this is between the age of 18 and 24, you learn a lot, this way of presenting yourself, everything looks great, this is what you learn over there.

Both elements, the rather “grounded” and the rather entrepreneurial and mobile influence are important resources for him and he strives to combine both these elements in his daily life.

James

James has two offices in one of Switzerland’s big cities and arranges to meet me at the train station on his way home. We settle at a restaurant and later move on to a café, which, he says, is also a well-known meeting place for teams discussing startup ideas. James grew up in New Zealand. He came to Switzerland for an internship and then stayed on, doing two more university degrees and finally starting two companies. Within Switzerland, he also lived in two different cities. When I meet him, he is in his late 30s. James tells his story as a narration that interlinks places, jobs and studies.

Utilitarian View on Places

Achievement plays a central role in James’ narration. Places are also constructed around this theme:

Before, I thought, it didn’t matter where you were to do good work and now I believe it’s critical, you can’t, that’s the classic, you can’t be a big fish in a small pond, if you want to do well, you have to go to where the best people are and compete with them and that will just make you better.

Even though he stresses that there was no original plan that he would end up living in Switzerland, he decided to migrate for good. He thinks of this process of final migration as something rather unusual, even though his parents had done the same; he feels that people either stay or move on, in an expat life style. In Switzerland, he sees himself as an outsider who is finding his way into the country through his work. This makes him flexible and able to view situations from different perspectives, he reflects. If the startup is successful, he feels, it will “earn” him his Swiss passport.

He describes his staying on in Switzerland through different steps: Firstly, he had the wish to travel, which he was able to do during his initial internship. Then, he was attracted by the work he was doing and by the comparatively high Swiss salaries, and finally, back at university, he liked the research and the way it was financed and supported. Lastly there were transfer possibilities for his technology, which allowed him to set up his company. With an attentiveness towards his contextual conditions, there seems to be the choice to optimize or move on and Switzerland, at different turns, had seemed the best choice to him:

And whenever you imagine “where else could I go?” There are very few places which are as nice to live. Other places might be just as interesting, but you’re going to take a pay cut or you’re going to be in a dirty city, you know something’s going to be worse. So it’s like a golden cage – it’s also bad, right, being trapped.

Migration then is not so much about looking for a better place or for a tolerable place, but more about looking for the best place. It includes an increase in competence and constructive competition, which again leads to more competence. Yet it would not work out this way, if it were not closely intertwined with a more frequent mode of mobility (travel and communication), which enables James to view and compare contexts on the one hand, and work and move within a larger transnational setting on the other.

### Deconstructing “Belonging” as Success Factor

Even though he sees his move as final, keeping a certain distance, being a “polite fit in” in Swiss society suits him. He questions how far it is possible to feel a belonging with people who have not had an experience of migration. So for him this kind of splendid isolation seems suitable, he remarks:

James: You know, many people have lived well in Switzerland because of this sort of polite ignoring, that’s what I call it.

K.: So you feel okay with that, or?

James: Yeah, I’m okay with it, there are many famous people who liked that, like Freddy Mercury.

He sees himself as an assemblage of all the places he is connected with, taking the best from every place. James describes his wife and himself like this:

Between us, we cover four continents in terms of reasonably good knowledge of how those places work. And that’s something that wasn’t clear to me when I was growing up, that living in a place where you don’t have a long family history can be a big advantage, you know, acting as an outsider working your way in, like here. It makes you very flexible and able, you hope or you try to think that you can pick the best elements from all the different experience you’ve had or the different things you’ve seen, different ways people deal with each other or deal with problems, you hope that you can see things in a way that a person who’s never lived in other places [cannot].



Coming from a different place, for him, provides him with a special perspective and flexibility.

### Transnational Network of Metropolises

Socially and professionally he is connected to a world-wide network of family, friends and business partners. Apart from the connection to the local conditions, there is also a connection on a translocal, transurban level and an affiliation to scenes such as academia. He spends at least two months each year travelling outside of Switzerland.

### Luca

I met Luca at an evening event, where he gave a talk on his founding process together with other startup founders. He is around 30 years old and from a European country, dressed smart casual with a calm and open appearance on stage. An aperitif party followed the event and there was time for personal discussions, so I approached him with my interview request and he invited me to come to his office. The office was located in the center of a Swiss city. It had one room for the two partners and their employees and a white meeting room, sparsely furnished and flooded with sunlight.

### Migration as one Variable among Others

Luca first came to Switzerland for his studies and met his girlfriend here. In the meantime he has moved four times within Switzerland. After completing his degree, he tried finding a job in Switzerland, but it proved to be difficult to find one that was interesting enough for him and where he would be accepted with his (at that time) limited German language skills. He speaks four other European languages fluently. However, there are more aspects to the situation. In the following shortened passage, he describes his decision to stay in Switzerland.

There was never much of a strategy behind it [the founding], it was a little bit an emergency, because my daughter was born and I had completed my degree. I was under pressure and at the same time I didn't want to do just any job, I kept thinking, if I stay here, and then this comfort zone comes, you find a job and you earn okay, why make any major changes now, why risk anything? The funny thing is, it wasn't planned that I would emigrate to Switzerland. It was for the reason that in my home country at my university, a good university, I did my Bachelor and then they introduced a new system... Then since my girlfriend was already here, I thought I would come to Switzerland, so we could be together.

Luca also talks about his home country and how useful it would be to contribute in the current situation, but he also had his family to think about. And he is very clear that he wants to do something that is meaningful to him. His

thoughts show the interwovenness and complexity of his migratory situation and decision, the density of this period in his life as well as the processual nature of migration. It is like trying to solve a puzzle made of pieces such as place, partnership, fatherhood, parents and family, family-in-law, the wish to create change in the place he grew up in, search for a suitable work content, for a suitable function or job, struggling with political and economic circumstances, and his inner conviction to define and do something that is meaningful. Each of these topics challenges him to make a decision to position himself – and migration, determining the place, is just one of them.

Moreover, most of these pieces can be causes or effects, or both at the same time. Luca's first move to Switzerland was the precondition of meeting his partner in Switzerland, and this lead amongst other factors to his second move to Switzerland – and this move in a way lead him to founding his company. But lots of other connections can be found. Before coming to Switzerland, he spent time in a working environment abroad, which also inspired him for his founding idea. Meeting his girlfriend and discussing the topic with her intensified this wish.

### Migratory Family Narratives as Base for his own Convictions

Luca's grandparents had already been highly skilled migrants in other countries and his parents had been pleased, after much movement within the family, to find a place for themselves to settle down. Luca talks about his fear that life would always go in the same track for him, the future mapped out with "the job, the car, the house, the dog":

So you hear all these stories [of the adventure of past generations within his family] and I grow up with them and then I go to school and I know exactly what everything will look like [in his future] then it's like, it's no fun! Which stories do I tell my kids? I don't want to do dangerous things or just stupid things, no, and, kind of the closest is entrepreneurship, it is a risk and it is also meaningful, because you create a company.

"I like playing, when the game is serious", he says. This quote represents the search for adventure, for not following the predefined path, which he took up in a serious, reflected way and with the stability and emotional and financial backup of his family. It seems like different layers of decision-making, of emotionally charged areas of life are overlapping, overshadowing, intersecting and then lead to concrete next steps.

Luca finally decided to live in Switzerland with his girlfriend, in a city where both of them could work. He found a business partner, and created a business in a field which he feels passionate about. At the same time he works translocally and travels frequently and thus maybe found for himself the "best of" version of the topics he was struggling with. With this decision, it was important for him to engage locally, and also to create a basis for his business, meet new people and make friends. For him a place cannot just be a

place of work; it needs to combine his passions and interests for learning and growth, and also a group of friends and contacts.

Creating such “best of” versions is a passionate and also painful process of personal struggle and of experiencing, confronting and reorganizing inner and outer semantic topographies, which in the decision-making situation described meant financial precarity in a situation which was altogether a first-time experience – having a baby and starting a career after university. The pressure of the situation as well as the many options concerning jobs and places, and his wish for a meaningful task, add complexity to the situation.

Bernd<sup>17</sup>

Bernd is in his 50s. Since his student days, he has been involved in founding startups. After an experience of failure, he has managed to build up a number of companies and sell them successfully. His current life-science company has over 100 employees. Our conversation takes place in a small meeting room at the company, sparsely furnished in black and white, and matched by a chess board.

### Migration as Business Tool

Bernd lived in different countries before moving to Switzerland. His move to a specific city in Switzerland was a well-planned and thought-through desk-top decision. He defined parameters together with his partners for opening a new company. They looked for places world-wide and finally decided to base it in a city in Switzerland. Bernd summarizes the parameters of their search as follows:

We looked where to put the company, ... so we chose Switzerland because it was the hiring of talent, the ability to access talent internationally, and the cost and the ability to raise money were the things that made us choose Switzerland. ... We had a big spreadsheet with all the different places. (Duchêne-Lacroix, Götzö, & Sontag, 2016, p.272)

### Multilocality as Living Arrangement

For his family, this move posed too much of a challenge, because the children would have had to switch school systems and his wife, they assumed, would have had difficulties working in her profession in Switzerland – a situation which both partners did not want to happen. The position of women, they reasoned, is better in Northern Europe than in Switzerland. Bernd thus lives multilocally and commutes between his family in Northern Europe and

17 Some of the content in this section has been published in Duchêne-Lacroix, Götzö, & Sontag, 2016, analyzed from the perspective of multilocal living and im/mobility, and a short example in Sontag, 2016.

his company in Switzerland. He spends about a third of his time at each of these places and another third travelling worldwide to meet customers and business partners. He describes this situation as follows:

Bernd: Currently I would say both Switzerland and [his family's place] are home, but I don't view it as a permanent home, this is it forever.

K.: Is that desirable?

Bernd: I would say it's neutral, I wouldn't say it's desirable, but the alternative is also not desirable, so neutral. I mean, if the alternative was I'm based in one place and this is my home, the restriction that implies, I don't like that restriction. (Duchêne-Lacroix, Götzö, & Sontag, 2016, p.270)

For Bernd, work is a defining element of his daily life. It connects his two living places and the time he spends travelling, as it structures his day no matter where he is, even during weekends. It also includes his social contacts, as they take place through his business. Bernd's decision was taken on the basis of his passion for bringing his business idea into practice and a strong pragmatism as far as place, legal framework and local conditions are concerned. The best combination of these factors finally means living multilocally.

Deborah

Apart from her business, Deborah rents out rooms from time to time. She does this to meet new people and because she is a very open and hospitable person, but also in order to increase or stabilize her income. I met her through such a room rental situation and was intrigued by the way she organizes her life and businesses. Later, I went to visit her at her office in a co-working space for the interview. Deborah is in her 40s. She was born and raised in West Africa and holds a degree which is not easily transferable to Switzerland. In fact, she did not want to go to Switzerland in the first place, but to another country for advanced studies. She had already got a place at university and her tuition fees were taken care of, but she was not able to cover the financial requirements that were necessary for a residence permit and thus had to drop her plan. Deborah then married a Swiss person and went with him to Switzerland. Here, she started to work freelance, because her degrees were not recognized and employment positions that she could get would not provide enough income:

After 6 months, I could already [work] and that sort of encouraged me, and I was encouraged to look further if I could find something, but before I did that, I started working in my living room – at home.

The marriage broke up and she moved to another city in Switzerland, a city that attracted her because she thought it was quite international and open.

There she created a new business, which at the time of the interview is a one-woman enterprise in a co-working space. It does not yet yield enough, so Deborah generates some income through two other part-time jobs and the room rentals. In the interview, she says:

I am always joyful and I think positive, I think someday the path will open up, that I can maybe fulfil my wishes and that I don't have to live from hand to mouth, but get enough income and be safe and yes, carry on living my life the way it should be.

Even though it has not been easy for her to set up her business, she is hopeful and determined to rely on her own work to make her living.

### Migration as Loss and Painful Transition

For Deborah, the transnational life has its painful sides, as she experiences difficulties in making her place in Switzerland and at the same time sees how in her former home the situation has changed. She does not feel welcome and at home there any more, as she did before. Moreover, when she got her Swiss citizenship, she had to give up her former citizenship and now has to apply for a visa every time she wants to visit her family.

Then I go to [country] and I notice, hey, it has changed, it's not how I left it. I have no friends any more, they all got married, have died. You return home and everybody is a stranger and the people you knew have changed their lives, live in different places. And since we don't have double citizenship, we are not allowed to have that, and they just took my citizenship. And that was difficult for me, that, when I go back to my country, I have to apply for a visa, that really hurt me and then at the airport I always got to hear: Yes, you don't belong here anymore, go to where you belong, and we are treated like Europeans. When I now go to [country], the people realize I don't live there.

Deborah now spends most of her time in Switzerland.

### Michèle

Michèle is in her 40s and founded her startup just six months before the interview. Michèle came to Switzerland as a student, because she wanted to be far away from her hometown and country – a small European country, which she experienced as rather narrow-minded and conservative. She finished her university in Switzerland, moved again within Switzerland because she had friends in another city, and the general political atmosphere as well as the surroundings of her work place suited her, and she started working. After a few years, she asked herself once more what would make her happy, and decided to start another university degree in a totally different field. When she had completed her degree, she quit her job and launched her startup. This was also because it was difficult to find an employment position in her new field which took into account her previous work experience, age and position.

During our meeting, I got to experience a bit of her professional qualities, her creativity and her passion for her work. Michèle's plan is to grow her business during the coming years.

### Migration as Freedom

Michèle talks about her move as immigration. At the same time, she keeps something like a transnational self-understanding.

Yes, I belong here, it's always the question, as far as my feeling is concerned, yes, but objectively, it is neither fish nor bird. I don't belong anywhere, that sounds maybe a bit dramatic now, but it doesn't feel like that for me, rather that I am neither nor. I think many people feel like that who emigrate.

Michèle assumes that "objectively" she belongs neither to her old nor to her new surroundings. She interprets this situation, however, as freedom, the freedom to create her own life and space without precast forms and judgments.

For me it is a great plus factor, I really enjoy that, because I don't live in my original surroundings, that I am much more free to live my life and [it's] not or much less about any labels of – ah, this is where she grew up. That means that what I do or what I am, for the most part, as much as that is possible, I made myself.

Belonging, for Michèle, is part of her agency. She decides where and how she wants to live, which place and which field of work are most suitable for her. This situation of "neither/nor" is also reflected in her situation as a double citizen, as she kept her old citizenship and also received Swiss citizenship.

### Emotional and Physical Surroundings as Basis for Wellbeing

With each move, Michèle seemed to increase her feeling of freedom and increased "what makes her happy". Geographical and job moves are both important on this path. She says:

I think that it is very important for me where I am and how I am feeling at that place, so it does matter to me where I stand, where I sit, in which place do I live, yeah, something like that, that is very existential for me, that the surroundings fit. Yes, that is why I moved away from [hometown]. Yes, even now it is like that, that that is not a space that is suitable for me.

So place as such plays a special role for her. And in this space, relationships, such as the relationship with her husband and her close friends are very important.

## Felix

Felix is in his 40s. He grew up in Switzerland. Felix guides me through his lab and explains many technical highlights to me, which I try to comprehend as best I can. Finally, he allows and instructs me to try out some of the products his company has developed. The image of a dynamic, passionate inventor crosses my mind.

## Switzerland as one of the Best Places in the World

Felix's parents had come from Southern Europe in the 1960s. When he was a teenager, his parents decided to go back with the whole family after having lived in Switzerland for thirty years. Felix started studying in the new place at university and worked at the same time to finance his university education, which was something special in his family. He describes this education as his dream, but he did not feel comfortable in Southern Europe: "There were always problems, the whole administration, the people, the mentality doesn't work for me anymore, I grew up in Switzerland, organization is important for me".

After the move with his family, the next turning point for him took place when friends from Switzerland told him about their university life. He talked to an internationally renowned Swiss professor about the possibility of doing a PhD and got accepted. He was excited about the international surroundings, the research possibilities and the opportunity to follow his own interests at the university. Felix did his PhD in Switzerland and outside of Europe. In addition, he gained work experience in the industry and at university, but he also became critical of pure academic work and a possible university career and more interested in doing something that involved direct feedback and hands-on problem solving.

To found his business, he again chose Switzerland, because he felt he could have "more influence over his life" in Europe. As a foreigner in the city he lived in before, he felt there were restrictions as to how much he could achieve. He calls Switzerland one of the best states in the world. So, even though Felix has lived in different places, Switzerland is the hub for him, where he returns to and which offers him the research and also business development opportunities which he needs.

## Simone

Simone is from Switzerland, she is in her 50s, and she travelled a lot in her life. She lived and worked abroad before, which for her was a great learning experience. She remarks that she learned: "If you really want something, a lot of things are possible, that influenced me". She returned to Switzerland and

worked in a high-ranking job at a big company, which involved travelling between 40 to 90 % of her time. This lifestyle, however, alienated her from the place where she lived. She says:

The hobby then was packing simultaneously, because you had different trips. You got back and the next day you moved on, and I missed out on a lot of these things here that really matter to me. On the one hand, I just wasn't here..., but also when I was here, I didn't have the time, energy, structure or whatever anymore to organize myself in a way that I could take part and enjoy free time here and that was astonishing and also a pity.

The situation got increasingly stressful and difficult for her. Simone decided to make a change and started her own business on the basis of the different experiences she had gained and the network she had created. She decreased her job hours and rented a smaller apartment, in which we met, and she tried to find a lifestyle that would suit her. At the same time, she is highly motivated by her business idea, through which she can pass on her passion and her experience to others.

## **4.2 Migration Strategies**

Natalie talks of a “summer breeze” for a move limited in time and James thinks of a “golden cage” depicting his final migration to Switzerland. These metaphors point to the range of understandings and perceptions of migration, and last but not least to the grounds on which people act and make further decisions. Six strategies on how the interlocutors migrated can be derived from the material.

### **1. Deliberate Step-by-Step Progress**

In this case, moving appears like a step-by-step process. “It wasn't planned”, is a characteristic statement. And yet, it does not appear as a completely unstructured procedure, but each step is rather well thought through, when it is taken. After arriving in a place for a specific reason, for example, an Erasmus semester, a job, marriage or an internship, new opportunities or networks may emerge, which the person had not thought of before and which lead to staying on or to another move. Not only new opportunities may arise, but also the reasons for a move may change, for example when a degree or internship is accomplished, when a relationship breaks up or children leave the house. The decision to stay somewhere in these cases thus follows the move. This may appear like a very pragmatic, situational approach and it may also show the way in which people found their businesses – for example, follow-



ing a certain invention or scientific discovery while they were working at university.

## 2. Careful Forward Planning

On the opposite hand, migration can be a well-planned context- and resource-optimization with predefined goals and parameters for decision-making. The move thus follows a specific goal. Bernd and Michael followed this strategy when they deliberately learned about the conditions at certain places before they decided where, how, and in which form to set up their businesses or education.

## 3. Seizing Opportunities as they Come

“Adventure”, “life is a serious game”, “luck favors the prepared”, “freedom” were some of the expressions people following this strategy used. An unforeseen or unforeseeable element seems important to this interpretation, like an invention, a child, a relationship, a sudden business contact, which may go together with mobility and may be explained as part of mobility. Almost as in a fairy tale narrative, something unforeseen und surprising happens and gives a new turn to the story.

## 4. Pushing the Boundary

In this case, the move can be motivated by a clear wish to cross existing limitations. Mobility is a means to improve a situation, add opportunities and lift boundaries, in the sense of finding a place with better business conditions or in the sense of fulfilling a personal quest for freedom, research, knowledge or curiosity.

## 5. Adjusting to the Situation

In some case, staying or moving also means accepting circumstances. The conditions may not be ideal but the situation may be the only possibility at a certain time. This might involve difficulties in the job market, because of the language or recognition of certificates. It may also mean problems at university, family obligations, family compromises or other factors. Yet precisely this situation may also lead to the wish to start an independent business.

## 6. Family Compromise

For some of the interlocutors, like Michael, Natalie, Luca or Deborah, the impulse for a particular move came from their spouses. One interlocutor told

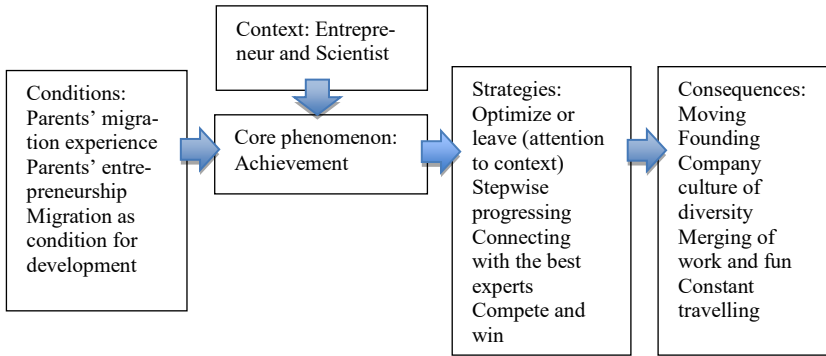
me about a deal the couple made when they were still at university: They would take turns in determining the place where they lived, so that both would get a chance to pursue their careers. The family decision may also lead to multilocality when the family decides not to move, as in the case of Bernd. Family life thus can be a reason for mobility, but also for immobility.

These strategies are not always isolated, but migratory decisions can involve different strategies at the same time. Moreover, the above-mentioned strategies not only account for decisions in the context of migration, but can have parallels in other areas of life such as founding.

### **4.3 Work related Migration?**

The different meanings and ways in which people move, as portrayed in the case descriptions above, challenge two assumptions regarding migration: straight causality as expressed in the model of economic push- and pull-factors and the idea that migration presents a biographical break. Migration is not only a strategy to achieve a better economic situation, but can play different roles within biographies. The following figure presents a simplified axial coding scheme (after Grounded Theory) of one of the interviews. As core phenomenon in his narration, I identified strong achievement orientedness, contextualized in a life as entrepreneur and scientist. Migration appears in different places in the narration. It was the condition for a strategy of step-wise progressing and further migration. There is also a family background of migration, which provided a broad range of first and second hand experiences – of difficulties and discrimination, but also opportunities and success strategies. Furthermore, migration is a strategy to optimize contextual conditions. Moreover, mobility is also a consequence of this lifestyle, because the kind of job and company the interlocutor created now compel him to be mobile.

Figure 5: Simplified Axial Coding with Selected Topics



Source: author, visualization by Monika Götzö

In fact, in each narration there were dominant motives and drivers, through which the interview partners interpreted their own biographies and which encouraged decision and movement in different areas of life. In the quote by Luca, above, his search for a meaningful way of living becomes apparent. For others, it is for example self-development, learning, or self-reflection. Seen from this perspective, migration, or rather the decision for or against a place, first of all becomes one element amongst others that people try to shift and balance in their lives. Secondly, rather than as a break, it can also be understood as continuity, as it enables people to follow their way of creating a meaningful life for themselves. Shifting place may at the same time provide continuity regarding careers, relationships, family constellations, education, or business ideas. Migration, rather than being a disruptive factor, or a center stage aspect within a narration then appears embedded with other elements and events of life, such as education, jobs, entrepreneurship, marriage, divorce, or parenthood, as reflected in the following interview quote:

I think, that maybe especially in the stage of life that I am in now, a prevailing insight and also something that I think about often, is this kind of inventing yourself anew all the time. To keep on asking: Who am I? How do I view my own past and how do I look at my own expectations towards myself, the expectations of others? This does have something to do with the international life, but it surely also has something to do with changes and breaks within my own biography. In a way this applies to everyone. You are a pupil at some point, you go to university, maybe if you are a woman, you become a mother or you work, at some point the children leave the house and eventually partnerships change, so this constant process of defining yourself anew. So, I don't know, I don't see myself with clear boundaries, but rather as a process. What else? I think, sedentariness is probably not for me, or only very limited, instead there is a big, big wish to learn.

The project started out asking about “work related migration of the highly skilled”. However, as migration in the interviews was embedded in a thick

texture of biographical factors, and based on a variety of strategies, it was too narrow to look at migration of the highly skilled as “work related”. Migration is part of each individual biographical topography as one event amongst others – embedded in a structure of meaning and orientation, which also underlie other developments in life such as career and the founding process (see chapter7). Just as migration can take different positions, so can the initially mentioned roles apply to migratory processes, and also for other areas in life. Limmer and Schneider (2008) write:

It is remarkable that the political discussion, so far, has been led without any well-grounded empirical knowledge about the forms of job-related mobility and its distribution as well as the attached consequences for mobile people and their families. Individuals develop manifold arrangements to combine family, partnership, employment and mobility in order to bring contradicting occupational and familial aims on a tense job market in line. These efforts are not considered in the public discourse even though they have a greater meaning than relocation or migration. (p.20)

The portraits in this chapter focused on these complex life situations, which will be further explored in the coming chapters.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, nine protagonists were introduced, focusing on main themes as derived from the interviews. In the second section, I argued that migration takes place in a number of different ways, and identified six types of migration strategies, each presenting a different outlook on life in a specific situation. Finally, I argued that migration is not necessarily a specific event or disruption, but can be understood as a factor amongst other factors, such as relationships, parenthood, education, or political situations that influence decision making, and are connected by personal motivations and drivers. Moreover, not only is the decision to go somewhere important, but also the decision to stay somewhere and not move on. The next chapters deal with specific aspects that were raised in the portraits and discussions in this chapter:

- What kinds of migratory movements and mobility can be derived from the material and how can these multiple understandings and ways of movement be conceptualized? (Chapter 5)
- What meanings do local places have? (Chapter 6)
- What are the factors that determine orientation and decision making? (Chapter 7)
- What role does the social and economic context play? (Chapter 8)

- What role does the “high qualification” play for these startup founders and how can this aspect be theoretically framed? (Chapter 11)

## 5 Movement: Migration or Mobility?

I am sitting in the entrance area of a co-working space in black leather seats opposite the reception counter. People keep coming in through the revolving door. Opposite the door is an elevator, behind it a huge hall leading to different offices. A young man rides through the hall on a little lightweight scooter – also an invention by a Swiss startup. My interview partner comes up to greet me right on time, wearing a hooded sweater and jeans. He introduces himself by his first name and immediately uses the more familiar German form of addressing me. We settle at a café for a second breakfast.<sup>18</sup>

### 5.1 Forms of Migration

The people I encountered could be classified as migrants. Yet there are different ways in which people move over the course of a lifetime. Common definitions of migration differentiate between migration, transmigration, circular mobility, multilocal living or second generation migrants.

1. Migration: Limmer and Schneider define migration as “permanent transnational mobility” (Limmer & Schneider, 2008, p.21).
2. Transmigration is a movement from one place to the next and on to the next, “a permanent movement across borders without a clear notion of geographical destination” (Limmer & Schneider, 2008, p.21).
3. Circular mobility “includes recurring forms of mobility, with mobile subjects returning, after times of absence, to their place of origin, respectively their permanent residence” (Limmer & Schneider, 2008, p.21). Commuting and travelling would also be ranged under this heading.
4. Multilocality is the simultaneous existence of two or more offices or living places in different locales. Multilocal living even more specifically describes living in different places at the same time: “Multilocal living means organizing daily life across several living places” (Hilti, 2009, p.81, my translation).
5. People whose parents migrated also appear in some studies as migrants or second generation migrants. D’Amato defines them for Switzerland as follows: “...those young people who are either born in Switzerland or grew up for the most part [in Switzerland], without having migrated themselves” (D’Amato, 2008, p.182, my translation).

18 Sontag, 2016, p.153ff

In the following figure, these definitions are applied to the sample:

Figure 6: Definitions of Migration Applied to Interlocutors

	<b>Migration</b>	<b>Trans- migration</b>	<b>Circular Mobility</b>	<b>Multilocal Living</b>	<b>Second Generation</b>
1	X	X	X		X
2		X	X	X	
3	X	X	X	X	
4		X			
5		X	X		
6	X	X			
7	X	X			
8	X	X			
9	X	X	X		
10		X			X
11		X	X	X	
12					X

Source: author

As the table shows, people fulfil more than one definition. Which person “fits” which definition depends very much on the perspective, situation and moment in time. None of my moving interview partners had experienced only one move in their lives. Even those who had migrated permanently to Switzerland still moved within Switzerland. For others, more than one of the above mentioned migratory states could exist either simultaneously or in different phases of their lives subsequently.

Furthermore, the definitions need to be seen as processual. A situation which could have been permanent may have turned into a transmigratory one, and a transmigratory situation into a permanent one. A few of the interlocutors are second generation migrants and also migrated in their own lives. Different combinations of concepts are possible. Some people may fit the category of transmigration, but could also be seen as multilocals, as they keep a room for themselves at their parents’ home or at the place where their second office is located. One could even argue that most people are multilocals, as they all still have family, friends and colleagues or business partners, or even rooms or offices in other places, some of them geographically more

remote, some of them, for example, in their company or in the university. One could also say that all are transmigrants, with the exception of one person, whose parents migrated to Switzerland and who has not moved himself.

Even though definitions and strategies may overlap and take place simultaneously, the following main forms of migration appear most frequently in the interview material:

- Transmigration, spanning several stays with the perspective of more stays or long-term multilocal work or family arrangements,
- One time transnational migration in combination with local moves,
- Circular migration with repeated stays abroad and returns either to the place of origin or repeated migrating between the same countries with a final stay at the second place,
- Circular migration such as travelling, covering 20 to 90% of the year.<sup>19</sup>

The above mentioned concepts are each helpful for very specific research questions. Yet for this group and the perspective of biography, each concept by itself also limits the complexity of movements. Indeed, migration as understood as “permanent transnational mobility” by Limmer and Schneider (2008) seems a small and difficult-to-determine facet of the actual movements.

## 5.2 Texture of Mobilities<sup>20</sup>

In the analysis, it was in fact striking that the theme of movement was not limited to these different kinds of migration or to spatial movement, but played a role in other areas of life, too. These movements, moreover, were often connected or depending on each other. Such areas were virtual space, relationships and social networks, interdisciplinarity, inventiveness, time, and finances. Thinking in terms of “mobility” rather than migration provided a frame to follow this “mobile condition” or mobile lifestyle that formed a texture of mobility within actors’ lives and careers.

The following sections will portray some of these mobilities. John Urry, who coined the term “mobility turn”, put forward a realm of analysis which includes “diverse mobilities of peoples, objects, images, information and wastes” (Urry, 2000, p.1, see also Sheller, 2011). In fact, he proposes that

19 This list has been published in an earlier version in Götzo & Sontag, 2015b, p.52 and some of the discussion on forms of migration in 5.1 in Götzo & Sontag, 2015a/b and Sontag, 2016, p.150.

20 Different mobilities, risk (p.75) and interaction (p.78) have been described in short in Sontag, 2016, pp.152-55, Götzo & Sontag, 2015b.



sociology should look at the social as mobility (Urry, 2000). Johanna Rolshoven writes: “Understanding mobilities as a topic in practice means studying movements of people, their bodies, thoughts, actions and things” (Rolshoven, 2011, p.54, my translation). This encompassing notion of mobility thus accommodates different forms of spatial movements, as well as movements in other areas of life. Limmer and Schneider, too, continue in their definition of mobility and follow Sorokin in his list of social, cultural, mental, and spatial mobility as fields of study in the social sciences. Limmer and Schneider add virtual or electronic mobility to this list, as well as *portability* after Urry (Limmer & Schneider, 2008, pp.21-22).

### Virtual Mobility

In the context of startups, it seems most important to consider the dimension of virtual mobility and not treat it as fundamentally different from geographical mobility. Communication software offers the possibility, for example, to be with people in sound- or even video conferences who are working on the same project in a different place and thus have a joint work flow. These tools play a role not only in business, but also in communication with family members. Such a situation of communication creates a space which people inhabit mentally, even if they are in different places physically. Limmer and Schneider write: “The physical movement of people is partly substituted by mobility in virtual space” (Limmer & Schneider, 2008, p.22). However, virtual mobility not only substitutes physical mobility, but it may also increase physical and other forms of mobility, as it provides ways of networking, business development and sales.

In the following quote, an interlocutor talks about working virtually with a team in Asia and Eastern Europe that he leads from Switzerland.

I: [his partner] was in Turkmenistan and later lived in [anonymized] during the last year and we met twice in [anonymized], where we visited our programmers. We were a completely virtual team.

K.: I was imagining you [the team] in an office here.

I: No, I had a marketing person here, who helped me for a while and I had interns for a year or so and otherwise the office was just me, because we really worked together in a modern way.

K.: And how does that work?

I: Very well. It takes some effort. You have to generate this culture that people interact and have conversations, ping the people, because you don't meet by chance, you really have to make an effort, but if you do, and we did from the beginning, it was a great advantage. That meant we just had programmers who were 50, 60% less expensive and at least as good as the ones we would have got here. It worked. In the end it may have also been a reason why we failed, because I think in the end, what counts for a startup is speed, especially in the case of an internet startup. And it did cost us a little bit, a grain of speed, and I

think, yes, that was a factor. But maybe, yes, had we employed people over here, we would have had only one programmer, we would have been slower, too, it's not so easy to say, but it is possible that it had an effect.

K.: So you use skype or the telephone, or...?

I: Surely not telephone. We chatted really a lot, it was google talk in our case. Why google talk? Because everything is immediately logged in the inbox in gmail and then you have minutes that you can search. Yes, much happened via chat and otherwise once a day or once in two days a call and yes, also planned meetings, so a weekly meeting where everybody was together in a call on Mondays and follow up calls and so on.

Michael's business, too, consists of teams in different continents, who can only work together because they create a virtual space.

K.: And how much of your working time would you say is face to face and how much virtual? ...

Michael: I would say, if you distinguish it like this, probably fifty-fifty. Well, sure, because of the distance a lot happens virtually, because we address very different target groups, you just can't be everywhere in person, where I would like to be, and face to face is really my team. My team itself probably works 70 to 80% virtually, they work much more at the computer and then of course in the projects, sure, a lot takes place via skype. Thank god for skype. (Sontag, 2016, p.152)

Apart from this direct communication, the internet supports mobility, because it is a business arena in itself. IT services, programming and trade are amongst the most common startup ideas. In addition, social networks are cultivated online and people are members of networking platforms as well as special platforms for founders.

## Social Mobility

Most entrepreneurs are also socially highly mobile. Social mobility here is not understood in the sense of a social upwards or downwards movement, but rather as interacting and connecting with people of different backgrounds. Limmer and Schneider define social mobility "in the sense of changing between different social groups or milieus" (Limmer & Schneider, 2008, p.21) as a horizontal movement. It is mobility between different stakeholder groups, professions, roles, and social spaces that takes place sometimes even on a daily basis. Founders have to manage employees, work with partners, colleagues, investors, and customers, are members of organizations, or have to deal with government agencies, especially in the beginning often by themselves.

Some founders are still connected to a university and thus move from university life to business life. Other have a second business or another job; they move from the position of an employee to that of an employer or a self-employed person. Furthermore, founders move between different startup

stages and responsibilities. In the following quote, social mobility is considered an attractive part of the job and described in close connection with geographical and time related mobility:

Well, yes, so my daily life is filled, of course, with my job for the most part, also with the environment to which I am new here, and my daily life at the moment consists more or less to 80 to 90% of the things I do within [his company]. The tasks are partly strategic, also I have a team of nine people which I lead, who need at least once or twice a week some time with me each. And I am travelling a lot, not only in Switzerland, also in Germany, and in our project countries. Now in August, September, I will be there for six weeks. I jump between a shirt and presentations in companies and foundations to shorts and daypack. It is very, very diverse, very different what I am doing and I'm really enjoying what I do, it's fun. Sometimes there are moments when I think "a clear structured daily routine would also be nice", but it is, it's a lot of fun and I'm grateful for what I'm allowed to do. (Götzö & Sontag, 2015b, p.51, Sontag, 2016, p.153)

Others also described this kind of mobility with different groups as difficulty, for example, when a person who is more interested and knowledgeable in product development also has to take care of the presentations and sales.

### Cultural and Mental Mobility

Interview partners described high flexibility and changes within their life and work, even within single days, as expressed in the following quote:

Yes, and this emotional roller-coaster, it's hard, because it starts sometime in the morning, you see: oh hey, we got this press echo and yeeees! "Customers, customers", then you get a "oh no, this doesn't work" and then somebody resigns and then an investor quits and then you feel very low and then, in the evening, some good news comes up and you are like yeeeeees! It's really, it's really like that, it's not just some saying but it's really, emotionally it's an up and down, all the time. Somebody once said, as an entrepreneur, you feel the ups as well as the downs much, much stronger and I think that's right. If you work for some [big corporation] and 1000 people lose their jobs, then it will affect you, too. But if you are the entrepreneur and have to let 1000 people go, then it will probably affect you more. If you are not a psychopath. (Ibid., pp.154-55)

This kind of experience can be understood as cultural or mental mobility. Limmer and Schneider (2008) define cultural mobility as the "movement of cultural elements such as ideas, values, symbols and items in the social space" (p.21). Mental mobility they describe after Sorokin as: "connected with personality traits, dispositions and skills of individuals. It varies with the openness, flexibility and ability to adjust of people ..." (Ibid., p.21).

This also includes that startup founders leave their professional environment and create a new one for themselves, gain new abilities, learn and create new rules. This may be the transit from a university career to business or from employment to entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the idea of the startup often involves interdisciplinary thinking, linking innovation and research, linking different scientific fields and insights and also linking theory and

practice. It also means acquiring and linking competences, which are split up into different departments in bigger companies: They must know about legal frames, accounting and tax issues, financing, marketing, recruitment, human resources, research and development, production, sales and of course the content and aim of their business.

Mental mobility seems a value that is often quite consciously constructed and displayed. The vignette in the beginning of this chapter expresses a casual way of dressing and speaking, which signifies a relaxed casual attitude. Here as well as in other interviews also a flexibility to play different roles – to change clothes and surroundings when necessary was mentioned. Interlocutors also speak about the way they shape their company culture as a creative space or a space of flat hierarchies.

An example for the construction of mental mobility is the topic of risk and failure. A prominent strand of the discourse says that launching a startup is doing something that nobody has done before and for that reason, failing is the best way of learning. An expert and startup consultant in Basel observed that the attitude towards failure has changed over the last years. In his opinion, it was the uncertainty and fear of failure which kept people from starting businesses before. The “American attitude” that failure is part of success is becoming more popular in Europe, he reasoned. In the interviews, this was valued differently by different interlocutors ranging from acceptance to making it a positive aim in itself. The following three quotes express three ways of dealing with risk. Risk is here seen as a goal in itself, as a part of entrepreneurial freedom and as the antidote to boredom:

You have to work with this attitude, because if you want to found the new Facebook, to become a millionaire and to be able to stop working, then that is the wrong attitude. Risk in a way must be your goal, and on the way you do very exciting things, and not vice versa that the exciting things are your goal, because entrepreneurship is risk, like a game. I like games when the game is serious.

You just accept that, how do you say, no risk no fun, either you have a risk-free boring life or you have a bit of risk and you can do whatever you want, you can steer your life a bit, and that is the case for us now.

You know if you're not afraid, then you're missing something. You're not bored, right.

One person added yet another dimension, which might be termed “spiritual mobility”: meditation, for which he uses the metaphor of the “inner path”. Meditation is an essential part of life for him. In fact, the structure and design of his everyday life, as well as his way of doing business, draws from this daily experience. It is almost like living in two dimensions; a mental travelling, which may not be that different to actual physical or virtual travelling.

## Mobile Time

Time related mobility also plays a role. In many cases there is a strong connection between work and leisure. It adds another dimension to the concept of *Entgrenzung* – dissolution of boundaries (see e.g. Götz, Lemberger, Lehnert, & Schondelmayer, 2010). Like a shift, a semantic change in the term “work”, the beloved leisure activity becomes work – but still carries the meaning of fun or hobby activity. The emic view would still consider it fun, while the etic view labels it as work, as the following quote shows:

And that is no problem for me, when I can work twelve hours a day for this, it’s my concern, I’m enjoying it and that’s why the factor of time, well, I would love to have thirty hour-days, because twenty-four hours are not enough. When you have certain lifelines [euphemism for deadline], then you work a bit more, otherwise it is those ten hours, but it is, this work is my hobby. I want to do it, I am enjoying it, so what would I be doing instead? Watch TV? Sports I do anyway.

The next interlocutor also talks about this situation and the feeling of amazement to be able to do the things he wants to do. It illustrates at the same time how in this swapped or merged zone of work and leisure social relations are also not separated:

Social life is very dominated by work, so I mean, I personally don’t make any distinction really between working and not working, I mean, there, okay I separate the risk, but, I’m actually amazed frankly that people pay me to do stuff that I do because I would do it for nothing in a way, because it’s just fun, so I’d say most of the relationships I have will in some way be work related or work derived.

In the end, because of this attitude towards work and the merging of work and leisure time, work seems to become part of most aspects of daily life, as the following quote suggests.

I: Oh I don’t have holidays. I don’t have time. I mean, doing that and that [pointing to his two business cards that are lying on the table] leaves no time for holiday, but it doesn’t mean I am getting burned out. Because you know the travel itself, you’re seeing something interesting, right, if you’re at a conference you might be at a place. I’ve never been to Edinburgh, that was cool, it’s like a mini holiday, you know you go out at night, you can walk around, you can take sort of little breaks during the day. So this sort of little time you can take for yourself counts as a mini holiday. When I was last in [place], you know, it was to visit my family, so I might as well keep working, because they just want me to be at home so they can cook me dinner.

K.: And you sit at the internet?

I: Right, yeah, so I might as well work. I mean, I catch up with friends, of course, I go out or lunch – catch up with everyone, you know, but it’s like being based there for a couple of weeks, last time I was in [place], there was a conference there which I could go to, so that was good.

K.: And when you’re here, what would a normal day look like?

I: Pretty normal, get up, I go to either the university or the company.

K.: What time?

I: I normally go like 9:30 or 10:00. You know, it's technology, don't start too early. And then you just work, normally leave 7, between 7 and 8, go home, have some dinner, do something and then try to do a bit of extra work, like 11 or 12, midnight, maybe to 1 a.m. I sort of get in a bit of trouble, sort of get forced to go to sleep.

K.: So, what about the social and family environment? Weekends? Or you also work on weekends?

I: No, so I almost never work at weekends, I might sort of read emails, but I don't do any real work. I only do real work if it's absolutely necessary. Like last Sunday I had a phone conference which had to be on that Sunday so I went to the office for a few hours, but generally don't work on the weekends.

Apart from the weekends, he tries to accommodate work and free time, holidays, conferences and family time whenever possible together without a consistent separation.

## Cost Saving

Dealing with financial up and down movements and flexibility was also a topic in some of the interviews. The initial founding can be based on very different financial concepts. Some founders attract investors, others earn enough money early enough, others again look for public or private grants, others "bootstrap", which means they start with very little initial cost, even reducing their living costs to a minimum. Living with reduced expenses and starting in a garage is one of the old startup legends, referring to founders such as Steve Jobs. Today, people bootstrap by living cost efficiently or by living, for example, in Vietnam and working via internet, at the same time promoting a relaxed sunny and free lifestyle. An article on the forum [www.startwerk.ch](http://www.startwerk.ch) promotes reducing the life costs of founders by eating spaghetti more often and moving back in with one's parents, which, the author hints at, would not be too harsh, because the founder is working all the time, anyway.

For some interview partners, saving money was an issue, while some had other side jobs. Others were confident that they could always find a job. For some, the goal seemed to achieve a stable income for themselves, while others thought of an exit or had already successfully sold companies, and this chance was regarded as the upside of financial bottlenecks.

## 5.3 Motility

The theme of mobility forms an underlying texture. Movement is not limited to migration, but the theme of movement appears in practices of daily life. It refers to geographical, social, and virtual space, to ideas, time, and finances, and these dynamics influence each other. Virtual networks might inspire a new business idea, travel or moving, lead to an increase in income or social connections and vice versa; a tight budget might lead to a move to a cheaper place; travelling and social mobility might lead to a more mobile understanding of time and vice versa.

Hildebrandt and Dick (2009) studied the understanding of mobility in Germany and concluded that mobility is understood as a resource, an “existential precondition for leading one’s life” (p.42, my translation). Hildebrandt and Dick’s view on mobility as resource does not declare it a luxury, or freedom, but rather places it in connection with dealing with current challenges and pressures of daily life. The material presented in this chapter can be interpreted in the same way. Mobility is an important part of the perspectives of founders in order to cope with present-day living and business conditions. Migration in its classical sense then becomes a form, a consequence of mobility.

Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye (2004) presented the concept of motility in order to describe this notion of precondition or potential for mobility:

Motility can be defined as the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances. (p.750)

Amongst entrepreneurs, this motility is also generated through their experiences of mobility in different dimensions of life. And in turn, this motility can be the precondition for subsequent mobility (Sontag, 2016, p.155). Limmer and Schneider (2008) write: “People who are open for change have an easier time deciding to relocate and they experience this decision and its consequences as less stressful than people who are generally interested in avoiding change” (p.27). How motility reproduces itself becomes visible with regard to social networks, as Bernd remarks:

We focus on hiring. When we hire people, we really try to look for people who have lived in different places, because once you’ve learned to live in different places, I think it does change you, you somehow become a bit more adaptable, or maybe just the fact that you did move shows that you’re willing to adapt. The question is, which is the cause and which is the effect.

And James narrates:

James: Well, we have a Swiss person, who speaks several languages. We have a Polish guy, at the moment we have an Italian guy, the rest are German and Swiss, one from the Romandie. Yeah, so I'm pretty sure my personality has affected the people I've hired.

K.: In what way?

James: I try to make sure that people are as different as possible.

K.: From each other?

James: Well, it's not a conscious thing, but I sort of see that. You know, you could call it an engineering company and there are many engineering companies in Switzerland, which are all like Swiss guys, you know, they're all guys, they're all Swiss. They all come to work at 8:15, they go for their *nüni* [morning break] and lunch, you know, the culture of the company is definitely heavily affected by the founders and this lives on forever.

The mobility of the founders thus influences the company set up and culture, and creates a demand for staff with a similar mindset.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The first section of this chapter dealt with the different forms of migration of the startup founders and how they overlap. In the second section, I argued that migration is not an act that can be singled out, but is connected with other kinds of mobilities. Thinking of mobility rather than migration helps to understand the connections between different kinds of movements and migration. While migration as an analytic term opens a one-directional perspective of movement, as it encompasses accomplished geographical movements, the concept of mobility adds a multi-directional perspective, in the sense of accommodating different dimensions of geographical movement as well as other dimensions, such as social, cultural, or virtual movements and inter-connections between these moves and geographical migration (Götzö & Sontag, 2015b). Moreover, it helps “zoom in” and recognize the different mobile components of daily life, including managing a virtual and mobile team and customers, flexible working times and innovations. Movement is also not bound to a linear timeframe, but often a simultaneous or multilocal one. Conferences via skype, virtual teams, daily commuting, changes in social spaces, travelling, or even different homes build a network of physical and mental positioning within space.

These mobilities and flexibilities also show how professional and private life is intertwined and cannot be clearly separated. Work, just like migration, is embedded in a mobile context. People may turn their passion or their hobby into a business. With regard to relationships, they may found with their friends or have most of their friends within their business networks. With regard to time, they work flexible hours. There is an amalgamation taking



place, in which one way of mobility informs and supports the other and vice versa.

Different areas of mobilities can then combine and influence one another. They create and shape the topographies and possibilities for founding, developing, and running businesses (Sontag, 2016, p.155). The founders' networks, partnerships, investor relations, education, experience, ideas and worldview often root in their own mobility. Mobility also opens different legal settings and infrastructures. Some founders had the idea for their business when they came to a new place and saw a market gap there for a product or idea, which they had seen elsewhere, or they developed a business concept on their travels, because they connected certain insights they had. Sometimes mobility itself even becomes the business, as in the case of founders who offer services for other mobile people.

At the same time, the causality is not that simple. Places such as Switzerland attract people by offering good working and educational conditions – even if they do not know yet that they will one day be founders. The founding process is an interaction with its surroundings. And certain cities provide a better environment for specific business areas than others and may thus attract founders, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The initial focus on work related migration in this project thus turned into mobility related work. These kinds of startups are possible through the interaction of different mobilities and the dissolution of boundaries. Biographies of mobility create careers (Ibid.).

## 6 The Meaning of the Local: Transurban Space

This chapter poses the question of which role concrete local places play in mobile, transnational, and transmigratory biographies and how the local and the translocal interact. The first section looks at different ways of local mooring. In the following two sections, these ways of mooring will be contextualized in a larger understanding of individual moving space, introducing the concept of transurban space.

### 6.1 Ways of Mooring

Placing mobilities center stage and focusing on the moving and movable in the last chapter leaves the question open as to the “mooring” or the meaning that concrete places and localities have. To deal with space, people employ a number of strategies and experience different possibilities and struggles. Their strategies have various intensities; people connect locally more or less strongly. Six strategies of mooring and interacting with a place were important in the interviews.

#### 1. Local Mooring through Family, Friends and Business

Luca decided to settle in a Swiss city with his daughter and family and build up his company there. For him, this means that he wants to engage locally. Friends, whom he can meet locally and regularly, are important to him. And he wants to grow his network for his business as well, getting to know local business partners. Another aspect of this settling process for him is speaking the language well. Mooring in this case means building up a network of relations that are important for him and his private and professional life. Simultaneously, his company is working on international projects, he travels and he is closely connected with his parents and friends abroad and visits them regularly for longer periods of time.

#### 2. Temporary Mooring Prior to Moving on

Another interview partner clearly distinguishes between long and short stays as far as her engagement with a place is concerned. However, she also describes the ambivalence of enjoying being settled, and of feeling unsettled and motivated to move on:

When we were in this place for ten years, I was involved in local politics. I felt very much, on the one hand rooted, but at some point I also became restless and thought: now, do I really want to go into retirement in THIS life? Now something has to happen.

Her last move was motivated by family reasons, but also by her fascination for the city she moved to. Mooring in this case depends on the perspective and duration of a stay. Moreover, it is not planned forever. Mooring means an ability to interact, and to take responsibility at a local place.

### 3. Mooring as an Involuntary and Painful Experience

For Deborah, becoming Swiss meant giving up her previous passport. She felt rejected and that she did not fit into the political categories which she had to abide by.

I didn't know any more – where do I belong? I don't belong to Switzerland, I don't belong to [country in West Africa] and there was a time when that really affected me. Yes I had to deal with this, but it wasn't easy. Now I am here most of the time, I accepted it, have no citizenship, I have nothing, I have to take it as it is, it is difficult, but yes, honestly, I feel more comfortable here than in [home country] now. [Swiss city] is home and all, but I think it has to do with the fact that my citizenship was taken away.

The way she is restricted to her Swiss citizenship and her life in the Swiss city where she lives now was not her choice, but a bureaucratic, forceful process. She would have preferred to keep two citizenships and be more flexible. The way she came to Switzerland in the first place was also partly because she was not allowed to go to a different place. So, even though mooring in Switzerland in this way was not her plan, she makes the best of the situation, builds up networks, makes friends and tries to set up her business successfully. Yet her experience also shows the legal limits of mobility, which affect her as a former non-EU citizen more harshly.

### 4. Multilocal: Up in the Air between Places of Equal Importance

Bernd's life is almost meta-spatial. He has an apartment in the town where his company is, and he has another household in the town where his family is and moves regularly between the two of them. In addition, he spends one third of the year travelling to other places, "up in the air". As his daily life in either place is determined by his work, his virtual "work space" could be interpreted as his principal space of mooring, while the geographical places are rather like flying visits.

### 5. Mooring through Professional and National/Language Communities

Marco works at a Swiss university and is just finishing his PhD. He also works in his own company. I visited him at his university lab, where he gave

me a guided tour and I could also meet some of his fellow scientists, who spoke English amongst each other; an intimate, hardworking, international group. Marco also describes that it was difficult for him to get to know Swiss people, even though he tried. Rather, outside of his working environment, he knows many people who are from Italy or have Italian ancestors like himself. Local mooring for Marco thus has to do with his business- and scientific community, his university and the Italian community he moves in.

Marco: Yeah, there is this, for sure, the language problem first of all and then, I don't know, the local people I know here they are all second generation Italians or – and even in the building where I'm living there is no Swiss there, I think there is one Swiss family. They are all Turkish, Brazilian and Italian families, but yeah, that's true there is no relation with, I'm not integrated.

K.: You call it that way.

Marco: Yes, at least the way I see integration, I will not define myself an integrated person, integrated foreigner here ... I mean all my friends are Italian, the people I know ... are also in my situation, let's say, coming from abroad.

K.: How do you feel about it?

Marco: Okay, no, because I don't know, in the end I'm doing what I want here, I mean I'm fine with it and I'm also fine with not having these guys as friends. I mean maybe in the past I tried a bit more with Swiss colleagues at least to be involved more, but in the end, I was never able to get along or I don't know if it's because of the language problem or, even in English it sometimes can be a problem, I mean to express yourself completely, that's why we end up all Italians. But yeah I mean, I don't care. It's not hurting me or it's not, doesn't make me feel strange or stranger.

Marco goes back home once a year. He feels close to his friends from childhood and his family.

## 6. Permanent Mooring

Another interview partner decided to stay in Switzerland for good. He describes in this passage how he negotiates with himself how much he wants to – or thinks it necessary to – engage with people and politics. His criterion to judge his engagement is an understanding of effectivity on the one hand. Switzerland, he reasons, does not need as much political interference as the US or other places, because things mostly work out well. He wonders whether it is necessary to invest into a system that seems to be doing fine. On the other hand, it is also the fact that he is not allowed to vote because he is not a Swiss citizen.

I: Switzerland lends itself very well to people who are happy to sort of be a polite fit, don't cause trouble, but not really become Swiss in the fully active way. ...

The question is, at what point should you or should you not really try to, if that's necessary, to belong to the people around you, who don't have this type of experience, like your

neighbor or the person working in the shop down the street. Let's take the example of Swiss politics. You know for me it's highly amusing that they worry about the tiniest problems, because Switzerland doesn't have real problems. I mean they have, I'm not saying they don't have problems, but it's funny to see how they worry about things long before they are real problems, which is good, but because I don't have a vote, I don't care, so I can't change the things. But, you know, this year I can apply to become a Swiss citizen. Then probably I should start to care or at least pretend to care. ... I think I can be in that luxurious situation because the Swiss have got it worked out, they know how to run their country, my opinion is not going to make a difference, they're doing fine with or without me. Yeah, it's not like you feel in the US where your vote is important – bring out the vote. In Switzerland, on average, people usually come to quite reasonable decisions, and they're voting all the time on everything, but this, you know this feeling of belonging, seems to be not particularly strong for me. I seem to be quite happy to go on as I am now, I like being here, I'm happy to sort of integrate in the sense of, you know, speaking the language, knowing details that only locals would know, but you know, but at the same time not really caring. And I would assume that becoming Swiss would mean that I start to care.

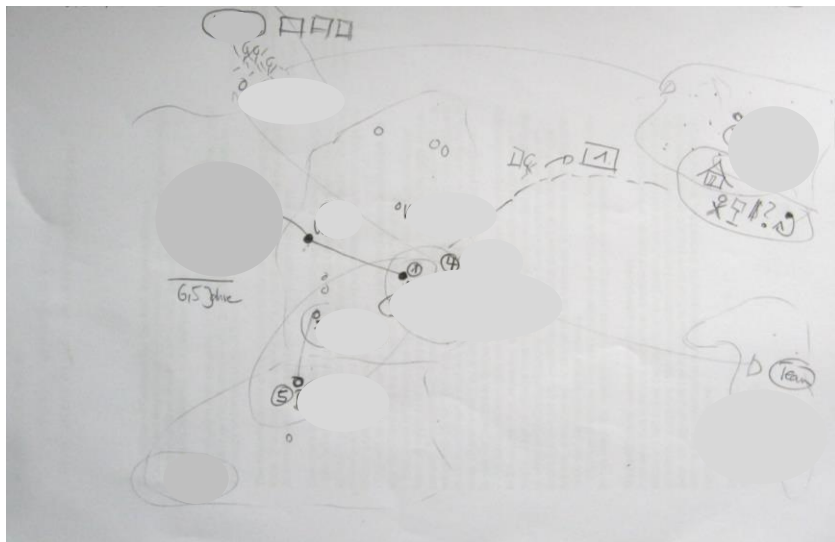
Foreigners in Switzerland do not have voting rights, except in some local areas and this situation does not encourage political participation in general. In this quote, the interlocutor states that he does not feel locally and politically very engaged and involved. Yet he (in contrast to others) also does not see a pressing necessity of becoming politically engaged, because, he argues, things run smoothly in Switzerland and his energy is better invested elsewhere. He has already been in Switzerland for many years and is now debating that, apart from the actual move, the act of gaining citizenship would mean a change in his approach, to “start to care”. Mooring forever, or migrating in the classical sense, thus is a gradual process in his case and gaining citizenship a step that has an effect. For this interview partner as for others, though, the field he interacts with is larger than the place where he lives now; he travels frequently, he sells his products globally and he is connected with people and family members worldwide.

## 6.2 Transurban Space

The examples show that people have different ways, preferences, possibilities, and histories of local engagement. These local engagements and connections, though, are only one part of their general engagement. There are further translocal anchorages that play a role apart from a single local place. These anchorages form spaces of thought, of emotions, of action, of interest, of physical movement, relationships and of course business. It makes sense to zoom out, as in the case of understanding migration in the context of mobility, to understand concrete local places as parts of larger personal moving spaces. This means switching from the perspective of a place, as it is often

referred to in general integration debates, to the perspective of the person, who connects different places and also different engagements in these places. The following illustration is a mental map from one of the interlocutors. It depicts the connected places and thus the space which he moves in.

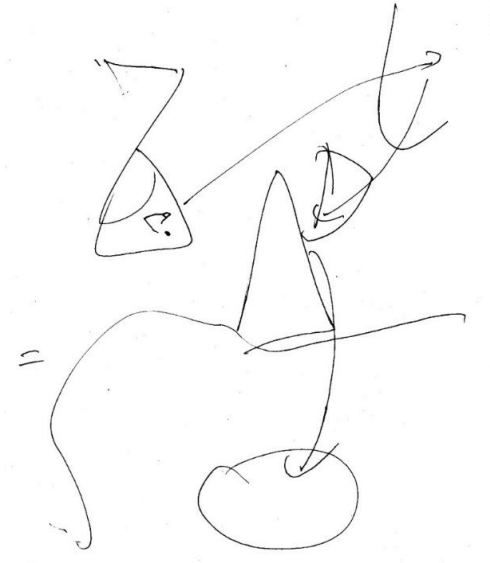
Figure 7: Interlocutor's Drawing of the Space within which he Lives and Moves



Source: Interview partner, author's material

He drew elements of a geographical map, yet with different dimensions and distances than in the generally accepted world map. Moreover, the places are marked with symbols, lines, numbers and letters, which explain where he spent time in the past, where he still goes and to which places and people he is connected through his activities, presenting a personal perception of space. Another interlocutor drew the following sketch of the space he moves in. It shows a path, and at the same time the places between which his business and life are set up today:

Figure 8: Interlocutor's Drawing of the Space within which he Lives and Moves



Source: Interview partner, author's material

During the interviews, I thought of some of my interview partners as hovering above the ground, but being attached to different places on the ground simultaneously – creating their individual web-like topography of space. The concept of space is important here, because it presents precisely this perspective of moving away from the single location and looking at an individual topography from the perspective of the single person, including the connecting pieces, the in-betweenness. Moreover, these spaces can be conceptualized as transurban spaces, as they connect mostly cities and urban areas. These are not any cities, but cities in which someone's area of interest is represented, as the following quote on IT and technology oriented startups indicates:

You start to accumulate friends, who disperse to other places and those places, there's usually a relatively small number of cities where your friends end up. So although it feels like they're all over the world, there's actually only a relatively small number of cities that these people go to, like London, New York, what you might call the sort of global people are not that hard to find. It's very rare that someone would go and live in a very remote location that is not near a big international airport. Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, you know all these cities, London, Paris, Berlin, Zürich a little bit, it's not so big here. They are places you go for work or go through for work and it's usually at some stage or another you have a friend living there who you can visit. San Francisco is another big one

for technology. I've friends living in Silicon Valley, in New York, all these sort of rich people hubs, I guess you could call them. (Sontag, 2016, p.151)

This observation connects with the concept of scaling (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2011). Rather than geographical areas, scales such as the local, the urban, and the global play a role in migratory experiences and interactions with the surroundings. Doug Saunders (2011) places the city in the center of his take on migration in his book *Arrival City*. The largest and last wave of migration, he argues, takes place from the villages to the cities – to the “arrival cities”, those parts of cities where people from the villages first end up and which function as a base for transition: “The modern arrival city is the product of the final great human migration. A third of the world’s population is on the move this century, from village to city...” (p.21). Saunders argues strongly that entrepreneurship in the form of small shops and businesses is at the core of arrival cities. Even though these businesses are not technology and/or innovation oriented startups, yet the city in both cases forms the base for transition. Just as people move from villages to cities, other people move on from one city to the next or travel within a network of cities. Cities form the places of transition and of opportunity.

Cities, and the connections between cities are arenas for migration and movement, in the sense of different shades of belonging, settling or mooring and in the sense of providing infrastructure and business opportunities, opportunities to creatively interact with space and also, as in Doug Saunders’ understanding, of providing transition space from one place or one business or one social setting, one idea, one research topic to the next.

However, even with a framework that focuses on the scale of cities and the seeming ease of connecting them and travelling, the national context cannot be neglected. The opportunities that the Swiss cities Zurich and Basel offer, for example, also depend on a national framework as far as company legislation, research promotion, and last but not least immigration legislation are concerned.

People develop the spaces they move in and their networks through various educational, professional, or private moves and stays. For some, international associations play a role. These can be networks of entrepreneurs or the scouts. Some of the founders also have other experiences of migration in their family, or their spouse’s family. They maintain networks through travelling, longer stays, or communication. Online communication allows families and companies to work and live together across distances and thus merges virtual and physical scapes (Sontag, 2016, pp.151-52).



## 6.3 Creating Space

The above mentioned ways of mooring or dealing with places, moreover, point to the issue that places are not clearly defined geographic and social constellations that lead to a straightforward understanding of “integration” or local participation from an ethnographic, actor centered point of view. In fact, numerous theoretical contributions have dealt with space during the last decades and have been described as *spatial turn* or *topographical turn* (Weigel, 2002). Space as understood in its social and historic construction became a critical analytical category, referring not only to the dimension of geography, but also to symbolic and imaginary dimensions (Bachmann-Medik, 2010, pp.296-297). One author has become particularly dominant as point of reference: French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In his book *The Production of Space* from 1974, Lefebvre understands space as mainly social space. He argues that nature or anything original cannot be conceptualized without the social. Lefebvre differentiates three areas or ways of producing space: the perceived, the conceived and the lived space, each characterized by a different quality. The first one indicates daily practices, the second one official images of space and the third one symbolic knowledge of space (Lefebvre, 2006). Johanna Rolshoven, building on this approach, puts forward a threefold understanding of space:

- “space of representations – societal and historical ascriptions”,
- “built space – measurable, architectonically constructed space”, and
- “experienced space – perceived by the individual and realized in daily actions” (Rolshoven, 2012, p.165, my translation).

From an ethnographic perspective, it is especially the experienced space that is the focus of analysis. The societal and architectonic space reflect in this experienced space through the perception of the actor. This is not a passive, receptive constellation on the side of the actors. It is not a given space per se, as it can be seen from the above examples that even in similar places and social and economic surroundings, and even though most people appreciate the economic wealth of Switzerland, they construct their living spaces differently. The constellation between the actors and societal and built space resembles an ongoing conversation of gaining experience and local knowledge, in a place or through networks, extending one’s own radius, interacting with local conditions and also engaging, implementing ideas and change, for example in the form of employment possibilities, new products, and new social networks. It also means engaging in critical interactions, withdrawing, and judging. The concept of experienced space (Rolshoven, 2012) illuminates space as daily life-experience. The paths and movements of people create space through mobility, migration and globalization (Hoffmann & Dilger,

2012, p.8). Experienced spaces are personal, flexible and extendable and not fixed, in the way in which geographical maps are. It is through movement, communication and action that they come into existence, change, develop, and grow (Sontag, 2016, p.152). Michèle put it this way:

It's nice, when you say [space] within my LIFE, because this space is obviously not only my apartment or a town, it's also this, well, how does space come about, many people have written about this, but it comes into existence amongst others, through movements that we make, a space is defined for oneself. (Sontag, 2016, p.151)

Imagination influences how people perceive and handle geographic and connected built space. Images of spaces develop and transform by moving, travelling, walking through the city, by cycling, by taking the tram, sitting in the office alone, with somebody else, attending a skype conference, communication, studying, reading, watching TV, thinking, or dreaming. Space is a constant co-creation. In fact, conceptualizing space has to do with conceptions of the self, with goals and wishes and personal schemes of orientation. Simone, for example, described how difficult it was for her to move back to Switzerland after living abroad for 2,5 years, not only because the place had changed, but also because she herself had changed:

And then it was about getting a foothold here again, that is also something that is often underestimated, to arrange yourself at home when you have been away for a long time. It's sometimes even more difficult than acclimatizing yourself anywhere else, because you think, I know it, but it is different now and you have changed.

At the same time, surrounding social and architectonic space constitutes a vis-à-vis. In this encounter, conflicts and ideas may evolve, as will be discussed in chapter 7, and founding can be seen as part of this interaction. It can be an attempt to come closer to a place or it can also be an attempt to establish independent or translocal structures.

## 6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, six ways in which people interact with local places were put forward. Some of these ways do not fit well with general notions of integration. Changing the perspective from a perspective of place to a perspective of the actors, however, reveals their engagements and connections as individual space, in which different places, institutions, offices, actors, and connections between them play a role. Space can be understood as an individual topography and even toponyme created by experiences, movements and imaginations beyond geographic conventions.

This space can be seen as a transurban space, connecting different professionally interesting cities as main anchors. The mobility of startup found-

ers can be understood as transurban mobility. Within their transurban spaces, people develop different strategies of local attachment. Each person has their own map of the world and is part of a network, in which some places are more important than others; in some, stronger mooring takes place than in others. The style of mooring is based on different criteria, which have to do with meaningful self-construction. For Luca, deciding on one place to stay was an important act. Bernd, in contrast, positions himself in two cities, and on his travels, his life almost takes place in a supralocal context. When James decides to stay for good, he feels trapped in a golden cage and for yet another founder it did not matter where he moved, he followed his wife. These ways of interacting with places and giving meaning to places are linked to individual constructions of life. Constructivist thinking on space can here be employed to understand the subjective interaction with and construction of spaces of personal movement.

Changes of place or movements within space can also mean continuities – of social relationships, networks, career building, pursuing individual targets and interests within an existing space. Moreover, this perspective throws a different light on societal engagement, as it lifts it to a translocal level. The interlocutor who explained his political disinterest in Switzerland with a global comparison, argues that Switzerland does not have real problems and thus does not need his engagement. However, a translocal logic in other cases also involves carrying political ideas and issues from one place to the next, thus connecting communities and possible solutions. Or it means focusing on social, environmental, medical or economic goals that play a role in a transnational field. It is important to take this perspective and its effects on local and translocal levels into account in a mobile, globalized world.

Such an actor-centered view on space contradicts notions of migration and integration that localize people at specific places. Space, in this understanding, exists in the form of pieces rather than connectivities. The forms of mobility, which are described in some of the interviews, point to a different understanding: the place as ordering or attracting paradigm matters, but the ways in which people interact with a local place is informed by and connected with a larger transurban space and self-understanding. This individual space is created through physical movement, and through emotional, virtual and imaginative ties. These notions of space connect with Lewin's understanding of a field as those factors that have an influence on a person in a certain situation.

This perspective of a networked, multi-sited way of conceptualizing spaces has not much to do with a classic understanding of migration anymore. Setting these personal spaces as starting points of analysis creates a different outlook onto presumably local groups and societies, and poses questions of integration differently. Some of the ways in which people moor might also be found amongst people who never moved, and there may be

many more. It is an actor- and agency centered approach that enables one to look at the kind of “integration” a person creates or chooses within his or her individual space rather than focusing on a local place. It is one of the myths behind concepts like “integration” or “sedentariness” that there is a general way of engaging with a place.



## 7 Orientation Schemes

Founders create the space they move in as they navigate in it and make decisions. This chapter asks: which factors motivate and drive them in their professional decisions, and how do they orientate themselves and make decisions in contexts of mobility?

### 7.1 *Passung*

What are people looking for? Before going into answers in the next section, I will introduce the concept of *Passung*, which Monika Götzö and I discussed and developed in the project. *Passung* relates to the notion of compatibility, fit, matching. It spans across all three terms and involves a situation that fits as well as the making of the fit. This process of creating *Passung* is a way of meaningful self-production, creating meaningful blueprints for life and thus for the self, which may also involve the creation of a product and a company.

In order to reach this meaningful self-production, people operate with context-sensitive performance orientedness. They interact with discourses, conditions, frameworks and the environment they live in, and they create or adapt structures which seem to them the best possible options. This does not result in moving in total freedom, but rather a constant debate with limiting or supporting structures. Performance, achievement and ambition are important drivers in this.

Some of the practices and strategies mentioned in the last chapters can also be seen in this context, and actually are strategies of meaningful self-production. This includes the melding of work and private life. It also includes conscious self-positioning within professional and private contexts, or the decision to move and change the context. Strategies of learning, innovating and (self-) optimizing can be seen in this light, just as much as the aim of following one's intuition or feeling. Likewise, playing with appearances and social and professional standards like dress codes, language, flat hierarchies, and last but not least, taking over responsibility for a company, are strategies of meaningful self-production.

Work and professional life pose a dominant context for these processes and become a frame of life, which often includes free time and private relationships. Work is an intensive lifestyle, determining big parts of life. As mentioned before, some interlocutors would say that it does not feel like work, but it is what they like doing or what they would do anyway – which underlines the merging between work and leisure. As discussed in chapter 5.2, this can be interpreted as a shift of meaning rather than a mere dissolu-

tion of boundaries of “work”. Work creates a frame for *Passung*, as it encompasses the idea of choosing content, organizational structures, social ties, and working times – thus choosing *Passung* through the different mobilities as described in chapter 5. It is precisely because the understanding of work is extended and closely connected to meaningful self-production and images of the self that it is such a powerful context and driver.

The initial trigger in the search for *Passung* is often attributed to an experience of *Widerstreit*, as evidenced in the narrations. *Widerstreit* in Koller’s use of the term describes an experience of conflicting discourses, referring to Lyotard (Koller, 1999). Such conflicts arise in individuals’ environments, or through expectations within their university education, family, regional, political, economic or environmental surroundings, or job. People cannot find their way into a prevailing discourse within their biographical self-production. They feel repelled and distance themselves. In my interviews, passionate and prevailing clashes were narrated, for example, with regard to work within big companies, from which the narrators distance themselves, as in this account:

But then the catastrophe happened, I did an internship at [large company] and yes, the bureaucracy nearly killed me. I really didn’t like that, I really felt uncomfortable, just because, I want to work, I want to reach goals, I don’t want to keep talking about how I should do my work. I also don’t like it if I first have to obtain fifty-seven permissions, so that I can make a photocopy or whatever. I exaggerate, but that’s the direction it went and that’s just not my thing.

Another arena for *Widerstreit* was the academic world and academic career paths. Some interlocutors criticized the politics within university structures or preferred to do something practical, which could have an immediate impact, instead of “writing papers”. In some cases, the idea was born out of a critique of social challenges or environmental destruction. For some, it was rather opposing the limits they felt within their social surroundings or within their earlier profession.

Out of these antagonisms, people passionately seek a new direction or solution for themselves – by founding their own company and creating their own working environment. This is of course a constant debate with the surroundings and their norms, the spatiality regime in which they move. In fact, some of the issues of mobility in chapter 5 point to this notion: People deliberately choose leisure clothes for doing business, use familiar language in professional settings, do not care about working hours or establish flat hierarchies within their own companies. Also, notions of risk and failure are interpreted in a way that understands failure as a positive chance, as the only way to learn something which nobody has done before.

Some narrations include a narrative of “luck favors the prepared” or of “it wasn’t planned that way”, and the difference between the “normal path of life” and the path that they took is stressed. This statement points to the belief

that there is something like a plan out there, that people do not just do things and that there is a safe, proper way to lead one's life – and also in this there is a rebellion, like a dialectic or iterative process. Family and environment, education and networks work on the person and at the same time the person him- or herself defines and refines his or her response to the surroundings. A constant answering process to life, in Viktor Frankl's terms.

The logic of these narrations lies in their construction as stories of choice and achievement, a logic that also outdoes social constellations. Two young men in the sample, for example, talked about the families they came from, their parents' life stories and their siblings. From a perspective of socio-economic criteria, both families represented very different social and economic conditions. One family was working class, and none of the family members had been to university. The other person came from a well-educated and economically successful family. Yet both of them used the narration about their family in similar ways. Both of them used their stories to explain why they are where they are today. The first person made his way into university by himself with all kinds of learning experiences in jobs such as pizza delivery and car repair, which in his interpretation helped him on his career paths. The second one was supported by his parents. Yet he decided he wanted to do something different than his parents. Both protagonists give credit to the family background for providing resources that are useful for them today. And both also distance themselves from their background in order to do things the way they want. Both stories are told as stories of achievement, of opportunities, of *Widerstreit* and *Passung*. The success of having left a place or a family tradition, of doing something differently – such stories, from a different perspective, could also be told as stories of personal failure, but they are told as stories of development, choice and sometimes also liberation.

*Widerstreit* thus is often constructed as the trigger, the challenge for creating, for meaningful self-production and also for changing the surroundings. However, *Widerstreit* is not only a personal story, but also a narrative of the startup community, the structure of any sales pitch or marketing strategy: selling something also means telling a story of “before” and “after”, of a problem and its solution, creating a kind of suspense to gain the audience's attention and to be able to convince them of the product or service. *Widerstreit* creates the tension for an interesting storyline, portrays a person who thinks and cares, and acting on it implies a high degree of conviction, of “having something figured out”.

It may be specific for this target group firstly how this *Widerstreit* is discussed, and secondly, how people make use of it and construct meaning within their narratives – by using situations of *Widerstreit* as motivation for choices and the changes they made, and for the ways in which they actively created their paths, for their founding or for the particular way in which they run their company. It presents a strong belief in their own agency. Alheit



(1995, 2003) expresses this in the concept of *Biographizität* (see chapter 1.3 and 3.2). It describes the ability to reflect and interpret one's biographical experience and to shape and influence one's living circumstances and social contexts. Mobile life situations may foster this approach to life, as high motility, also high cultural and mental motility, may be transformed quickly into a story of development and (self-) formation. People seem to be able to gain an overview of their surrounding conditions, orientate themselves and make use of available conditions for their own aims, or change their situation. *Biographizität* then becomes an important part of motility.

## 7.2 Individual Motivations and Orientation<sup>21</sup>

In the interviews there were several themes that stood out as factors of motivation or orientation in making professional and personal decisions and creating an entrepreneurial life. Some of these factors overlap within a single biography.

### 1. Freedom and Risk

The factors freedom and risk encompass independence and responsibility in decision making and developing ideas, business activities and lifestyle independently, "being one's own boss". In the interviews, the active creation, steering and expansion of business activities and life, was mentioned. This is sometimes contrasted with positions in big companies or other institutions that are considered more boring or even "enslaving". Taking and enjoying risks is often part of this, just as a certain kind of excitement is. Expressions like "roller coaster" or a "serious game" were mentioned with regard to the life of an entrepreneur. Long working hours and loneliness can be part of this ideal of focusing on independence, potentials and passions in this way.

### 2. Creation of Independent Structures

It was striking how interview partners used the founding of their business to create structures of their own. This means professional structures, a company culture, company networks, places as well as daily life. This has to do with self-understanding, visions and wishes for developing their own life. However, it can also be connected with experiences of (legal) limits, discomfort, or discrimination within existing structures. Spouses who accompany their part-

21 An earlier version of 7.2, in particular sections 1-4 and 6-7 was published in Sontag, 2016, pp.156-57.

ners may for example encounter difficulties to enter the labour market in Switzerland and chose to start their own business. Also people whose degrees are not recognized in Switzerland may chose this path. Parents, often women, who accompany their spouses and take care of children may face intersecting difficulties, having left the labour market for some time, maybe having degrees that are not recognized, and experiencing structural discrimination in the labour market.

### 3. Curiosity and Scientific Contribution

This category describes notions of passion and craziness about discovering, inventing, crafting, and scientific contributions. Many interviewees were fascinated by the scientific work they had done, but also by actually creating a product or service that could be used in practice. This notion is well expressed in the following quote:

So for me the most satisfying thing is that there are companies in this world and products in this world that exist, which probably wouldn't exist if I hadn't been involved in building them, and so to create this new entity is to me the most interesting thing, that's fundamentally what drives me. (Duchêne-Lacroix, Götzö, & Sontag, 2016, p.270)

In my sample these were mostly male scientists, who have tried to find their career path, some of them first inside, and then outside of a university.

### 4. Joy and Satisfaction

Joy, satisfaction, or personal fulfilment were certainly important motives in many interviews. I came across a strong reflection on these factors and the choice to keep or increase these in their lives with two women who had developed their startup as a second career. In one case this was preceeded by a personal and professional crisis and thought of as prevention from a beginning burnout situation. In another case, it had to do with the wish to reorient the mode and outlook of life, such as looking for a new more suitable professional field.

### 5. Self Improvement and Learning

One of the interlocutors put it this way: "I learn every day; every day I get up and say: what can I learn today?" Some interlocutors described this fascination of learning, gaining new experiences and opportunities and constantly improving themselves. Christopher, who closed one company and is looking for a job before he starts a new company, says:

And that means, I try to keep learning and becoming better and that is something that drives me, also regarding the things I do now. I try to find a job where I can either use the

things that I have learned now, or where I can learn things that I cannot do now, but of which I know that I should be able to do them, when I try again, from someone who knows them.

Migration was also interpreted in this light. Michael planned his moves almost like a study program. Various Erasmus and other exchange programs may also fall into this category. For some, this meant reflecting on assumptions about the self in the light of new contexts and experiences.

## 6. Contribution to Society

Contribution to society as a factor of motivation and orientation plays a role in many interviews. Topics are the environment, improving medical treatment and health, education, development and learning, social justice, or integration. It can also be the invention or improvement of a product, or the way in which a company is set up and lead. An interview partner expressed it this way:

The aim is to help people. That's the aim. And it doesn't matter how you get there. I mean in the case of our products there is this obvious social motivation, you know. If my product helps someone get better, then, that's a rewarding feeling, of course that's a good thing.

The notion of trying to be a "good human being" may go along with this. Furthermore, this factor and the previous ones often go together. It is neither a self-denying feeling of responsibility for society, nor a self-centered denial of society.

## 7. Earning Money

The financial output of course also plays a role. Yet, some entrepreneurs (e.g. with prestigious university degrees) were certain that they could earn more money with a traditional career in a big company. For others, the startup was, in the given situation, the best way or even the only way (e.g. when degrees were not recognized in Switzerland) to earn money. Different interview partners had experienced different possible outcomes of a startup: Failure, a low income, an acceptable income, or a successful sale, the "exit". Even though interesting, however, great financial success or an exit was never regarded as the only motivating factor. The following passage from an interview exemplifies this attitude:

I don't do that because of the fame, I don't do that just because of money. Money for sure is a component. Everybody who says that he is not an entrepreneur because of money, is lying on a certain level. I mean, this incentive, that you could really become rich, even if the chance is minimal, is sure a factor that can trigger this tension and excitement. Because success is marked by an exit and yes, an exit usually means money. That sure is one thing that also motivates me, but for me it is also about, I like this high intensity, and I like this pressure and the responsibility. That is, stress is something for me that does not burden me

much. I love to work under pressure, to have to make decisions myself, to know that I am the only one who decides if it works or not.

These are no single factors, but orientations also shift and overlap. With each factor, the goal is meaningful self- production, which is most often a stepwise procedure of making use of possibilities and opportunities.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

The drivers that people reconstruct in their narrations present a dialogue with their surroundings, a context-sensitive achievement orientedness in a process of meaningful self-production which leads to *Passung*. Sometimes their stories are sparked by forms of disagreement, *Widerstreit*. Often stories are told as stories of choice. In chapter 7.2, seven different, sometimes overlapping, factors of motivation and orientation in creating entrepreneurial lives were described. High motility, as discussed in chapter 5, adds dynamic, networks, ideas, and opportunities to this process.



## 8 The Making of a Startup Scene

The ways of creating orientation, meaning and in this way also continuity or stability as described in the last chapter do not end at the individual level, but are of course part of a wider social context. Individual people draw from this context in shaping their narrations and models of the world, but this context also evolves and grows. Bringing together the topics of the previous chapters on the meaning of space and also on the process of self-positioning, this chapter focuses on the creation of a startup context or environment.

The startup scene appears to work with comparatively few boundaries, such as institutions, hierarchies, rules and codes of conduct and instead features a strong inner and outer dynamic. Yet structures do exist and – what is more interesting – develop at a fast pace. The startup scene thus poses an interesting possibility to observe how new economic and political structures, boundaries, identities, labels and groups come to life and tie in with older themes.

From a biographical perspective, family members, friends, colleagues, or investors may play a role in making decisions, creating a business, and connecting with larger contexts. One interview partner explains how he grasps the different influences of people around him by the way in which they influenced his language when he was learning German:

I am strongly influenced by my family, my parents, also by my friends. We all are, but I can identify how I was influenced and by whom ... and I realize that even now, when I am saying something in German, I will express it the way a certain person does. At the beginning I said things mainly like [his girlfriend] says them, pronounces them and now I realized which other persons are influencing me. (Sontag, 2016, p.158)

Inspiration and influence thus came through different relationships. He also found a business partner who shared his business idea and they started their first trials and product developments. Both of them then decided to connect with a startup organization and work with a coach. Extending networks of personal contacts is of course promoted through events and coaching, yet the surrounding social networks that enable a person to create a business are often not planned or plannable, as reflected in an interview:

People always talk about leveraging your network. You need to have 5000 LinkedIn connections and I mean, it does help, of course you should definitely look in your existing network to see if someone can help you and that has worked out, one of our investors is someone I knew from school, but it's not something I think you can strategically plan or maybe it is, I don't know. And then my main business partner, the CEO, he is someone I know from when I was living in [name of place] and I knew I wouldn't be able to do it all on my own. And I would have to find someone who is prepared to take the personal risk.

For him, two people he knew from other contexts became important as investor and partner. The form of a business can be influenced by personal con-

tacts from very different stages and fields, from professional as well as private contexts.

## 8.1 Capital, Co-working, Competing – Institutional Frames

“I’m sure you have heard of the challenge of XY, that’s why we developed YZ, it can actually do XYZ... Our advantages clearly are...”, the young man was standing on the stage in a checked shirt, jeans, and wearing glasses with thick rims. He stared at his computer, then at the big PowerPoint slides behind him, tightly holding onto the speaker’s desk in front of him with his left hand. He had exactly ninety seconds to do his “pitch”. When he finished, the audience broke into applause. Then a jury, sitting in leather sofas right in front of the stage, while the audience was standing behind them, had three minutes to ask questions. Next, a lady entered the stage, dressed in a black suit. She stood in the middle of the stage, looked straight into the audience, and presented her 90 seconds pitch. Soon the jury would make their decision and present this year’s award winner.

Startup structures also develop through a number of private and public support systems. Growing startup support structures provide an easily accessible framework within which founders move. As described in chapter 2.2, a number of political and economic factors, as well as technological innovations, created a startup friendly environment in the 1990s. In Switzerland, universities of applied sciences were reformed and strengthened. The Commission for Technology and Innovation (KTI/CTI) increasingly launched startup projects. Today, on the European level, the establishment of the European Research and Innovation Area Board (ERIAB) and the EU program Horizon 2020 strongly point to the vision of innovation and the interdisciplinary support of research, industry and small and medium sized enterprises.

For Basel and surrounding cantons, BaselArea is the public promotion agency supporting established companies as well as startups to establish themselves in Basel or move their companies to Basel. Consulting services are free of charge. The region is branded and advertised under the categories of industry, transportation infrastructure, talent pool, business framework, education and research, and quality of living. By appealing to entrepreneurs with these factors, the city also brands itself as entrepreneur friendly and innovation supportive (BaselArea, 2015).

Within this general climate, a vast range of smaller support organizations formed and still are forming. They are organized as foundations, associations, privately, or by the government. They offer co-working spaces or offices, information and training, mentoring and coaching, networking possibilities, events, marketing, and investor contacts. In fact, the majority of the people I talked to were in some way linked to one of the support organizations.

Just in the cantons Basel-Landschaft and Basel-Stadt, there are between thirty to forty organizations supporting startup founders, a number which has

increased during the last ten years. Their programs are partly publicly, partly privately funded. Maurer and Schreiber (2014) portray twenty organizations in their thesis *Positionierung der Startup-Förderorganisationen im Wirtschaftsraum Basel. Entwicklung und Evaluation eines zukunftsfähigen Modells* (*Positioning of startup-support organizations in the economic area Basel. Development and evaluation of a sustainable model*), focusing on the area of Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft. They analyze their market position and pose the question of if and how another support organization might be positioned. This research itself is remarkable as it stresses the importance of the startup support organization as a field of economic activity and relevance by itself. The organizations provide finances, coaching, training, services, information, space, networks and platforms (Maurer & Schreiber, 2014, p.17). In particular, coaching and office space are the two ways of support which most organizations offer (p.55). Moreover, Maurer and Schreiber differentiate programs that are specially targeted at certain stages of the development of a startup. They conclude that most organization focus on the “seed phase”, the early first phase of founding (p.56). The authors further differentiate between three targets of these organizations: economic promotion, more specific startup promotion, or promotion of integration. Some of these institutions thus are more content-oriented and support, for example, only technology companies. Others promote the integration of migrants, assuming that self-employment may be a realistic option for migrants to enter the economic system.

There are also some companies and organizations that are active across the whole of Switzerland or even internationally, organizing events, supporting young entrepreneurs through competitions, funding and coaching. CTI Startup, for example, is the startup initiative of the Swiss Commission for Technology and Innovation. CTI Startup started its services in 1996. It offers a free coaching process for startups, at the end of which enterprises may receive the CTI label to certify their quality and credibility, relevant also for potential investors. Swissnex is a network run by the State Secretary for Education, Research and Innovation and supports exchange in the area of education and business, such as Swiss entrepreneurs and cooperations in the U.S., India and China and Brazil. Other initiatives include Venture Kick, an initiative by the Venture Kick foundation, which is financed by a number of foundations and companies. It targets mostly early stage founding and spin-offs from universities, with clearly visible marketing at the University of Basel. Participants go through a six month process of developing, training and selection, divided into three steps. At each of these steps they can win grants, or finally an investment, adding up to 130,000 CHF for the most successful candidates. Business Angels are entrepreneurs, senior managers, or executives who invest in startups and at the same time accompany these startups with their insights, experience, and networks. Business Angels are organized



in associations like the BAS Business Angels Switzerland. Some organizations cooperate closely with the universities. Some universities also have their own startup-support centers.

Some of my interview partners had received initial capital through the competition of Venture Kick or through Business Angels, some were renting office space in a co-working space organization, others again connected with co-working spaces for networking, while some received coaching. One person had a stipend from a foundation that distributes fellowship grants worldwide, specifically targeting social entrepreneurs. Startup support is very accessible and already targets university students, but also other founders, with low key events, fairs, regulars' tables, free coaching, idea development workshops or speed dating with existing startups.

The coaches and managers of the co-working and coaching organizations I talked to agreed that the scene is growing and that the "American mentality", as one of them framed it, of valuing entrepreneurship, risk and careers that do not need to be made for a lifetime, is slowly moving into Europe. During the last fifteen to twenty years, an increase can be seen not only in the number of startups, but also in the growth of the startup support business and in the way in which government agencies fund this kind of economic activity. The coaches assume that this trend will continue. Prejudices against the (insecure) job of an entrepreneur will decrease and more people will move in this direction. For Marco, setting his company up in a startup center helped in building networks:

It provides a kind of network of people, I mean on the administrative level or on the advisory level, to provide us a network to us. Especially, because none of us [the founders] is German speaking or also because we are not in the network here, so it's a kind of limitation for the start. (Sontag, 2016, pp.157-58)

Universities can play an important role as places where the founders meet, sometimes do research together, share ideas and develop their company (Ibid., p.158). In Marco's case, the founding developed through his position at the university:

I met A, who was my supervisor ... and then B arrived here, because his wife ... found a job at [corporation], so they moved here and B began to look for ... he got in touch with A and then everything started, we were showing the technology to B and then he realized that the technology we developed has an applied aspect, was not only basic research, so everything began from there. (Ibid., p.158)

The environment of universities and research-oriented companies like the chemical industry located in Basel, provide a basis for startups to form as spin-offs and to cater to an existing market. They influence networks, business possibilities, and self-development. In Basel, through the universities as well as the strong pharmaceutical industry, many spin-offs can be found in the field of life sciences. In Zurich, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

Zurich, ETH, supports founders with programs such as the ieLab (Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab). The ETH also helped found the technopark – an area of 44,300 m<sup>2</sup> of office space for startup founders. Marco describes the conducive environment for his business in the life sciences like this:

Well, I mean, the place where you are, where you do things matters, I mean look, Basel, you have Novartis, you have Roche, all the other companies around, giants and all the pharma stuff and then this creates a ground where you can find people and sell your new crazy idea. I mean when you do this in Rome, I don't know, at least from a scientific point, it's more of a touristic area for historical reasons, and also for the economy. It's more, say, wine and agro-food oriented. Already [someone] you know, you can simply ask like that without making official meetings or emails and maybe never get an answer.

This theme can be found in other biographies, too. Places then present and provide a certain business potential, and this includes the research landscape, the business environment, the funding and investment situation, as well as, in some cases, the legal framework. Furthermore, people may be part of (exclusive) international entrepreneurial clubs or networks. And the internet provides a vast range of forums, blogs and other startup relevant information and webpages.

The company Compass Inc., created the *Startup Ecosystem Report*. In this report they identify main urban areas around the world where startups prosper<sup>22</sup> (Herrmann, Marmer, Dogrultan, & Holtschke, 2012, p.2). Their study also assumes a correlation between capital cities and financial industries as well as art and music sectors and startup density (Ibid., p.135).

Support structures provide a job market. And it is a fairly open market, as entrepreneurs may also become coaches themselves or found with the idea of coaching or supporting startupper. This system of coaching and mentoring appears like a very open supportive way of learning and in this is different from other career structures. Yet public events such as fairs, pitch presentations and competitions also require certain forms of conduct and ways of self-presentation. There are dependencies and hierarchies involved that are reminders of older systems of hierarchical learning and doing business. From this angle, competitions can be seen as rituals of power distribution. One interlocutor describes the coaching process of becoming a “real company” as follows:

I think that's great about Switzerland, there is this commission that is directly paid by the government to support enterprises, small enterprises. And there is the possibility, we had this possibility to take a coach who helps you as startupper, to set up the company, so that it is a real company and not something like, I don't know, an inventor's office or something like that. That it looks like a company, not just from the outside but also all the plan-

22 Silicon Valley, Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, Seattle, New York City, Boston, London, Toronto, Vancouver, Chicago, Paris, Sydney, Sao Paulo, Moscow, Berlin, Waterloo, Singapore, Melbourne, Bangalore and Santiago (Herrmann, Marmer, Dogrultan, & Holtschke, 2012, p.2).

ning, the business planning, the financial side, how you employ people, how you write contracts, read contracts, all that stuff. And we were at the university and then we came here and they made us this offer and we were lucky, we had a very good coach, she is still with us and she, she is young, she is in my age, and she gave up her job and started her own company for personal reasons. And she lead us and we received this label. That is a process over several months. For us it took 1.5 years and in the end you receive a label, which means: ready for sustainable development. And that is good, you get a CTI label and what happens then is that investors, who are participating in this CTI, they also have an investment group, CTI Invest, they have access to the internals of the company, they have our business plan and all that, that we prepared in these 1.5 years and the idea is that many of these companies that go through this process have the possibility in the end to talk directly to investors.

In his account, the construction of a structure, habitus, and self-perception, sealed by certification, becomes visible. This process does not only (re)create legal frameworks for company structures, it also creates itself as a repetitive process of structure-making, a process that is in fact a commodity in itself. And it also creates entrepreneurs. It turns innovators, as the interview partner remarked, into entrepreneurs. In one of the coaching sessions I attended, the term “strengthening the entrepreneurial personality” was used in order to justify the content of the session and receive government funding for it. Other parts were well defined documents and tools, such as the business plan, the marketing approach, the webpage, the focus, mission or vision and the pitch. This is a certain set of knowledge and it is at the same time a format that, in my case, started to shape and focus the way I was thinking. The “scene” with all its actors thus generates formats, such as expressions, texts, tables, designs, that are spread through coaching, mentoring, events, internet, and in personal conversations – and are constantly reinforced through the vital issue of selling, funding or investing, which again relies on them. They also develop and change, as can be observed in the changing design formats of webpages and the way in which information is arranged, which can quickly be interpreted as “up to date” or “outdated”. The general notion, which I also experienced in coaching sessions that I attended, is one of “doability”:

Now I am myself sitting at an empty white table in a little grey room, opposite a friendly coach who is going to introduce me to the basics of startupping. He introduces himself and his experience as founder and coach and then we start discussing how to go about founding a business in Switzerland. The coach pulls sheets from a set of folders, and provides me with check lists, explanation sheets and sheets from the tax office and explains how to go about everything. When I walk out, I feel like I can start a simple one-woman business in the service sector tomorrow or even tonight, I see no major obstacles. One thing that I would have to clarify, though, is my status as immigrant.

The basic framework for starting a business was communicated as something quite clear, plannable and realistic. In the interviews, there are also critical discussions about this startup support system. Critical points were raised with regard to the methods and the kind of streamlined behavior that is necessary

to take part in certain competitions. One person explained that it takes a certain type of person to do the required presentations and not everybody, however clever they might be, likes this. Another remark was that the way some of the organizations deal with the startup idea feels “artificial”. Others again see the interventions by these organizations as limiting, because they push founders not to think big:

Yes, around this a huge machinery built itself up. I think that for example the courses that exist push the people to think small. I think that the statistics that exist, that say that the success rate is 90 % in all these initiatives or something like that ... that’s a sign that the people are lying.

Also the general notion that finding investors was a positive and necessary accomplishment was criticized:

For us, it was a big topic as a company when we would want to start pulling in investors. At the moment we survive because of our sales, we had to give away only very little of the company. Many of our colleagues in the same state had to give away a lot of shares, we didn’t want that, because then the investors actually dictate what you have to do. We have colleagues who really had to give away a lot and there is only due diligence, they work only on this bureaucratic, administrative stuff, we didn’t want that. We want to stay independent, we want to make technology, we want to make our dreams come true, not fill out some forms, due diligence forms all the time. That happens as soon as you have a bigger investor, then you have to do that, they want to know how their money is invested.

Apart from this startup context, companies of course have to deal with other structures from the outside as well. They abide by the same rules as any other company and some of these structures and processes are more difficult for them to manage with their limited facilities and budgets.

We are now on the way to medical certification. That is a very difficult path for a small company, I have to say. It is actually something that was made for bigger companies, to pull back the smaller companies a little [...]. For us it was like a jump in at the deep end, because we realized that many things that exist in the industry are not meant for small companies. That’s a pity that it has to be like that, I think, that means you are actually slowing down innovation.

This is also, as mentioned in chapter 5.1, a matter of the multiple responsibilities of the founders who have to take care of issues which are covered by separate departments in larger companies.

So, even if a shift towards a different understanding of work and risk takes place within the startup scene, there are no boundary-less zones. On an institutional level, a thick context of policies and businesses catering to the startup founders has evolved and created a new structure of its own. This structure provides institutionalization, networks, storylines, formats, events, and investments that develop and support the startup lifestyle. The startup structures in Switzerland for the most part are also geographically confined to regional and national contexts, even though founders and coaches themselves might be moving and working in international spaces and markets.

## 8.2 Conclusion

Critical discussion on the broader societal developments of mobility, fluidity, or flexibility of work have emphasized challenges, uncertainties, and increasing responsibilities for the individual (Bröckling, 2007; Sennett, 1998; Schönberger, 2007; Moldaschl & Voss, 2003). In the sociology of work, a new understanding of work and life has been proclaimed, differentiating our post-industrial times from the industrial society. This process has been analyzed as increasing subjectivation, arguing that the whole person with all of their creativity and personality is in demand when it comes to work. Voss and Pongratz introduce their concept of *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* – being the entrepreneur of one’s own working power, and Bröckling the concept of the entrepreneurial self. They argue that responsibilities which formerly have been taken care of by the employer or by the government, are increasingly resting on the shoulders of the single citizen. The authors point to the opportunities this development entails, but also to the danger of excessive demands on the individual. Migrating entrepreneurs of born global startups seem predestined protagonists in this context.

Different areas of life are claimed to be losing their contours: gender roles, age groups, professions and qualifications, organizations, lifestyles and milieus (Gottschall & Voss, 2003). Results of this development are said to be a continuing precarity of working conditions, more flexible daily routines and working hours, but also the “*Verarbeitlichung des Alltags*”, the determination of daily life by work, as well as more flexibility with regard to qualifications and professions, and vanishing boundaries with regard to space (Gottschall & Voss, 2003; Sennett, 1998; Moldaschl & Voss, 2003; Schönberger, 2007).

Chapter 5 mentioned these vanishing boundaries and mobilities. In chapters 7 and 8, I sketched out that just as these boundaries vanish or are deliberately transgressed, there are also structures and intersections which provide orientation and contours. A contemporary, *lebensweltliche* study of biography does not understand a biography in isolation, but rather as an interaction within social structures (Picard, 2009, p.320; Picard, 2014). Decisions, orientation schemes and *Widerstreit* do not arise in an unbounded world. Biographical narrations negotiate meaning, orientation and surrounding structures. Yet these structures must be traced and analyzed anew in emerging contexts, as Sennett (1998) puts it:

In attacking rigid bureaucracy and emphasizing risk, it is claimed, flexibility gives people more freedom to shape their lives. In fact, the new order substitutes new controls rather than simply abolishing the rules of the past – but these new controls are also hard to understand. The new capitalism is an often illegible regime of power. (Sennett, 1998, pp.9-10)

Surely, many boundaries of work and life have changed and founders are deliberately leaving some of them behind, deciding not to become part of a

working life with too many pre-set parameters, with tasks and processes which they do not consider meaningful, and which may limit their activities or creativity – or they prefer a timeframe which they can dispose of the way they want. Yet, people are not floating in a vacuum. New frames and structures are forming. In fact, as this particular way of founding businesses and supporting them is rather new and growing rather fast, it is a chance to observe how a new field opens up, develops and is slowly filled with political, economic, social, individual, and daily-life structures and categories. Structures grow from existing parts of the economy, society, political agencies, and universities (and conflicting views and negotiations) into this field and together create a specific culture – a startup culture, a way of deciding what is acceptable and what is not, a way of communicating, a way of making use of existing structures and a way of narrating. Connections to much older motives and narratives can play a role, too, as for example, the legend of the garage startup that dates back to the 1970s and some early US American heroes of the startup movement like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak, who are said to have started their businesses like that. Later on, their ideas turned into the two market leading computer companies. The garage motif even dates back to Walt Disney's early productions. And the theme of the story parallels the classic American dream success story and can be found in fairy tales and movies – in both statements: the notions of starting from nothing and achieving fame and riches and the notion of entrepreneurship, of becoming the boss instead of the worker.

Founding thus does not take place within a vacuum or complete fluidity but there are rather growing points of orientation that influence and shape a “startup culture” as well as individual possibilities, decisions and activities. These include family and social relationships, private and public supporting organizations, events, forums, and programs, political and economic possibilities, as well as narratives and images.



## 9 Boundaries in Migration Research

### 9.1 “There are no migrants here – only global people”

As described in the previous chapters, the discussion of concepts such as “migration” and “highly skilled” accompanied the project. Theoretical frames such as mobility (chapter 5), transurban space (chapter 6), *Passung* and orientation schemes (chapter 7) were introduced in order to understand and interpret the material. The following four chapters will elaborate on this discussion of concepts and perspectives.

In the present chapter, the focus lies on reconsidering some of the anthropological heritage in migration studies in order to understand why the concept of migration poses limits to studying such contexts of multiple mobilities, transurban connections and individual ways of creating *Passung*. In fact, during the fieldwork, I dropped the word “migration”, because the people I met did not relate to it. The subtitle above, “there are no migrants here – only global people”, was the response I received from a startup center, when I inquired if I could visit them to conduct interviews as I was working on a research project on highly qualified migrants. I had checked the CVs of some of the startup founders working there and they fitted established definitions of migration. The following two vignettes describe two more conversations I had around this issue:

I’m making my way through the dressed-up crowd in a fancy Basel bar. Around a hundred international people mingle and meet. Most of them still in their shirts from work, mostly light blue and light violet, others dressed up for the evening party. “We make life easier for expats. Connecting global minds in 390 cities around the world” is the slogan of “Internations”, the club which organized the event. Members are reminded before the event to make newcomers feel comfortable and the atmosphere in general is easy-going. It is easy to get to know new people. I introduce myself to a number of people, who again introduce me to others. On my way out, I meet two young men from India, both of them post-doctoral scientists, who enquire about my research project. “Oh it’s about highly skilled migrants”, I quote the official title. “So, you call us migrants?” one of them says rather indignantly.

In my free time, I work in social projects, aimed amongst others at refugees. We create projects and write proposals to organize cooperations or acquire funding. In these proposals, the official wording “integration of migrants” is used. One evening, after a project meeting, I travelled home with a colleague and we started talking about life in general, reflecting about our jobs and about the projects, when he suddenly said: “You know, the strange thing is, most people I know don’t like to be called migrants. I also don’t like this word, I mean, I live here, I contribute to society”.



Consequently, I and told people in my first email or call that I was interested in their experiences of moving or of running an international business. I avoided the word migration in my fieldwork and later on, writing up material, found it similarly difficult to use.

It was difficult to move beyond a certain immobility of the concept itself and its focus on aspects of constructing social positioning, strangeness, othering, exclusion, and power. Migration often means “immigration” and mostly points to “im/migrants” – people who have moved. An exception would be (historic) research dealing with emigration. Thus, migration does not encompass processes and still, it is a label that sticks to a person for a lifetime.

In fact, the concept of migration creates dichotomies that are powerful, partly because they have a heritage, which I will go into in the coming sections. These dichotomies include, on the level of concepts, migration versus sedentariness (9.2), migration versus national boundaries (9.3), and on the level of method, migration versus locally confined research (9.4).

## 9.2 Sedentariness

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe the discourse was tuned towards “migration losses” to the US (Bade, 2004, p.46). In the US, the Chicago School of Sociology started integrating migration as a research topic, with a perspective on migrants by the settled. Migration was understood as a permanent movement from A to B with the aim of assimilation or “amalgamation” in the melting pot USA, respectively the big cities. Robert Ezra Park (1950) described the figure of the *marginal man* as a migrating person who has left a structured context and thus is at the same time free, emancipated and instable and has to arrive in the new context. Concepts in early migration studies were dichotomous: here and there, inside and outside, immigrant and emigrant, strangers and locals, free and instable versus stable and settled. Massive urbanization contributed to this view on migration as a one way road and added dichotomies of city and countryside, traditional and modern, center and periphery (Ackermann, 1997).

“Dream of modernity” was the term which Konrad Köstlin used to describe the focus on and perspective of sedentariness (Köstlin, 1995, p.20). A dream which ethnographic researchers have helped to construct and nurture – oftentimes by placing this state of sedentariness into perceived “pre-modern” times – traditional European villages or islands in the South Sea. Early *Volkskunde* (early European Ethnology) has even been called the “science of sedentariness” (Göttsch-Elten, 2011). Indeed, other topics were more important to early ethnology and anthropology than migration. Research meth-

ods confined to local places and a concept of culture as a holistic, meaningful, confined unit matched this approach.

This attraction of sedentariness is sometimes associated with the social turbulences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – industrialization, urbanization, general increase in velocity, as well as poverty and hardships that resulted in mass migration within European countries as well as to Russia and the USA. The motives of sedentariness, safeguarding and protecting an “original”, local state of affairs, also showed up in the focus of ethnology on collecting costumes, tools, songs, stories and rituals, which were then interpreted as a way to provide a societal frame of orientation and structure, an idea of stability (Johler, 1995; Götttsch-Elten, 2011, p.25; Köstlin, 1995; Csáky, 1995). Köstlin (1995) writes:

European thinking interprets, understands and lives the idea of sedentariness as reaction to the accelerating societal development, in which less and less seems reliable. Where everything is in a state of flux, orientation is more difficult. Sedentariness as idea evolved in the process of modernization. (p.20, my translation)

Legends and songs from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century portray this dichotomy of a promising sedentariness on the one hand and mobility, experienced as negative and painful, on the other (Johler, 1995, pp.34, 39). Johler interprets the fairy tale “Hans in Luck” this way. Hans loses everything on his path of migration, until he finds fulfilment in being home again.

This was not always the case. Köstlin contrasts this worldview with the medieval Christian image of the human as *homo viator*, as “guest on earth”, and an image of life as pilgrimage, as movement towards afterlife (Köstlin, 1995, p.21). Mobility, says Csáky “becomes a virtue” in these early Christian contexts (Csáky, 1995, p.13).

The mere concept of migration, in fact, already has the effect of emphasizing sedentariness as norm – because the silent assumption is that migrants migrate in order to settle, and not in order to migrate. And even today it seems more curious and interesting to study how and why people migrate, while studies hardly ask how and why people live a settled life or do not migrate. Migration is interesting because it is “the other”. The tension between these two terms remains until today. One may even wonder whether the notion of migration in Europe is connected with a “collective trauma” of the mobile 19<sup>th</sup> century and since then has served as a blueprint for judging migratory situations. And yet again, it is not possible to compare the “new migration”, which this study deals with, with the migration of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The problem is rather that the notion of migration itself taps into a number of historic regimes and settings and last but not least the idea of migration as an opposite to the state of settledness, as a stage under suspense, which should ultimately result in settlement. Yet in this study, patterns are more complex than the pairing “settled versus migrating” suggests. Firstly, as de-

scribed in chapter 6.1, settlement, the connection with a place itself, is not a straightforward thing, but has different forms and meanings for individual protagonists. They choose or are confined to different ways of mooring. Some make private and professional connections, some find it difficult to get in touch with local people, and others again are happy with a kind of “splendid isolation” and may just have an apartment at a place and spend most of their time in their office, in virtual space, or in other places.

Secondly, movement and settlement do not necessarily exist exclusive of each other or apart from each other. It is possible to be mobile and settled at the same time, as other studies of transnational social fields have also shown. In this study, those people who live or work multilocally especially exemplify this situation. Bernd, as quoted in chapter 4.1, regarding his multilocal living situation says: “If the alternative was I’m based in one place and this is my home, I mean, the restriction that implies, I don’t like that restriction”. Michael has his apartment in Switzerland, his offices in two other countries, and his social context in a number of other places – a “translocal settlement”. Christopher is physically present in his office in Switzerland, but has very little time for local social relations, as his life takes place in the virtual space of his business with his colleagues working in different places. Other interlocutors who are settled in any one place are still translocally connected or even mobile.

Thirdly, the two terms are also not clearly separable, as the process of moving has an effect on a situation that might look like “settlement”, producing motility and different forms of mobility, as argued in chapter 5. Movement and settlement, furthermore, play a role in different dimensions of life and carry different meanings. Settlement or stability might not necessarily relate to geographical dimensions, but could be found in other dimensions of life. In Bernd’s case, his enterprise and his vision could be interpreted as the “settled” or stable element that drives him in his mobile life, in which he has to spend a lot of time on airplanes in order to connect his living and business places. For others, as argued in chapter 7, their orientation schemes, their interests, passions, visions or beliefs present a somewhat settled or immobile element.

Consequently, a discussion of methodology and research approaches becomes necessary. So far, the settled has often been assumed to be the normal and thus received less attention than migration and mobility. If one inquires about the mobile and reasons for mobility, the same questions can be posed towards the settled, understandings of settlement and reasons for not moving. For big companies this question is already quite relevant, as it is important and expensive to make people move and involves losses if people leave earlier than planned. Secondly, the question has to be posed as to the meaning of the mobile and the settled, as well as the desire and the aim, as settlement cannot be assumed as the general aim. One interlocutor, for example, men-

tioned about her restlessness at a place: “And then, after ten years, I thought: now something has to happen.” As quoted in chapter 4.3, she also states that “settlement is probably not for her”. Finally, studies could distance themselves from this dichotomy altogether. The biographical method and an analysis of individual topographies and spaces, as argued in chapter 6, provides an approach that allows enquiry about more personal nuances regarding life design, places and personal connections, the meaning of movement and non-movement and the shades in between, than the pairing “migrating” or “settled” suggests.

### 9.3 Methodological Nationalism

Entangled with this conceptual border between sedentariness and migration is the notion of nationalism. Duchêne-Lacroix, Hilti, and Schad (2013) call this the “double container perspective”, referring to the nation state and also to the norm of a fixed, countable household unit (see chapter 2.1). Political borders between nation-states, clearly defined political territories with rather “homogenous” societies have been attributed a basic authority since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The unit “nation state” and cultural and ethnic ascriptions of identity become the backdrop for research in the social sciences: “methodological nationalism”, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) frame it.

Nationalism, Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue, is so deeply engrained in modernity that it became invisible from the modern perspective: “Because the world was structured according to nations-state principles, these became so routinely assumed and ‘banal’, that they vanish from sight altogether. Methodological nationalism has thus inhibited a true understanding of the nature and limits of the modern project” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002, pp.220-221). Rather recent movements like the increasing power of multinational corporations and organizations, Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue, have given way to a scrutiny of nationalism. They identify different modes of methodological nationalism. The aforementioned “ignoring” is one, as well as naturalization, by which they mean taking the nation state for granted as a basic entity within scientific research:

Naturalisation owes its force to the compartmentalisation of the social science project into different ‘national’ academic fields, a process strongly influenced not only by nationalist thinking itself, but also by the institutions of the nation-state organising and channelling social science practice in universities, research institutions and government think tanks. (p.223)

Thirdly, they identify the mode of territorialization, by which they mean the limitation of research, research design, and funding to national boundaries.

Migration studies, in this setting and tradition thus addressed “foreigners”, international immigrants, while other forms of migration remained ignored (Ibid., p.229). The focus lay on problems evolving around integration. Yet the notion of integration itself is an integral part of this understanding of nationalism. The model of the nation-state as a homogenous cultural space involves the inclusion or exclusion of people, especially when they are more mobile than the borders of the nation state.

Immigrants appear as natural enemies of a political world divided into culturally homogenous and territorially bounded nations each represented by a sovereign state. This perception has influenced social science theory and methodology and, more specifically, its discourse on immigration and integration, where immigrants were often portrayed as politically unreliable, culturally different, socially marginal and biographically abnormal. (Ibid., p.217)

How deeply and effectively this logic works within notions and debates on migration cannot be underestimated. However, this study shows that for the group of entrepreneurs, other political entities are important in addition to the nation state, such as the EU and EFTA-borders, which determine who receives which permits and possibilities. Moreover, urban areas are important because they determine the economic possibilities in the first place. Yet the concept of migration implies the transgression of a national border, even in cases for whom this is not the main issue. It will be important to be more precise with regard to the kinds of borders and regions studied when studying migration.

The connection between migration studies and nationalism is also one of practical politics and policies. Migration studies and migration politics are closely linked through their perspectives, through funding and also through their concepts and vocabulary. Migration politics were largely security politics. Migration research, migration politics, security policy, and border regime thinking are closely interlinked in their categories and focus (Bade, 2004). Migration research thus focused on immigration, often with a focus on social problems for the receiving society (see also Wicker, Fibbi & Haug, 2003). Legal categories such as “asylum seeker”, “refugee”, “migrant worker”, as well as ethnic categories are ascribed to migrants by state authorities, while self- descriptions might differ (Bade, 2004, p.48). As Bade argues:

In migration, migration discussions and migration politics, a tension between self-ascriptions and ascriptions by others has increased through the prevalent administration of problems since the late 20th century; between the self-understanding of migrants and the identities which migration politics ascribe. Migrants have to try to conform to these ascribed identities, however, if they want to have a chance of access. (pp.47-48, my translation)

In fact, the first Swiss public agency dealing with migration was established in response to the circumstances of the First World War. Until then, national borders had been open and the cantons had been responsible for decisions of

settlement, asylum and immigration. Gast (1997) writes about the period during the First World War:

Various international organizations and connections – with Geneva as the site of the Red Cross and Zürich as commercial and financial center – made Switzerland an ideal center for the provision of news, strategic commodities for war, and finances for dubious deals. (p.14, my translation)

Pressures grew from different sides, as Switzerland experienced food shortages and workers' demonstrations during the war. In 1917, a decree was passed which led to the formation of a central institution of *Fremdenpolizei* (immigrant police) under the department for justice and police (*Eidgenössisches Justiz und Polizeidepartment*) (Gast, 1997, p.17, 33). Even though this agency was supposed to be a temporary solution, it remained, and changed its name later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the Migration Department (*Migrationsamt*) and the Integration Office (*Integrationsstelle*). Today, in some Swiss cantons, these agencies dealing with migration and integration are still ranged under the department of security.

This illuminates the constant question of who is in a position to name or define whom? Which identities and emic concepts find a voice and which do not? And which images are present in the discourse around migration not only with regard to national, but also to social, humanitarian, economic, and criminal backgrounds? Past and present contexts of judgements trigger images and pose difficulties for an analysis, as pathways in thinking, debating, addressing and defending are well trodden. These lines of differentiation may also show up in the research field around “highly skilled migrants”. In this study, it seemed it seemed necessary to constantly reflect on terms, starting with the research design, then the words used when contacting interlocutors, the wording in the interviews themselves and the style of writing. As discussed in chapter 5, I proposed to use mobility as a framework instead of migration. Christopher says about the flexibility of entrepreneurs:

I think that, what's for sure very clear, that many good entrepreneurs are very mobile and go to places where they can succeed best. And I think that's why one finds many Swiss entrepreneurs and German entrepreneurs and so on in Silicon Valley, because the capital is available there and also the other talents are over there. It's also something that attracts me at the moment.

From an individual point of view, regional and urban areas and their meaning, like Silicon Valley, but also places like Basel, Zürich, or Berlin, and their environment of universities, companies and startup support need to be taken as much into account as national legislations or the EU or EFTA. Areas can also be transnational, as in the case of Basel, where for some businesses the attraction lies in the tri-state-area with Germany and France that provides access to a variety of resources and employees.

Focusing on mobility instead of migration semantically opens the field anew and encompasses understandings of movement from an individual, biographical point of view that go beyond an understanding of nation state boundaries and national legislation. Moreover, it provides a frame to connect causes, effects, and interrelations of different mobile areas of life (see chapter 5). And it allows the breaking down of movement to the experience of daily life and the analysis of the meaning and connection of different kinds of movement. One of the interlocutors describes the work routine like this:

I try to be every two months for three, four days in [business location 1], and then I was in [business location 2] until the day before yesterday. My children are on holidays, so I made use of the time to go there, so that you actually sit together. And the partners also come over here.

The three places she talks about, her present home and the two locations of her businesses, have something to do with her migration history, but they also represent the space in which she presently moves through her travels, visits or virtual exchanges. Her migration is thus not finished by crossing a new border, but it rather forms a space in which she is active and which provides a basis for her economic activities.

## 9.4 Methodical Localism

A third boundary that has been discussed widely during the last two decades concerns the research setup. In chapter 3.3, I mentioned that the field appeared “fragmented” in the beginning. In anthropology, the long-term, one-site and on-site field research, accompanied by a certain reverence for its adventures, still plays an important role. This classic research perspective corresponds with the boundary between migration and sedentariness. A stay in any place should last, in its traditional form, at least a year in order to experience a cycle of seasons; a language should be learned, a socialization process undergone in a nutshell, a new culture learned by the means of one’s own bodily experience. On return, a monograph is written and the “having been there” (Geertz 1988) serves as legitimization and is an initiation into the community of fellow scientists. As Eriksen (1995) writes in the student guidebook *Small Places Large Issues*:

Ideally, one should stay in the field long enough to be able to see the world as the locals see it. Even if this may be impossible, among other reasons because one cannot entirely get rid of one’s own cultural background, it can be a worthwhile aim to pursue. The strength of the anthropologist’s knowledge can thus be said to lie in his or her mastery of both the local culture and a different culture (his or her own), and the tools of analysis, making it possible to give an analytical, comparative account of both. (p.17)

This approach created a field as a specific location through the presence of the researcher and their following publications. Gisela Welz (1998) differentiates this process as a twofold localization of field research:

Field research always means localization, in fact, in two ways. Firstly, the culture to be studied is localized at a concrete, geographic space by narrowing down a 'field'. And secondly, the researcher uses him- or herself as instrument of observation, as he or she is physically present on a long term basis, even if this is temporary. (p.180-181, my translation)

The claim by early anthropologists, of studying the entirety of a community, differentiated by broad topics, corresponded with spatial distances, but also politically with the nationalist, ethnic groupist view and scientifically with the positivist view of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet, Malinowski, the forefather of classical fieldwork did not himself conduct purely locally confined fieldwork as he followed the people and objects in his research of the Kula exchange, which expanded across a number of islands and archipelagos. Still, he was locally confined to the region, as his most famous research on the Trobriand Islands was partly due to a detention by the British government – and thus a direct effect of the First World War (see also Hanerz, 2003, pp.202-203). And Malinowski was part of a scientific perspective in which the mobilities he observed were not called mobility or finance scape, but exchange system or economy.

Thus, possibilities, but also researchers' perceptions and interactions define the field of study. Yet as social processes of change, globalization, systems and networks moved into the focus of social sciences, the construction of the field also underwent debates and revisions. Apart from direct interaction and participant observation, scholars argued, for example, that other sources and materials should be included in the research process (Eriksen, 1995, p.290; Gusterson, 2008). One of the keyword that became prominent was George Marcus' "multi-sited ethnography" (Marcus, 1995). Researchers exemplified how to construct a field beyond local boundaries by following their interviewees or the ties of their communities (see Hüwelmeier, 2012; Welz, 1998). Welz writes about this approach and its effects on research:

If one assumes, however ... that mobility instead of sedentariness is the rule, the ethnographic perspective shifts. The focus does not lie on the description of a locality any longer, but on the question of how and why processes of localization are attached to this one place. (Welz, 1998, p.183, my translation)

The key term "multi-sited ethnography" not only refers to the study of different geographical sites, however (Hess & Schwertl, 2013, p.27). It rather points to a different perspective on field research in general. Marcus (1995) differentiates between two approaches of doing ethnography. In the first one, the classical approach, researchers connect a local lifeworld, which they study, with theoretical contexts and understandings of the world. The second



approach is the rather postmodern perspective of multi-sited ethnography, a mobile ethnography that traces movements and dissolves boundaries between an understanding of the lifeworld and the “world system” and the simultaneous construction of both. This also means an inclusion of different “knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities” (Marcus, 1995, p.100). This inseparability of lifeworld and theory, and their construction and emergence, are part of the discussion around the understanding of migration. When the discourse cannot be separated between the desk and the field, it becomes difficult to attach a label from afar. Of course, the question always remains, which issues are concealed? How does the focus on globalization, “dissolution and fragmentation” (Ibid., p.98) or even deconstruction and reflection divert ones attention, just like the aspect of mobility within the Kula system may not have caught Malinowski’s primary interest.

Ethnography thus is also an expression of *Zeitgeist*, not only of changing realities, but of changing interpretations of reality and of setting different points of focus. This involves deconstructing strong identifiers like the localistic paradigm, as Marcus writes: “Indeed, something of the mystique and reality of conventional fieldwork is lost in the move toward multi-sited ethnography” (Ibid., p.100). For Hess and Schwertl (2013), the topic is one of connectivities: “... it becomes clear that the question of the field is primarily a question of which connectivities researchers can create” (p.32, my translation). And again, the stronger visibility of the act of drawing connections through multi-sited ethnography may only make a process that has always been at the heart of fieldwork and scientific work more comprehensible. Still, apart from this self-reflectory part, lifeworlds, travel possibilities and mobilities do change, of course, and do have an effect on ethnography as an “art of the possible” (Hannerz, 2003, p.213). In urban, professional settings, a part of the field may be difficult to access or remain invisible, other parts may be mobile and flexible, and yet others are widely accessible and open themselves to researchers, no matter where they are, through the internet. In some fields it is not only the researcher who keeps following potential data, but also the data itself that is moving and following the researcher as in the case of newsletters, mailing lists, invitations, and connections with informants via Xing or LinkedIn. Making connections has always been central. Yet during the last decades the often acclaimed density of information that could potentially be connected and the different ways of accessing this information, such as the virtual world, have triggered discussions. Still, it is possible to go back to the very detailed view of authors like Kurt Lewin, as mentioned above. In the present study, the perspective of biography thus proved a starting point to come to terms with the overflow of information of a field that seems scattered and disconnected on the one hand, and globally and publically present and connected on the other.

## 9.5 Conclusion

Both “migration” and “highly skilled” (see chapter 11) are labels that speak from a certain positioning, also of the discipline of anthropology. Migration is a concept of policies and can be analyzed in this context. However, it presupposes a perspective of migrants, defining who is a migrant, from the viewpoint of settledness and along the lines of nation state boundaries and policy. And it is a powerful term in a number of other public, scientific and political discourses at the same time. From an individual perspective, it carries a long emotional and sometimes painful history of drawing borders, of grouping and labelling, judging, deciding who belongs and who does not and exercising power or even brute force. Groups and identities were and are created and ascribed politically with consequences for real life.

From the ethnographic perspective of this study, the concept of migration is, as pointed out, problematic, as it is rather static, an ascription from the outside, and is also a discourse of social judgements that people themselves may not identify with. The task in globalized times has to be to look at movement from more than one perspective, as dynamic – and to see this dynamic in its interwovenness with other dynamics. It might not be possible to completely leave those dominant narratives and images behind, but it is possible to choose more open concepts. Again, this should also not obscure borders, boundaries, inequalities and exclusion, but rather also help make these visible.

The value of a constructivist anthropological analysis is to unravel these meanings, stories, strategies and also political effects that live within concepts. Migration can be seen in a sequence with ways of using “race”, “ethnicity”, “culture”, religion or foreignness to determine who is included and who is excluded from a certain perspective (Sökefeld, 2007; Leimgruber, 2001; Wicker, Fibbi & Haug, 2003). It is a current and widely used term especially in contemporary debates. It is not possible to think of today’s discourses on refugees, for example, without this term, but the term also structures the debate and possible ways of thinking about society.

In this chapter, I followed three boundaries of migration research: sedentariness, nationalism and localism in research settings. I argued for a focus on personal spaces of movement instead of opposing migration and sedentariness. Secondly, with regard to nationalism, I discussed using the perspective of mobility rather than migration. And thirdly, referring to the traditional localism of research design, I pointed to the approach of Lewin’s field construction and the biographical approach, as used in this study.

Yet even though it is helpful for analytical purposes to look at spaces and mobilities instead of migration, migration also needs to stay on the agenda and within our attention, precisely because it is a political category and an

important field of policy making and public discourse. Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011) decide to carry on using the term in their book *Locating Migration* and write:

Responding to the intense anti-immigrant rhetoric that contemporary politicians all around the world encourage and endorse, *Locating Migration* emphasizes the multiple roles that people of migrant background play as local actors rather than as threats to the body politic. The concept of migrant as it is deployed here takes into account the legal and discursive power of the institutions of a nation-state to define individuals as foreign in status, culture, or religion – even when they were born in the country and have full residency rights or legal citizenship. (p.10)

In order to contribute to the discussion and intervene, it is important not to ban the term migration from ethnographic fieldwork, but rather to acknowledge its power in shaping reality and to keep on pointing to frictions between research, concepts, and public discourses.

## 10 Trends in Migration Studies

After describing a few borders and limitations to the concept of migration in chapter 9, this chapter deals with models and concepts that rather focusing on analytical levels that cut across established categories or dichotomies and tries to capture globalizing people, communities and pathways as well as constructions of practices and subjectivities. In the 1980s and 1990s, under the influence of theories of globalization, postcolonial theory, gender studies, and post structural thinkers, the theoretical landscape changed. I will introduce three strands of thought that influenced this study. In section 10.1, I will look at theories that focus on connections, such as the notion of transnational social fields or Appadurai's (1990) model of global scapes. Section 10.2 focuses on the aspect of deconstructing understandings of migration and borders, and section 10.3 points to ways in which individual positionalities can be understood.

### 10.1 Connectivities

The concept of transnationalism addresses social spaces that span across political borders. These are spaces, which particular groups of people define through their movements and networks. A focus lies on simultaneity; people can be at different places, move between them or be in close communication, maintaining social, emotional, cultural and economic relations at the same time (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). The concept of transnationalism bridged the analytical gaps of "methodological nationalism", while yet acknowledging the existence and role of nation states. Pries (2010) argues:

These transnational relations and social spaces are new, in so far as they are based on a quantum leap in terms of the intensification, acceleration, routinization and 'technical relining' of society across national borders, as compared with historic predecessors of past migratory movements and crossborder contacts. (p.15, my translation)

Depending on "the degree of stability, frequency and meaning of the transnational exchange processes" (p.29, my translation), Pries differentiates between three levels of transnationalism. Firstly, transnational relationships, which could be virtual communities based on common interests. Secondly, Pries writes about transnational networks, as more intense forms of exchange, such as alumni networks or more active virtual communities. The third level which Pries differentiates are transnational social spaces, which he defines as follows:

Crossborder social entanglements, in which the relating social practices, systems of symbols, and also systems of artefacts which have developed such a high intensity that they have become the main social-spatial reference unit of the daily lifeworld, are called transnational social spaces. (p.30, my translation)

All three levels also play a role in my study, and yet they do not describe the facets of interaction between different localities beyond a national cross-border perspective. The question is, how far it is possible to leave the paradigm of methodological nationalism using that of transnationalism, when it looks at movements cutting across nation states and thus sets the nation state again as a defining factor. There are studies on communities whose movements occur between two different places in two different countries, each with different legislations, and here the analytic frame of transnational social spaces is an important tool. However, in my study, there were several people who moved between countries, but also between cities in the same country, thus spanning their personal space of movement across national, regional (on the level of cantons or federal states) and local (on the level of cities) boundaries. From an individual point of view, a move within Switzerland from Basel to Bern or from Luzern to Basel or Zürich already means different access to business, university, or family contexts. Legal boundaries could also, in fact, play a role in Switzerland on the national as well as regional level. Thus, especially when cities become important agents in determining movement, the focus of a transnational perspective may be too broad. For this study, concepts of translocality, or more precisely transurbanism, which I introduced in chapter 6 were helpful. Both point to people's connections between places without necessarily involving state boundaries, as in the following definition:

Authors engaging in the development of a translocal perspective seek to integrate notions of fluidity and discontinuity associated with mobilities, movements and flows on the one hand with notions of fixity, groundedness and situatedness in particular settings on the other. (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p.376)

The concept of multilocality or multilocal living, too, offers a way of looking at the meaning of people's (multiple) living places, or the islets within their individual "archipelagos" of living as Duchêne-Lacroix (2006) terms them, taking individual actors as starting points and questioning the ways in which other factors play a role. Appadurai coined the term *global scape* in the beginning of the 1990s as a way of conceptualizing the "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" of the "new global economy" (Appadurai, 1990, p.296). These scapes, he argues, spread in the modern world globally and simultaneously in different areas of life. He differentiates ethnoscapas (referring to moving people), technoscapas (technology), finance scapes, mediascapas (media and images) and ideoscapas (ideas and political narratives) (Appadurai, 1990). Appadurai demands an ethnography which does not bind imagination and place together. His model of scapes can easily be connected with the

startup context, as people connect with the global technological infrastructure, (innovative) ideas, finance flows, and markets.

In fact, the ideas of individual spaces and scapes was important and useful in this study and influenced the analysis in chapters 4 to 8. As mentioned above, the focus was on translocal and transurban spaces, inspired also by the idea of multilocal living or working, encompassing the places that mattered to interview partners no matter whether they were national, regional, or local. Moreover, Appadurai's model of global scapes pointed towards movements in different dimensions of life that can take place simultaneously.

The starting point of exploring spaces in this study was the individual narration. During the interviews, very individual inner topographies showed up. These were made of actual places interlocutors had been to, and people they knew, as well as virtual connections they had, and of the past, the present, or even ideas for the future. Nevertheless, these "landmarks" gave shape to an individual map of daily life, an individual space that also encompassed the in-between, the connecting parts, the chat rooms, conversations, mails, postcards, train- and airplane trips.

## 10.2 Reflexivity

A second strand of discussion influenced the setup and process of analysis of this study. Critical migration studies (e.g., Hess & Tsianos, 2010; Bojadžijev & Karakayali, 2007) call for changes in perspectives and normativities in migration studies. Hess argues for three changes in perspective: to stop setting migration up as "the other", as linear, or as a product of a logic of push and pull factors. Instead, the normality of migration and its subjectivity and subjectivation should be recognized, as in the form of studying from the perspective of migration (Hess, 2010). Moreover, the ethnographic border regime analysis (Hess & Tsianos, 2010) scrutinizes the way borders are created, negotiated and dealt with and sets an agenda for reflexive, multi-sited fieldwork that focuses on practices and sites as much as on discourses:

It is not enough to conceptualize border as object of negotiation in the terrain of discourse, but border is to be looked at as a total social relation and, in the sense of *doing borders* [English and italics in original], as practice as well as in and through practice-solidified reality. (Hess & Tsianos, 2010, p.255, my translation)

This focus on critically questioning perspectives and processes of constructing and understanding migration and borders is a reminder to pay attention to an anthropological level of micro analysis, perspectives and positionalities. "Demigrantising' migration research" and "migrantising' social research" is the recent call by the Berlin Migration Lab at Humboldt University

(Römhild, 2014, p.7, my translation). The perspective of migration, they claim, should contribute to general social research, in, for example, deconstructing normativities such as methodological nationalism. And migration research itself should concentrate on the power of migration in general social relations: “Migration research should thus move away from the usual ‘migrantologic studies’ (‘de-migrantize’) towards a broad analysis of social relations and conflicts, in which migration is constitutively working as object and as driving force” (Ibid., p.8, my translation).

This study included this perspective by looking at biographies of people in a certain profession – and the way in which movement matters or does not matter to them. Having chosen entrepreneurship as starting point and then looking for ways in which movement mattered also helped me to understand entrepreneurship, for example, as a way of dealing with movement or as a way of making use or taking advantage of movement, or as a general way of leading a mobile life.

### 10.3 Positionality

The concept of translocational positionality (Anthias, 2008) proposes an approach that opens analytical possibilities to think of the local, the social, and the agent-perspective without narrowing down the view to a perspective “onto” migration. As Floya Anthias (2011) says with regard to the conference of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* (German Association of European Ethnology) in 2009 on mobilities:

I am very pleased that this conference has chosen the broader term ‘mobilities’ as this extends the area of concern from the territorial and spatial (usually framed as delineated by the nation state border) to potentially recognise other movements, not only geographical, but also local, translocal, translocational, identificational and social. (p.40)

Anthias argues that the concept of transnationalism runs the risk of drawing certain borders and neglecting others. Transnationalism shifted the focus from the paradigm of “assimilation” in the new country, the dichotomy of being here or there, and instead looks at other forms of “being and belonging” at different places simultaneously (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Anthias, 2011, p.41). Yet, for Anthias, important criteria and borderlines are missing, such as gender, ethnicity, or class: “The transnational experiences of men and women are qualitatively different because women do not always have access to mobility, and because their movements are framed within a set of normative and culturally gendered rules” (Anthias, 2011, p.41). People do not just move within geographical spaces but also in other dimensions of life. These movements can take place independently of each other:

To be dislocated at the level of nation is not necessarily a dislocation in other terms, if we find we still exist within the boundaries of our social class and our gender. However, although we may move across national borders and remain middle class or women (for example) the movement will transform our social place and the way we experience this at all social levels and in different ways. (Anthias, 2008, p.15)

Certain positionalities, understood as categories derived from the field, thus may not be dislocated, but continued or strengthened by geographical movements. In the case of the entrepreneurs in this study, moving advanced their careers for some, or made it possible for them to be partners or parents. It also called other aspects, such as gender or family identities or professional recognition, into question. Identity and belonging is not static, but processual (Ibid.). “Translocational positionality” thus takes into account the different, intersecting aspects of a person’s situation as well as their positioning within space:

A **translocational positionality** is one structured by the interplay of different locations relating to gender, ethnicity, race and class (amongst others), and their at times *contradictory* effects. Positionality combines a reference to social position (as a set of effectivities: as outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings: as process). That is, positionality is the space at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice). The notion of ‘location’ recognises the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. (Anthias, 2008, p.15)

This concept was helpful in this study in opening questions about the material. It was not applied as a direct analytical tool, but rather as a methodological consideration to probe interpretations. Which positionalities play a role in a case? How are they constructed? Which factors are mobile and which are not, even within a seemingly mobile situation? What are influential context factors in a situation and which role do they play? Within this project, the range of analysis was limited, and some positionalities, such as gender, could be explored in much greater depth in this field.

## 10.4 Conclusion

Choosing the perspective of profession rather than of ethnicity or locality opened the focus to connective, reflexive and subject oriented approaches. Furthermore, the biographical narrations provided insights into different positionalities that mattered to the person and their mobility or immobility. A person’s professional positionality was in the center of each conversation and presented the entry point to explore other positionalities and their ways of changing or continuing, but also local and global space, and the connections in which somebody moved. Borrowing a concept such as entrepreneurship



from economics to define the field and not limiting it to ethnic entrepreneurship or a specific group of “migrants” thus “demigrantizing” it, moreover, lead to a reflection on both migration and entrepreneurship. The focus on migration from the side of entrepreneurship helped view migratory processes less with regard to settledness or not settledness, and more with regard to career paths and spaces of movement. On the other hand, a view onto entrepreneurship from the point of mobility allowed the encompassing of different roles of moving and mooring, dynamics, processes, and a wider network of involved stakeholders.

## 11 Studying the “Highly Skilled”

I’m always saying that the university almost destroyed all this, because, well, you learn the formalisms and all that and that is not a very entrepreneurial thing. (Interview)

The category “highly qualified” or “highly skilled” has become somewhat established. And yet it remains to once more reflect on it in the context of this study. Discussing this question carefully makes even more sense as this field of research is rather fast growing. In this chapter, general labels and definitions will be explored in the first section (11.1). Subsequently, section 11.2 will deal with self-concepts of the interlocutors in this study. Drawing again on field data in section 11.3, I ask what qualifications mean or contribute to the actors’ paths. Finally, I argue for a shift in concepts towards motility (11.4).

### 11.1 “Highly Skilled” as Political and Economic Category

Favell, Feldblum and Smith (2008) name and call into question five basic assumptions with regard to the migration of the highly skilled. In a nutshell, these concern:

- The dichotomy implied between elites and others,
- The assumption that migration of the highly qualified is demand-driven,
- The brain drain/gain/circulation equation, which assumes that developing countries in particular lose their best brains,
- The assumption that this kind of mobility is “frictionless”,
- The equation that success correlates with education.

As this catalogue shows, economic ideas play a major role in the conceptualization of the “highly skilled”. The definition of the OECD<sup>23</sup> also has a clear focus on employment and employability. In recent academic studies different terms like “new immigration” (Aratnam, 2012, pp.52-53) are brought up. Sociologists like Leslie Sklair focus on the category of class, such as a “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair, 2009). In anthropology, the term “expatriate” emphasizes the free choice of people who move, as Hannerz (1996) wrote: “Expatriates (or ex-expatriates) are people who have chosen to live

23 As quoted in chapter 1.1, the definition of the OECD’s Canberra Manual, highly skilled people, so called “Human Resources in Science and Technology” (HRST) include people who have either “a) successfully completed education at the third level in an S&T field of study; b) not formally qualified as above, but employed in a S&T occupation where the above qualifications are normally required” (OECD/ Eurostat, 1995, p.16).

abroad for some period, and who know when they are there that they can go home when it suits them” (p.106). The term is also used in studies concerning e.g. employees sent abroad by their companies, diplomats, or NGO employees (e.g., Kreutzer, 2006; Piéché, 2009).

Highly skilled people are often thought of as “expats” and generally privileged migrants. Such a general understanding is problematic in a number of ways. It contains a strong assumption of “frictionless movement”, which may be impeded for various reasons, be it because of family ties, gender roles, professional or financial commitments, sexual orientation, or political conflict. It has been discussed before that the migratory processes of highly skilled people are not necessarily out of free choice for various reasons, asylum being one of them, and also not necessarily successful, but might result from precarity and also lead to precarity (Favell, 2008; Götzö & Sontag, 2015b, p.44). Moreover, the division between “abroad” and “home” can be a hindrance in the analysis of transmigrants or transurban mobile people.

The mere conceptualization of a category of highly skilled migrants or expats implies its opposites:

- “normal migrants”, which is a somewhat hazy category, implying expertise, social or economic factors, or a greater mobility?
- settled people.

Creating such conceptual opposites means falling back theoretically, as it opens old dichotomies such as foreigners/natives, in/out, agent/victims (see also chapter 9), and furthermore adds the dichotomy of economic situation or social class. (Ibid., p.44.)

Other authors have called for a cautious use of categories. Reinhardt Johler in 1994 pointed out that referring to known categories such as “nomad” is a means of defending and strengthening the paradigm of settledness. Klaus Schriewer and Thomas Hojrup<sup>24</sup> argue that the notion of “highly skilled” needs to be defined further, not as possessing an education, but rather as being in the process of constant further qualification, or creating a unique profile for oneself. Sanna Schondelmayer writes that maybe mobility itself is not central or even exists in the way assumed, but the interesting phenomenon is a “mobility-gestus” – a contemporary discursive practice to describe one’s merits (Schondelmayer, 2010). Markus Pohlmann writes in a study on top managers, that he cannot detect a “rootlessness” or a “world-class” in his target group, but rather a lot of business trips, which happen within the logic or reference framework of a company culture (Pohlmann, 2009, p.529).

As shown in the previous chapters, the sample of this study also cannot be described by dichotomies of educational, professional or social categories, freedom of movement or even movement versus settlement, even though the

24 Oral communication, Murcia, March 2013.

protagonists fit the definition “highly skilled migrants”. As described in chapter 4, migration strategies also involved family compromises, bureaucratic problems, and giving up of careers, and did not always involve a frictionless, free movement. Financially, some were well off, and others experienced tight situations or at least fluctuations.

The concept of qualification becomes especially problematic in the case of entrepreneurship, as there is no official qualification or educational goal to be reached or merit to be achieved in order to become an entrepreneur. Mayer-Haug et al. carried out a meta-analysis including 50,045 firms, and concluded that education has a very weak connection to entrepreneurial performance (Mayer-Haug, Read, Brinckmann, Dew, & Grichnik, 2013). I visited one project which supports immigrant women in building up their own businesses. The organizers of the program do not ask for a certain level of education, but rather highlight the entrepreneurial skills and motivation which the women need in order to succeed. Similarly, in my study, characteristics like entrepreneurial spirit, achievement orientedness, determination, networks, inventiveness, or creativity are as fitting and meaningful as high qualifications.

High skills are a basis for migration policies and also appear in the media and public discourse. The definition of the OECD points out under which premises this concept needs to be understood: formal education and employment or at least employability. Within the political and media discourse the issue of employment/employability and thus economic contribution is the main focus. In this way, a group of economically successful people is constructed as an image of foreigners/immigrants. And in this way it is part of a long tradition of labeling (and judging) kinds of “foreigners”. Irene Götz in her discussion on current forms and practices of nationalism argues that a new form of patriotism and nationalism actively propagates the engaged, entrepreneurial citizen. “The nation itself is dealt with like a *marketable product* [italics in original] in these campaigns. It represents a center for production and trade, the travel destination and the urban adventure place for mobile elites” (Götz, 2011, p.150, my translation). Migrants, Götz argues, who become part of this neoliberal paradigm also become part of the campaigns. And these create new boundaries between groups, now pointing to those who are employable, activatable, and those (migrants) who are “not-activatable” (p.150). Startup founders fit this picture of the active, “postfordist entrepreneur of the self” (p.149).

Yet this image of the highly qualified, employed, activatable migrant does not have much to do with the condition of “educational qualification” per se. A refugee from Eritrea with a university degree faces different obstacles to professional and societal participation than an EU citizen with a similar qualification. This has to do with recognition of certificates. It also has to

do with policies of restriction, e.g. in asylum processes. In addition, in the job market itself, other factors of discrimination may have an effect.

Moreover, the by far largest part of highly qualified people will never be able to move or settle in Europe or Switzerland, with its tight restrictions towards immigration from outside EU/EFTA countries. People from these countries must have a job secured in advance. They cannot simply enter Switzerland in order to become entrepreneurs, no matter which degrees they possess. Talking about highly skilled people as a homogeneous group that easily transgresses borders, obscures these factors.

Thus, qualification is defined by institutions of nation states, just as migration policies are. It is the national policies that distribute degrees and it is national policies that decide which degrees from other nation states receive which kind of recognition and approval, and who may enter into which national job market – and who may not, no matter how highly qualified. Research based on this understanding moves within a framework of methodological nationalism once more.

## **11.2 “We are Technicians, we are Developers, we are Dreamers”**

How do the entrepreneurs in this project see themselves? As mentioned in chapter 9, one of my interview requests was declined by a co-working space with the words: “You are looking for migrants, but there are no migrants here, only global people”. Of course, different aspects play a role in people’s self conceptions and in the interviews we only scratched the surface of this broad and personal topic. Towards the end of the interviews, I asked most interview partners directly how they saw themselves, or even to build a little symbol for themselves with Lego (Gauntlett, 2007). It was interesting to discover the different ways people chose to answer this very open question, and which topics they thought of first. In the following, a few cases will be sketched out.

### **1. Geographical and Political Framework**

Two people said they identify with Europe: “I am a European”. The following interlocutor explains this kind of understanding:

I: I would say I am European, I don’t see myself as an expat, no, but I’m sort of, yeah, I’m a European person that travels a lot.

K.: So being here [in the head office in Switzerland] is really like a business trip, or how do you feel?

I: To some extent, yeah, you could argue that. I mean it's more than that, because I end up very impressed with many of the things that I see Switzerland doing, but at the same time I don't imagine myself integrating and becoming Swiss at any point. I don't feel any need to do that anywhere. I've lived in four European countries, it's really, it's Europe, it's more Europe that, I think, is the valuable concept to me.

K.: We've been talking about Europe so much, what exactly does it mean to you when you say "I'm defining myself as European"?

I: Oh, where do we start? A soft power, not hard power in terms of how you deal with the world, social democratic systems at their core in terms of, not completely capitalistic, an embrace of diversity. I mean you've got that in the States as well, I mean I'm not trying to define Europe but those would be the things I would look at in Europe and say I believe in.

For him, this regional identification has a lot to do with the value system which he believes in – and which he finds in the EU. Identity here has a geographical dimension which is not national but supranational, and focuses on a specific political constellation or a feeling of belonging.

## 2. Experience as Construction Kit

In this way of identity construction, people emphasized the fact that they individually combine a number of influences, places and experiences and interpret this as valuable. They interpret their experience as ways of learning, as a way of forming their personality, or also as a cultural skill to connect different people. One interlocutor used Lego to build a little round and colorful ball and explains:

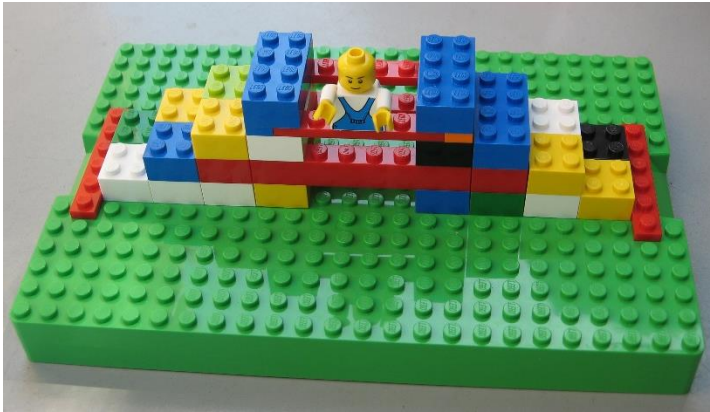
I don't know, I guess if it's round or sort of round, as round as you get it in Lego, you hope that you can combine the different elements that you have experienced or seen in a somehow harmonious way. You know the rounded personality, you hope that you can put everything together in a way that works well, you can feel comfortable with.

Another person built a Lego bridge and explained:

I enjoy bringing very different people together, like in my house with the dinner on different floors. Somehow I think that is exciting, to really provoke this, to see, okay, how do such totally different people, there is a term for that, people from different circles, people with a different socialization, yes.

In this case, as in other cases, different experiences contributed to self-understanding and the business idea on the one hand, and on the other, it was sometimes important for them to pass this experience on to others as well.

Figure 9: Lego Symbol for Self-Understanding



Source: Interview partner, author's material

### 3. Self as Center

Being oneself, being happy, being well, were most important in other conversations. One person said: "I am myself or something very simple. I am not the [profession] and I am not the [nationality] and I am also not the [second profession], but, yes, I am just myself and I like that," and later adds: "You cannot have more than that. You only have yourself." Two people answered very straightforward in this way: I am myself. Places play a role in so far as they provide an environment for this self-development. Deborah put it this way:

I am just Deborah and I try as much as possible to work [mentions her different jobs], and I try to do my best, and I am very outgoing, and am happy every time when I meet people from different countries and can talk to them, when I can do something with them. Yes, I am always joyful and think positive, I think at some point the path will open up.

In other cases the focus was rather on self-reflection or defining oneself anew in shifting circumstances.

### 4. Qualities of the Self

Two people answered by describing characteristics, traits and qualities they see in themselves:

Maybe [I am] a shy person, or for sure a curious person, open. If I'm doing something, I try always to be professional and to put the effort in to reach the goal.

Somebody else answered like this:

I see myself as very ambitious. I think that's difficult to put in words. For example, when I have employees, then I know that I am very, very demanding, but I am also very fair, and when there are reasons or when something happens, then it is in my opinion not the fault of the employee, but my fault, because I demanded too much. That means, I try to learn constantly and to become better, and that is something that drives me. I think I am unconventional, in the sense that I don't like to stick to rules, that I don't view structures as given, and I think I always have one or two surprises for people whom I work with, that makes everything more exciting.

This quote also reflects a value system, but it is framed as individual characteristics and skills: being ambitious, responsible, fair, open, critical, and exciting. This kind of framing and development and "work on the self" can also be seen as an attitude within the larger startup context.

## 5. Content

Other interlocutors emphasized the content of their business. They believed strongly in their inventions, observations and products and identified with the aims of their business, for example in bringing products to the world that could cure certain diseases.

These are mere glimpses that cannot be interpreted as set identities, but rather as elements. These aspects are extremely broad and relate to different areas of self-description, such as values, traits and abilities, and ideas of personality. I interpret them also as positionalities in Anthias' (2008, see also chapter 10.3) sense. They present those categories that are important to the protagonists when they talk about themselves. Yet, they also exemplify the variety of individual self ascriptions, in which qualification did not play a dominant role. The categories, of course, also reflect certain discourses, social fields and tasks, in which individual people at that time moved. And they also reflect our interview situation and what was possible to say and what was not. Interlocutors may not have seen a necessity to mention education again, if we had talked about it before in the interview. Moreover, academic skills and achievement in general is a "silent" discourse that works through published material or voices by third parties rather than by giving credit to oneself. Still, it also seems useful to look for self-ascriptions and descriptions in order to define anthropological frames for analysis in future, rather than sticking to categories of social analysis from a meso or macro level.



### 11.3 Biography of *Bildung*

Education and qualification cannot be dismissed, though. It is rather interesting to explore which roles they play. One obvious relation is that between academic research and business ideas. Some founders, like Marco or James, built their businesses directly from their research at university. Others were at least inspired by their previous findings and work, or rebelling against it with their business idea. Yet other founders had a high qualification in one sector and opened a business in a different sector. Some founders' qualifications did not count in Switzerland, so they started something on their own.

The concept of *Bildung* (education, development), referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt, is useful as a framework in this study as it encompasses more areas of life than merely institutionalized education. Some approaches from the perspective of research on *Bildung* look at “biographies of *Bildung*” and here take into account those periods, where a person experienced growth after being confronted with new or unusual circumstances (Alheit & Dausien, 1996). Biographies of *Bildung*, as Dausien and Alheit (1996) argue, could be thought of as the chain of events which a person identifies as learning events or realizations. Mobilities then, as well as changes of contexts, and experiences of new responsibilities, can be thought of as processes of *Bildung*. From this perspective, startup founders have a strong *Bildungs*-biography, but institutionalized, planned education is only one part of it. The other part has to do with their family background, their hobbies, networks, with going through the learning process of running a business, and with the experiences of mobility, which many interlocutors interpreted as ways of learning or self-reflection, reminiscent of the notion of *Bildungsreise* – educational travels. One interlocutor describes how he looks for spaces of *Bildung*:

But I had to think, what do I want now, and then I thought that I could have more control over my life, if I was in Europe. I mean, in the end, we are here on earth, we have the possibility to do something, one should not waste time, absorb and understand as much as possible, that's the true aim, isn't it? Actually, life on earth is, certain people would say, holidays, you come from a different planet, different universe and land over here, and it is like, yes, a paid holiday to learn new things all the time.

Besides his profession in technology, this also includes reading about topics such as art history. Universities, too, play a role in biographies of *Bildung*, not only through the disciplines they teach. Universities and colleges are part of, provide and create a spatiality regime, which is structured by their location in cities. The move away from their parents' home to the university or college city, for most interview partners, initiated their migratory history. The universities themselves also promote a certain understanding of mobility and encourage or even demand international internships or exchange semesters such as the Erasmus program. Finally, the period at university provides net-

works, or provides the openness or time to network. These networks provide access to people, but also to a set of knowledge, such as how to finance research projects or how to recruit assistants or cheap interns amongst students.

Another way of looking at education is to turn the question around and ask not for a view of entrepreneurs from the perspective of education – that is, the pre-grouping of highly skilled migrants – but for a view of education from startup founders. The German Startup Monitor 2014 followed this question and asked participants to rate the performance of the German educational system with regard to enabling entrepreneurs. Their result is a 5.1 on a scale of 1-6, where 1 equals “very good” and 6 “fail” (Ripsas & Tröger, 2014, p.52). One of the interlocutors, for example, passionately denies a connection between his education at a renowned business school and his entrepreneurial activities. He argues that the formal education did not help him to develop entrepreneurial ideas:

I just took a path, let's see if it was the right one, I don't know yet. I was always quite entrepreneurial, that has something to do with my family. My grandfather founded a company. When I was fourteen, I started to sell computers, at eighteen, I designed webpages. Just such things that you do to have a bit more pocket money. And then I went to university. I'm always saying that the university almost destroyed all this, because, well, you learn the formalisms and all that and that is not a very entrepreneurial thing.

He goes a step further and asks: what about those who are too smart, too creative or too entrepreneurial for the educational system? This point is interesting as it cracks open the simple dualism of high versus low qualification yet again from a different angle. He argues:

I think that if people are a bit smarter than average, they are not really supported. I think that is one thing that leads one to do things one's own way. Especially up to the level of high school, where you are kind of pressed into a box. I think that that leads to limitations. Not that we need special support for highly talented students or whatever, I mean I was in a private school and had great teachers and so on, but sure, you have to take care of where you are going for yourself. If you now want to do something, academically or at school, that is not on the plan yet, then you can ask the teachers, but nobody really had time, then you search for ways, and for me IT was such a way, where I could express myself, it was fun. University was boring, I just worked and distanced myself from the university, because, I really, I really couldn't identify with my bachelor, just because it was such a factory.

One of the important points here is that a high qualification does not automatically lead to a specific outcome or career and instead might be perceived as hindrance, or as an experience of suffering. Or it might not have any direct consequence, as in the case of those whose qualifications are not recognized or who work in fields that have nothing to do with their qualification for other reasons. However, *Bildung* does play a role in the form of formal and informal biographically, individually important events, experiences and learning processes. And secondly, universities play a role, not only with re-

gard to the content taught, but in their way of initiating people into processes of mobility, networks and resources.

## 11.4 Conclusion

Theoretical debates during the last years worked on deconstructing political and scientific boundaries within discourses of migration (see chapters 9 and 10). With “migration of the highly skilled”, a field of study recently opened up, which by its definition runs the risk of cementing old dichotomies anew and which remains rather hazy and undifferentiated as to analytical categories in ethnographic studies. Categories such as “highly skilled” or “migration” play an important role in policy making on a meso and macro level and can be analyzed on this level. They also open spaces of (public) conversation, but they are less useful as descriptive and analytical categories in ethnographic research on a micro level. Studying the highly skilled involves the following issues:

1. The concept risks falling back theoretically, as it is a reproduction of methodological nationalism. It is the nation states that have the authority to create, recognize or reject degrees. This concerns degrees in fields such as medicine and law, which are difficult to transfer from some places, but it also concerns the general acceptance or rating of degrees from other states. In the case of lost diplomas of refugees, a whole new diplomatic debate opens up. Using this concept as a research category means following a categorization proposed by political and economic institutions and thus levitating the ethnographic lens onto a macro level. Instead, the concept and the process of its creation could be made objects of anthropological study.

2. The label gives the wrong impression of a seeming homogeneity of a group of highly skilled migrants (Götzö & Sontag, 2015b). In its extremes, it subsumes those who work in jobs requiring a high qualification, but do not have one, especially entrepreneurs, who do not need one, as well as those who have a qualification, but are not allowed to work. A lot of subgroups are difficult to categorize, like artists or professional athletes, or people with all kinds of special skills. Furthermore, highly skilled refugees are rarely studied under the heading of highly skilled migrants. Last but not least, there is the problem of silent acceptance or rejection in the job market of people with official degrees who are discriminated against because of racism, gender, biographical background, because they are migrants or for other reasons. Studies like the one by Favell (2008) point to the heterogeneity and economic precarity of the group of young international professionals. Because of this heterogeneity, the label is difficult to apply and the question is how far it can

add value to understanding the ways in which migration works – or the ways in which education works.

3. In the end, it risks becoming a way of saying (economically) wanted migrants as opposed to unwanted migrants – and the feature that makes someone wanted is their economic contribution, which again is a value judgement. Alternative ethnographic setups for future studies could follow different paths and crisscross existing boundaries by choosing different ways of defining target groups. This could also mean changing the focus from conceptualizing the qualification or the move as the central element of peoples' lives to a more emic view that embeds "the move" within the pattern of events that shape their lives, and asks for people's self-conceptualization beyond dichotomies like mobile vs. settled or highly skilled vs. poorly skilled, as described in 10.2.

Finally, the interesting question in mobility research concerns and will concern physical and social mobility potential, which Kaufman et al. (2004) have called "motility". It is this potential that makes global inequalities, privileges, border regimes and structural violence, as well as actors' ways of expressing themselves, visible. And this potential does not rest on predefined categories such as skills or qualification, but rather allows for the definition of these categories in the research process. Qualification becomes one variable which must be scrutinized as to its meaning and value in each individual situation. "Generally, motility encompasses interdependent elements relating to *access* to different forms and degrees of mobility, *competence* to recognize and make use of access, and *appropriation* of a particular choice, including the option of non-action" (Kaufman et al., 2004, p.750). In fact, it is important, when looking at potentials and privileges, not to focus merely on the mobile and the opportunities of the mobile, but to acknowledge that immobility can be as much a matter of choice, as mobility can be a matter of force. This notion of immobility as capital is hardly expressed in debates around migration of the highly skilled. Highly skilled migrants can be living in precarious situations and highly skilled people can be forced not to move (e.g. stopped by the EU border regime) and vice versa. Qualification alone does not determine the way somebody moves or stays. (Götzö & Sontag, 2015b) Thus, when discussing privileges, it is necessary to take into account the capital or ability of choice.



## 12 Studying up?

When I told her about my research inside a multinational company, a colleague of mine, also an anthropologist, looked at me and said: “What about your peace of mind?”

The issues of concepts, theories and methods around migration and qualification, as discussed in chapters 9, 10, and 11, are closely linked with the research perspective and power constructions within the field. Anthropologists, as well as lay people, confronted me several times with the statement: this is researching the elites, “studying up”. In their view, it was different from the work which anthropologists normally do or are supposed to do. This chapter will focus on this discussion on “studying up”, because it helps to discuss the historical roots which make some fields more accessible than others. In fact, the way in which migrants have been conceptualized has something to do with the aforementioned boundaries such as sedentariness, nationalism and localism, but it also has something to do with the perspective of “studying down”, studying people who are socially less privileged or less qualified. The rather recent discovery of highly skilled migrants as a research field and the introduction of a difficult differentiation between them and other migrants also has to do with the disciplines’ perspective.

Studying elites in the past did not lie at the core of ethnologies. European ethnology and anthropology developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in an atmosphere of modernization, industrialization, and colonialism. There was a demand by contemporary elites to collect and store the “original” and “natural”, and preserve it in the face of fast moving changes and developments. This was at the same time a process of reaffirming an enlightened, modern, “advancing” identity (Bagus, 2005). The “other” that was being studied was the pre-modern and the non-capitalist. One of the most important differences between “us” and “them”, as Yanagisako argues, was perceived to be the participation in a capitalist economic system (Yanagisako, 2002, p. xii). In social and cultural anthropology, non-capitalist people living far away from Europe were studied. In the case of European ethnology, it was the farmers and workers and their folklore, tools and customs. This heritage is reflected in studies that focus on entrepreneurship from a perspective of ethnicity or precarity today. The selection of research subjects and questions, the terminology, the construction of the “down”, are at the same time a self-construction of the discipline or the researcher. Laura Nader in her famous article on studying up from 1969 frames it this way: “Anthropologists might indeed ask themselves whether the entirety of field work does not depend upon a certain power relationship in favor of the anthropologist ...” (Nader, 1969, p.289).

Constructing and studying a certain “other” (the other to modernity, the other to capitalism) thus has long been at the heart of cultural anthropology. And the present study is set at the crossroads of both these notions: the figure

of the entrepreneur represents an intersection of capitalism and modernity. Yanagisako writes in her study on entrepreneurs in Italy: “Anthropology’s contribution to understanding capitalism and culture will continue to be severely hampered unless we break out of the discipline’s predominant focus on working-class, ‘subaltern’, and ‘non-Western’ peoples” (Yanagisako, 2002, p. xii).

Studying up and its obstacles, implications, and reasons have been discussed during the last decades (see e.g., Wisniewski, 2000; Priyadharshini, 2003; Hannerz, 2006; Walford, 2011; Gusterson, 2008). Many arguments in this debate in some way deal with the notion of identities, which are negotiated and defined via “up” or “down”: identities of the researcher, the discipline and the researched. There is a connection with the general reflexive turn since the 1970s and the writing culture debate in anthropology. The researcher was no longer seen as objective observer, analyzing data in a positivist manner, but rather as a person who is involved and influences what happens.

Nader discusses four areas with regard to studying up: “access, attitudes, ethics and methodology” (Nader, 1969, p.301). I will use her categories in the following as structuring elements, as other contributors to the debate have done before.

## 12.1 Methods

The debate around methods already raises the question of identity, especially as it poses the question of how far research based on participant observation constitutes anthropological identity so strongly that it is impossible to proceed in a different manner (Nader, 1969; Gusterson, 2008). The field of the present study already disturbed the classic image of a field, as described in chapters 3.3 and 9.4. It appeared fragmented and unconnected. The people I talked to spared 1-2.5 hours for me, I did not “hang around” with them and they also did not know each other personally. Hanging around in the field of a company, a public agency or a laboratory may pose difficulties. Nader writes: “We may have to give higher priority to traditional anthropological values such as using our knowledge of others as a mirror for ourselves and allowing questions to lead us to methodology (rather than vice versa)” (Nader, 1969, p.308). Gusterson (2008) calls his approach to his research in a weapons laboratory “polymorphous engagement”. He meets with interview partners in different locations (also virtual spaces) and at the same time he combines different methods and materials within his work, depending on the actual situation.

Not only locations and social arenas but also tasks, roles and positions are fragmented. Thomas argues that the preparation of a study has to include

thinking about which role of a particular person one wants to address; for example, the professional or the private (Thomas, 1995). I do not think it is necessary to separate the roles deliberately, but to be aware that separations take place through the locations, the questions, and the introduction chosen. I did not address interlocutors as parents, spouses, members of a sports club or a charity, but as entrepreneurs.

In a way these “new” fields make obvious what has always been the case: that of course the presence, the gaze, the perception, the analysis, the writing process of a researcher create a field and create coherence. It is the researcher who draws connections and structures, combines elements as close or similar, and places others in a distance. And still, the image of a “correct”, “coherent” field, the notion of methodic localism, the authority of “having been there” is part of the powerful myth of cultural anthropology. Migration or mobility have also been eclipsed by this myth of localism and coherence, even though translocal connections, last but not least through the person of the researcher, were always involved. A localistic illusion, as Picard calls it, was created.

## 12.2 Access

When thinking about the topic of access, precisely the puzzling fragmentation of arenas and roles may provide options and possibilities: A person who may be difficult to access in their office is at the same time father or mother of a kindergarten child, member of an association or club, customer at a car service center or food cooperative, and it may be easier to meet them in those contexts than in their official professional surrounding – like a multi-sited access. Moreover, the question of access arises in every field of study and needs relationship building, sympathy and improvisation in every case – no matter whether one is working with farmers or lawyers.

In this study, I approached people at evening events and engaged in conversations at networking evenings. I emailed them via their webpages, or following comments or videos they had posted on the internet, found them on LinkedIn and Xing, or by chance in daily life. I attended parties, even a costume party, and met people who knew other people or who gave me an interesting glimpse into the scene. And of course, I used the networks I had and asked people to put me in touch with their contacts.

I also used, sometimes by accident, different roles. I handed my business card to a young entrepreneur at an evening event once, and he immediately recognized me as his target group – university lecturers, as he had developed a tool to improve university teaching. I only started talking about my study



after quite an interesting conversation about his business. Others were interested in my own business or me as a founder.

### 12.3 Attitude

The topic of attitude, too, is connected with identity. Wisniewski (2000) and Priyadharshini (2003) describe how studying up may meet with resistance at the university or amongst colleagues. In fact, research at universities itself may even be thought of as danger to the career (Wisniewski, 2000, p.9). Priyadharshini puts it this way: “Facing the judging power of an academy whose ethos and norms have evolved under conditions of studying down means that the researcher faces threats to her or his credibility and hence professional identity off the field as well” (Priyadharshini, 2003, p.427).

While Laura Nader argued in 1969 that in the past, the reluctant attitude of researchers not to interfere with processes of social reform may have hindered them from researching within the institutions of their own societies, Priyadharshini describes how her research within an MBA program was criticized precisely because it did not address more important issues. Sometimes, the long tradition of studying down and establishing corresponding power relations between the researcher and the researched also seems to intersect with political activism and antagonisms against neoliberal mechanisms, which again may prevent a deeper research into different economic and political logics and connections. Walford discusses this issue further and asks us to reflect on how research with opposed political attitudes between the researcher and interview partners can work out, and whether researchers should openly display their opinions (Walford, 2011).

Apart from these political considerations, there is also the fact that the educational background, knowledge and interests of researchers and interview partners may be very close (Hess & Schwertl, 2013, p.26, 29; Warneken & Wittel, 1997). I found this aspect very inspiring and challenging. Some interview partners asked me in the beginning what kind of interview I would conduct (for example, a narrative, structured or semi-structured interview), being well informed about the different types of social scientific interviews. They asked me about the analytical steps, about my research questions, about the expected outcome, engaged in discussion about my hypotheses, and contradicted my approach and thinking. These talks, questions and critical remarks challenged me, but they also helped me a lot in organizing my own thoughts. This is a chance for valuable peer-exchange. At the same time, it is an integral part of the field that informants, who are themselves scientists, talk about – and in the language of – scientific research. Yet it is also easy to lose a certain reflexivity in this proximity and put forward the same critical-

analytical questions to these scientific discussions as to the rest of the interaction.

## 12.4 Ethics

The question of ethics connects here. Laura Nader (1969) writes: “It has been said that anthropologists value studying what they like and liking what they study and, in general, we prefer the underdog” (p.303). Priyadharshini (2003) calls this the “feel good factor”, when a studying down research relation may include a form of support for the researched (p.423). Robert Thomas points to the opposite situation. Researchers may be positively overwhelmed by the situation in a big company or by the charisma of a CEO: “I must admit to having felt ‘honored’ to be granted time with a well-known executive and to be tempted to be less assertive than I might have been with someone less newsworthy” (Thomas, 1995, p.7). I think it is important to pay attention to these feelings, to reflect on and understand them, and also experiment with them, because it is here that “up” and “down” are constructed and show their effect. The triggers, which make one feel involved, empathic or intimidated, are individually different. And fear of the field surely also played a role in more classical fieldwork relations and situations. Yet the more it is possible to learn about a cultural context such as the CEOs office, the more it is also possible to understand the factors that create those feelings of power relations. And in this way, fear or intimidation seems valuable, just as it is in other fieldwork situations, to the creation of a certain suspense and attentiveness that enables one to look more closely.

George Marcus’ discussion of multi-sited ethnography sheds light on the issue, as he takes the focus from the discussion of “up” and “down”. *Multi-sited* in his approach refers to “knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities” (Marcus, 1995, p.100). In his example, he refers to studying the emergence of a policy and the people affected by it and writes: “Although multi-sited ethnography may not necessarily forsake the perspective of the subaltern, it is bound to shift the focus of attention to other domains of cultural production and ultimately to challenge this frequently privileged positioning of ethnographic perspective” (Marcus, 1995, p.101).

## 12.5 Conclusion

“Up” is a simplification that is difficult to use when it comes to representing research situations. The question is how far this debate of down vs. up constructs and solidifies powerful conceptions of hierarchies, and how far this is possibly based on the “pervasiveness of the economic definitions of success” (Thomas, 1995, p.7). In fact, a lot of research may rather be considered as “sideways”, as Hannerz understands researching professions that are not so different from one’s own (Hannerz, 2006, p.30).

“Up” and “down” are one-dimensional markers that cannot in most cases represent the many facets of a research relationship. In fact, labeling groups as “up” or “down” from the perspective of the researcher, mirrors a classification of “familiar” versus “unfamiliar”, or “similar” versus “strange” and thus a distance, an othering. People I met through this project were very diverse regarding their age, their professional fields, their socio-economic background and situation, and institutional influence. This variety does not figure in concepts such as “up”, “down” or “elite”. Favell (2008) carried out one of the first studies on highly skilled migrants in London and points out how they are often labeled as a privileged elite. However, as mentioned earlier, he shows that the label “elite” does not encompass the diversity and often also financial precarity under which people work and live.

A differentiated understanding of relations of power and powerful discourses is important in anthropological work. For the research situation, a differentiated understanding of power also means a more differentiated perception of the situation of the interview partners. In emphasizing “up” and “down”, “us” and “them”, or even “us” and “us”, the spectrum of nuances of constraints and liberties, vulnerabilities, and subtle and open power constellations in the lives of individual “powerful” people risks vanishing as they appear consistently powerful and full of agency (Priyadharshini, 2003; Herzog, 1995).

Priyadharshini describes the debate of studying up as “stuck” and illustrates how a deconstructivist understanding of identity may liberate studying up from this tight spot. This includes focusing on multiple spaces of action and negotiation, modes of behavior and perspectives: “By focusing on the tensions of participants’ lives and desires, their multiple subjectivities came to the fore” (Priyadharshini, 2003, p.432). This focus on multiple positions and identities, she writes, does not only apply to the researched, but also the researcher: “Studying up does not permit inflexible and stable researcher identities” (p.433).

“Up” and “down” are perspectives and thus need a point of reference and a self-positioning by the researcher. The question is, what kind of self-construction does one have in the field, with what consequences and for

which purpose? As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, I sometimes felt a reluctance, and certainly strong opinions, from anthropologists or informed lay people with regard to the subject I studied. These included opposing entrepreneurship or corporations, a critical angle against neoliberal economic systems and (self-) exploitation, a critical attitude against “hipsters” in the startup scene and their supposedly pretentious attitudes, and criticism as to whether studying highly skilled or highly qualified people could be a meaningful contribution to society or anthropology, as other topics might be more relevant. Of course, researchers and also interview partners are involved in all these current and powerful discourses. And yet, if at all possible, it is most valuable to reflect on them, on self-positioning, self-expression and attitude, because they influence interactions and analysis.

One issue at hand is the inclusion of more playful and experimental approaches to fieldwork in the study of fields that have been labelled as “up”, and which seem stressful, serious, or difficult to access. Just as one would take one’s wellington boots and learn to plough the earth, or learn to dance in a costume in some fieldwork settings, one might wear a suit or a cocktail dress and explore evening events or business meetings in another. Power entanglements are surely more complex and subtle than that, but playful engagements and material symbols are a starting point for experimenting with (self-) perceptions. In this study, I tried to provoke an open atmosphere, by integrating toys like Lego, or by meeting people for breakfast or lunch, a situation that was more personal and appealed to different senses. Fields like the migration of the highly skilled inspire once again to reflect on the positioning of the researcher and the discipline, which is an important entry point into discovering underlying power regimes in scientific production, by evaluating one’s own judgements, vulnerabilities, fears or disagreements.



## 13 Conclusion

Two years after I first contacted them, I once more followed the protagonists online or met them in person. All the companies and products still exist. Some companies have grown, others remain as they were. Some founders are now also active in other areas, such as consulting for startups or organizing support for refugees. Two people have started new companies. One person has left their company for a new one.

In this book, I have presented findings of a field study with mobile entrepreneurs based on narrative, biographical interviews, expert interviews, participant observation and document analysis and I have discussed current theoretical approaches and frameworks. This final chapter will summarize the main findings in section 13.1 and implications for concepts in sections 13.2. Section 13.3 argues for research setups that take their starting point in social roles or situations in order to analyze movement.

### 13.1 Mobilities of Startup Founders

1. Migration is part of a complex context of events, experiences, goals and convictions.

In chapter 4, I introduced nine of the protagonists in condensed portraits, bringing out some of the most striking categories within their biographical narrations, relating to ways of living life, making decisions, moving and working. I argued that migration is part of a thick context of events, experiences, and goals. Migration is often portrayed as a disruption. And yet, from the ways in which my interlocutors moved and made decisions about their moving, migration can be seen as one parameter amongst many others in the context of decision making. While it involves changes in a person's living place, it may involve continuity in terms of family life or in the way my interlocutors could set up their professional lives. The ways of making the decision to move were diverse. I put forward a scheme of six strategies which the actors employed when making their move:

1. Deliberate step-by-step progress
2. Careful forward planning
3. Seizing opportunities as they come
4. Pushing the boundary
5. Adjusting to the situation
6. Family compromise

2. Most people transmigrate and combine different forms of migration in their biographies.

Subsequently, in chapter 5, I questioned how the founders moved and saw that most current definitions of migration, such as migration, transmigration, circular migration, multilocality, and second generation, apply to them. The most common forms of movement were the following:

1. Transmigration, spanning several stays with the perspective of more stays or long-term multilocal work- or family arrangements
  2. Single transnational migration in combination with local moves
  3. Circular migration with repeated stays abroad and either returns to the place of origin or repeated migration between the same countries, with a final stay at the second place
  4. Circular migration, e.g. travelling for 20 to 90% of the year
3. Different kinds of mobilities form a texture of movements and a basis for careers.

These geographical moves were connected with movements in other dimensions of life, as further explained in chapter 5. I conceptualized these movements as mobilities: virtual mobility, social mobility, mental or cultural mobility, mobility with regard to time and income. These mobilities formed a dynamic texture, they were interlinked with physical mobility, and they influenced each other. These mobilities provided access to networks, exchange, ideas, facilities, and funding, or they led to the need for self-employment and thus influenced the individual's professional situation and formed the basis for entrepreneurial careers. Moreover, mobility could lead to more mobility and thus enhanced the motility of a person, the potential to be mobile.

4. Physical mobility forms personal moving spaces.

In chapter 6, I described different ways of local interaction and mooring and the role that concrete places played:

1. Local mooring through family, friends and business
2. Temporary mooring prior to moving on
3. Mooring as an involuntary and painful experience
4. Multilocal: in transit between places of equal importance
5. Mooring through professional and national communities
6. Permanent mooring

People were connected to more than one local place, and interacted and moored in different ways in different places. Their relations to geographical places could thus better be conceptualized in terms of personal moving spac-

es, which encompassed different places as well as the connections between these places, be they in terms of multilocal living, physical, virtual, emotional or imaginative travelling.

5. Spaces of movement are transurban spaces.

Local places between which people moved were mostly cities. They played an important role, as they provided a specific environment for startups. This concerned, amongst other things, the accessibility of infrastructure, networks, funding, research facilities, customers and staff, as explained in chapter 6 and 8. Movement thus took place in transurban spaces.

6. Startup founders look for *Passung* and make choices by acting on personal orientation schemes.

Chapter 7 looked at motivations and orientations. The interlocutors navigated mobilities by acting on one or several of the following factors of orientation. Often these were seemingly “immobile” goals and values. These were:

1. Freedom and risk
2. Creation of independent structures
3. Curiosity and scientific contribution
4. Joy and satisfaction
5. Self improvement
6. Contribution to society
7. Earning money

These factors of orientation motivated people to create what we called *Passung* (see chapter 7.1, relating to fit, compatibility) – a working and living environment that suited them. The creation of a company played an important role in achieving *Passung*, as it often presented a larger frame to life that also encompassed social relations and hobbies. Surrounding structures that were perceived as limiting, as well as in individual cases the difficulty to have certain foreign degrees recognized, parent-, and gender roles also influenced individual decisions.

7. Individual, private and public actors and institutions create structures in the startup context.

In chapter 8, the focus was on the context in which startups come to exist, with regard both to the level of personal relationships and to the level of surrounding institutions, support structures, companies and legislation. I related this with theories around dissolutions of boundaries and argued that while dissolutions can indeed be observed, at the same time new structures



come into existence, sometimes very rapidly. Such new structures included a growing economic sector of startup support organizations and actors, as well as ways of performing and acting on an individual level. The kinds of movements and actions observed amongst the interlocutors did not happen arbitrarily in free space, nor did they follow a strict neoliberal logic, but rather they followed personal orientation schemes (chapter 7), biographical interwovenness and political, economic and institutional possibilities (chapter 8).

## 13.2 Implications for Conceptualizing the Research Field

As mentioned in the introduction, this research project started out by looking at work migration of the highly skilled and all three terms were reviewed and discussed in the light of this study. I will summarize this discussion in this section and point to possible ways of constructing research fields of highly mobile people. In the end of the section, I will briefly summarize the main concepts used in this study.

### Migration

For the purposes of this research, we had originally chosen to work with the notion of migration as used on a political meso and macro level. This was a reinterpretation or reframing of the term as used in public discourse as we were referring to people who would not normally be classified as “migrants” but rather be labelled as “expats” or, for those interview partners who were mobile and Swiss, simply as “Swiss” or “return migrants”. In the course of the study, however, it became clear that on the one hand the term could not encompass important aspects of analysis on the micro level of individual, biographical perspectives, and that on the other hand it was difficult to move beyond a certain “immobility” of the concept itself and its focus on constructing social positioning, othering, exclusion, and power. The following issues were part of the discussion during the project:

1. Migration is mostly used with reference to an event, but it does not describe the process or the life that takes place before or after the move. In a biographical approach, in contrast, it is important to be able to think of processes over the course of a lifespan.
2. Even though migration refers to an event, the label “migrant” sticks to a person for a lifetime, though self-descriptions may diverge.
3. In discussions about migrants, their migration is viewed from the perspective of the “receiving society” – or from the perspective of a third party looking at two nations. It is constructed by policies and national, econom-

ic and social borderlines. A Swiss person leaving Switzerland is not labelled a “migrant” from the perspective of Swiss society. Historic research dealing with emigration or projects such as the before mentioned project of the Swiss National Science Foundation “Emigration from Switzerland” are exceptions to the rule. As Floya Anthias points out: “Ideas about society or ‘the social collectivity’ used by researchers include assumptions about the nature of a cohesive societal whole (e.g. American or British society), within which migrants are then problematised as social actors...” (Anthias, 2011, p.41). Migration as a political category thus runs along the lines of nation state borders. Yet only a few of the issues that appeared in the interviews are situated within the dimension of nation states, these being mainly the restriction of access and the national legislation regarding entrepreneurial activities.

What in fact became much more visible during the study were the various forms of migration and movement as well as multiple and complex mobilities of the protagonists (chapter 5). It is hardly possible to separate these different levels of mobility, and they are important when looking at biographical narrations and the wider picture of how people create their lives and careers. In order to accommodate an actor-centered biographical view, and the processes and interactions of different kinds of movements such as different geographical moves, but also extensive travelling, virtual, social, or cultural mobilities in the realm of this study, it was found necessary to go beyond the concept of “migration” and view the issues under the wider term of “mobility” and thus include multi-directional, simultaneous, and multilocal movements in different areas of life.

## Work

When we created the project, we had assumed that the migration of the highly skilled or highly qualified would to a large degree be work related. Work migration starts from the premise that people move for work. It has a strong background in debates of the 1960s around the recruitment of workers from rural or less industrialized areas into more industrialized areas. Work migration involves finding a job and creating an income. This economic conceptualization of migration finds its parallels in discussions of brain drain or gain. Yet in this study, the reference to work migration had to be refined for a number of reasons:

1. Most people had moved a few times with different aims and motives, including education, internships, in order to be with their partners, spouses or families, or in order to be in a certain city. Moreover, work, education, research, social and family contexts, as well as personal schemes of orientation and migration are difficult to disentangle from each other, be-

cause in fact they connect and influence each other in many different ways. Taking work as a main or even the single reason for migration blocks the view onto these complex connections.

2. Secondly, work, in the case of the founders interviewed in this study, often means finding or creating a whole working environment suitable for them, embracing a topic they are passionate about, a possibility for future growth, a company culture and a social context which suits them. Businesses often involve activity by day and night, private and professional relations, and converting a hobby or leisure time activity into one's main professional activity. The very notion of "work" is thus quite different from the general understanding of work migration – and may well call in-to question the general understanding of "work" as it applies to other work migrants too.
3. The general assumption that migration follows employment possibilities also applies in the case of the startup founders, but the relation is more complex and indeed can be turned on its head, as entrepreneurial possibilities also follow in the wake of mobility. For some protagonists, employment possibilities are built on the very basis of mobility, as mobility generates a network of social actors and institutions, ideas and funding, which helps create careers.

For this research it was therefore helpful to look at our interlocutors' daily lives and biographies in order to gain an understanding of the meaning of work within their lives, as explained in chapter 5.2 and 7.1. Moreover, the perspective of looking at entrepreneurship as a specific form of work was useful in order to refine our concept of work. For research on similar groups, too, it might make sense to question what work means, what its role is, and how it is connected and embedded with other factors of migration.

## Entrepreneurship

The project set out with the concept of born global entrepreneurship borrowed from economics, and not with any notion of ethnic entrepreneurship. As perspectives onto one another, entrepreneurship and migration studies can mutually benefit from each other, not by explaining ethnic entrepreneurship through the lens of migration, nor by explaining migration through the lens of economic push and pull factors, but by providing an impulse to critically question these patterns of explanation. Looking at entrepreneurship from a perspective of mobility cuts across general notions of ethnic entrepreneurship and also across general understandings of entrepreneurship. It brings to the fore the different networks and connections in which people move, and which have to do with their family, university, startup organizations, or other academic or entrepreneurial networks. Moreover, looking at mobility from a perspective of entrepreneurship points beyond a political, ethnicized, or eco-

nomicized way of explaining movement. Instead, it embeds movement in the logics and ways of meaning making of this professional and private situation of life.

## Highly Skilled

In the social sciences, the relatively new field of studying highly skilled or highly qualified migrants comprises a broad diversity and heterogeneity, and involves studying this “group” as well as their forms and ways of migration and mobility. “Highly skilled” served as starting point in this project, but the term is problematic both as a descriptive and as an analytical term for the following reasons:

1. There is a risk of regressing into older debates around migration, as the term suggests a dichotomy between highly and low qualified migrants, thus implicitly creating two new container-terms and a new simple-looking dichotomy – a social dichotomy. This reproduces dichotomies in migration studies and the social stigma involved. In public discourse and policy making, the terms may serve to differentiate wanted from unwanted migrants.
2. Moreover, the term is closely tied to a national state logic that defines who is skilled and who is not, and defines which certificates or degrees are necessary and how much value they have. Such a definition is pro-pounded by national political, educational, and economic actors and functions on a macro level. It is therefore questionable if it can be useful for a cultural anthropological perspective that takes its starting point from the individual on a micro level.
3. Highly skilled people, it is assumed, move out of their own free choice. Yet this view does not always tally with experience, so this interpretation of the “highly skilled” ignores a set of people, for example among the refugees.
4. The label implies the existence of a group, when in reality migration processes are very heterogeneous and can have very different results.

As far as the startup founders in this project are concerned, from an individual perspective, an understanding of *Bildung*, as explained in chapter 11.3, is useful for understanding the ways in which they qualify themselves, as the term *Bildung* goes beyond formal education and encompasses the crucial experiences and learning that take place outside any official system of education or career.

For future studies it could be useful, as described in chapter 11, to employ concepts that allow for an analysis of social and individual factors of movement and critically assess what role is played by qualifications. This should include amongst others individual opportunities and goals, factors of

inequalities such as gender, as well as political and economic possibilities and pathways of mobility. The concept of motility (Kaufmann et al., 2004), for example, points to the potential to move, and allows for a more nuanced analysis of the factors that provide the necessary potential for mobility. Qualifications, rather than being the defining criterion, then become one possible factor amongst others. Moreover, it makes sense to question how this factor functions, as universities in this study did foster mobility through their networks and structures, such as their own location, the international setup of their programs, or the possibilities of exchange semesters.

Thus, as in the case of “migration”, “highly skilled” or “highly qualified” is an interesting and important concept as an object of research, to analyze how it is employed and works in political and public discourse, but a difficult term to define a field by in anthropology. It is more productive to find out how mobilities are understood and which factors support or prevent mobility and immobility.

### Studying Sideways

One more debate that was picked up on in this project was the debate about studying “down”, “up”, or “sideways” (Hannerz, 2006), terms used to describe the social positions between the researched and the researcher. In the past, in anthropology and European ethnology it was very common to study “the other” of modernity – the non-capitalist, non-modern (Yanagisako, 2002). This was labelled “studying down” from the perspective of the researcher. In the 1960s, Laura Nader called for “studying up” in anthropology (Nader, 1969). This meant studying institutions, companies, or universities. The ensuing debate around “studying up” rightly directed attention at the perspectives assumed in research. Much has been said about this discussion since, and much research has been done that could be labelled as “up” or “sideways” – studying people in a similar position. And yet, I still encountered astonishment about studying “up” or “sideways”.

Relationships and positions in the field though were more complex and included a range of different dimensions, contradictions, and entanglements. A key part of research is to unravel and clarify such personal and social constructions, including of course the positioning of the researcher. In order to understand globalization and mobility in their different facets, it is important to move on from this heritage of “studying down”, but also from this compartmentalization and this debate of “studying down/up/sideways” and deliberately involve different actors within society in the research.

## Concepts in this Study

In summary, four concepts have appeared to be fundamentally useful in this study:

1. Economic studies on born global and international entrepreneurship were useful in understanding the international, historic, political and economic context of this kind of entrepreneurship on a meso and macro level.
2. Mobility provided a multi-dimensional framework for looking at various forms of movements and their interaction and meaning in individual narratives. These included geographical, virtual, social, and cultural movements as well as movements in time and finances.
3. Orientation schemes and *Passung* provided a focus for looking at personal motivations and aims that shaped decisions of both entrepreneurship and mobility.
4. Looking at personal spaces of movement, in this case transurban spaces, made visible connective dimensions such as multilocal work, travelling, moving, networks, and virtual communication. This was more productive than focusing merely on the perspective of “place”.

## 13.3 Situational Analysis

Discussions about concepts and research perspectives are of course part of the larger question about how we imagine society, and about the images and notions of society that inform research setups. This can be the differentiation between a migrant and non-migrant population, highly and low skilled people, or the notion of “ethnic” entrepreneurship. It is helpful to experiment with research setups in order to capture and explain openly current processes of movement and ways of organizing work and life. In this study, the perspective of born global/ international entrepreneurship taken from economics proved a useful lens through which to look at and raise questions about migration and mobility. In such “cross-section”, cross-disciplinary analyses it is no longer “the migrant” that constitutes the defining category and focus. Instead, social roles and identifications such as the entrepreneur, the scientist, the artist, the parent or social situations such as companies, universities, families, or neighborhoods can become the starting points of research. Movement can then be interpreted as it acts upon and within a given context. It makes as much sense, simply put, to ask questions as to where people position themselves and where they are heading for as to where they came from. Choosing such cross-section analysis is thus an opportunity to investigate movement

more closely – neither from the perspective of the settled nor from the perspective of migration, but from the situational perspective. It is a way of probing, if a question, phenomenon, or situation actually is about migration at all. It is also a way of moving away from the debate around migration as “the other” or as “the normal”. Instead, it is the old plea for looking at the particular (Abu-Lughod, 1991). In addition to avoiding a narrow concept of migration and compartmentalizing migrants and non-migrants, choosing such fields is also a way out of the trap of setting “highly skilled” against “low skilled” people as it allows for an emic evaluation of the requirements for being in a certain position, such as, for example, the possession of academic qualifications. In individual, biographical narrations movements and skills are then but one part and it is up to the analysis of such narrations and situations to find out what role they play.

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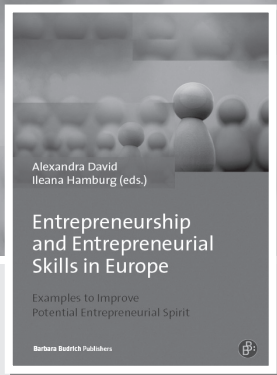
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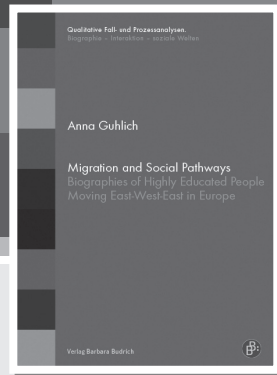
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