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Paper Title: Towards a shared future for Flemish cities: exploring the intersection between Ethnic Entrepreneurship, Policy, and Urban Revitalization.

Theoretical background

This paper explores the interaction between migration, (sub)urbanization, and ethnic entrepreneurship in Flemish local commercial districts. Ethnic entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important and studied aspect of urban economies and has been recognized as a way for migrants to overcome social and economic barriers (Volery T., 2017). This paper builds on previous research that has highlighted the importance of social networks, economic integration, and cultural capital for ethnic entrepreneurs (Waldinger et al., 1990, Kesteloot C. and Mistiaen P., 2005).

Waldinger et al. (1990) have studied ethnic entrepreneurship in the United States since the nineteenth century regarding various ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Italians, and Irish. The international literature on ethnic entrepreneurship is exhaustive (Rath and Schutjens, 2019; Vacca et al., 2022; Volery, 2007; El Bouk et al., 2013; Eraydin et al., 2010). In the Netherlands exhaustive research is also available (Essers, 2003; Naerssen et al., 2004, Essers, 2006; Essers, 2008; Tedmanson and Essers, 2015; Khademi et al., 2023) however, in Belgium, and particularly in Flanders, research on ethnic entrepreneurship is premature, despite the importance of the subject. This topic gains more and more importance in Flandres to understand certain evolution in local commercial districts (Bonne et al., 2014). A recent study commissioned by the Flemish government has revealed the geographic expansion of migrants to suburban areas (Vandekerckhove B., 2022). The Flemish suburban municipalities now have to deal with a diversity they were unfamiliar with. In this paper, we will examine the consequences of this migration and the policies (or lack thereof) that have been implemented, particularly in the context of the expansion of the population with migration roots, as shown by the comparison of the two maps between 1990 and 2017.

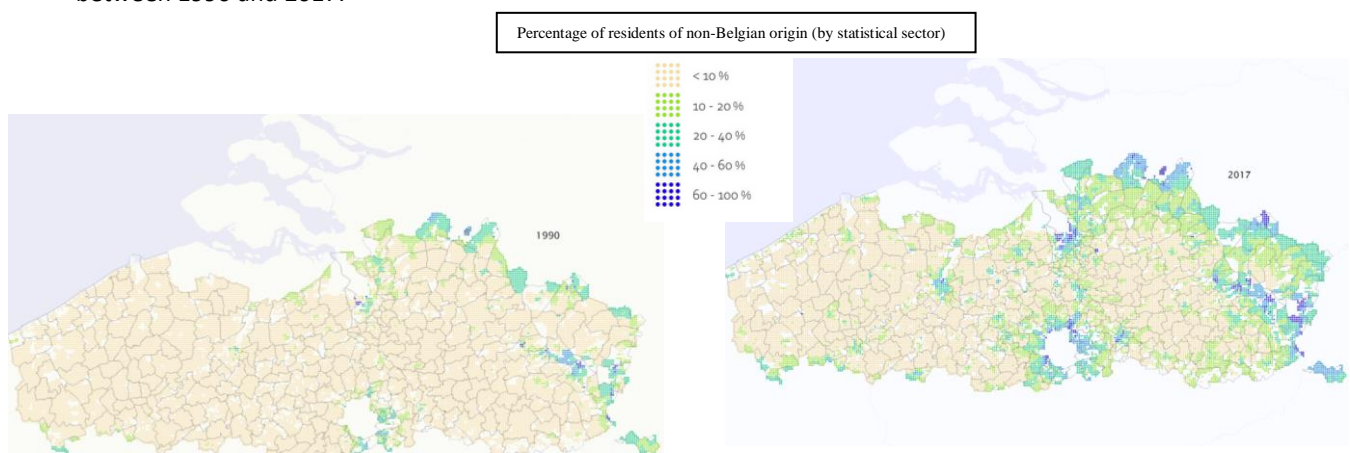


Figure 1: Vandekerckhove B., et al., 2022

Figure 2: Vandekerckhove B., et al., 2022

Research questions

The main research question of this paper is: **"What is the policy approach of Flemish local governments towards ethnic entrepreneurship, and how does it influence the attractiveness of such businesses in the local context?"** To answer this question, we will look at the different policies and measures used to support or hinder ethnic entrepreneurship. We will also analyse the effectiveness of these guidelines in terms of their impact on economic success, social inclusion, and cultural recognition of ethnic entrepreneurs in Flemish commercial districts.

In addition to the main research question, we will address several sub-questions, such as:

- What is the current state of ethnic entrepreneurship in Flemish commercial districts, and what are the main challenges and opportunities that ethnic entrepreneurs face?
- How do ethnic entrepreneurs access financial, social, and cultural resources, and how do these resources affect their business strategies and outcomes? What are the differences and similarities in policy approaches between different cities and municipalities in Flanders, and what are the factors that explain these differences and similarities?
- How do ethnic entrepreneurship policies interact with other policy domains, such as labour market policies, urban planning, and diversity management?
- Is there something such as the 'wanted' or 'unwanted' entrepreneur?
- Are there particular neighbourhoods or regions in Flanders where commercial vacancy rates are high, and what impact does this have on the growth of ethnic entrepreneurship in those particular areas?

Methodology

This paper will employ a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data will be extracted from databases on retail, vacancy, population, and other relevant factors. This data is extracted from databases such as [Locatus](#), [provincies.incijfers.be](#), and [Statbel](#). The University of Antwerp is involved as an expert in the Flemish 'Propfloeg' project, in which multidisciplinary experts and innovative thinkers from 10 Flemish companies work on re-enforcing commercial districts and neighborhoods in Flanders. As of January 2024, 93 cities and municipalities have signed up for the guidance program. This means that we can collect data and analyze this for 31 percent of the Flemish cities and municipalities.

Furthermore, the paper will draw upon surveys of ethnic entrepreneurs in Flanders and in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of entrepreneurs, business support organizations, and local government officials. Descriptive statistics, content analysis, and regression analysis will be used to analyze the data collected through the mixed-methods approach. By combining both quantitative and qualitative data, the paper will be able to thoroughly examine the policy approaches towards ethnic entrepreneurship in Flanders and their impact on the local context.

Results/findings

The literature review makes it possible to draw some preliminary findings on this subject. The findings of this study suggest that ethnic entrepreneurship in Flanders is influenced by a variety of factors, including social networks, access to capital, business experience, language proficiency, and cultural knowledge. Social networks were found to be the most important factor in the success of ethnic entrepreneurs. Additionally, the findings suggest that language proficiency and cultural knowledge play a significant role in the success of ethnic entrepreneurship (Waldinger et al., 1990, El Bouk, F. 2013).

Oosterlinck S. et al. (2019) have studied how to deal with urban diversity and ethnic entrepreneurship. They suggested that local policymakers should invest in improving the image of neighborhoods to attract more customers. Many business owners feel that their neighborhoods have a negative reputation due to issues like poverty and crime and that punitive measures aimed at addressing these problems are not enough. Creating a positive perception of ethnic entrepreneurship is crucial to supporting these businesses' success in local communities. This can be achieved through initiatives such as supporting street festivals or cultural events, as well as showcasing the diversity and unique offerings of these businesses. However, it is important to note that our research is still ongoing and interviews with local officials, ethnic entrepreneurs, and different stakeholders are currently taking place. As such, the conclusions of this paper may evolve as new information is gathered and analysed.

Significance

This paper makes a significant contribution and adds value to the concept of 'Ethnic Entrepreneurship', especially in times of increasing urbanization and migration. While this concept shows great potential for promoting diversity and integration in the entrepreneurial landscape, it is also facing major challenges. These challenges stem from a variety of factors, including limited access to funds and resources, societal biases and stereotypes, and institutional barriers that make it difficult for ethnic entrepreneurs to thrive. These challenges highlight the need for more focused policy interventions and targeted support measures that can help overcome these obstacles and create a more supportive environment for ethnic entrepreneurship to grow and flourish. (Gamal I. and Vaughan G., 2011).

This paper addresses important issues related to the challenges and opportunities faced by local governments and ethnic entrepreneurs and provides insights into the policy approaches of Flemish cities and municipalities towards this group. As such, it fills a gap in the literature and offers valuable recommendations for future research and policy development.

This paper will contribute to the international literature, but will also have important implications for policymakers, business (support) organizations, and ethnic entrepreneurs.

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