

Residential and employment biographies of self-employed home-based business owners in Germany

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Stadtler, L. (ILS/Technical University of Dortmund)

In the last few decades self-employment has increased in Germany and other EU countries, caused by individualisation, tertiarisation and uncertainty in job markets (see Apitzsch et al. 2016: 478). Currently, 4.3 million people in Germany are working self-employed as new Information and Communication Technologies enable more people to work from home, particularly the self-employed (Statistisches Bundesamt 2016: 60). In literature the venture of the self-employed who work from home is often called home-based business (Mason et al. 2011; Vorley/Rodgers 2014; Reuschke 2016). Due to the increasing relevance of self-employed home-based business owners in late modern worlds of living and working, this Masters thesis aims to *examine the importance of the residential location for self-employed people with a home-based business by means of their residential and employment biographies*.

In addition to the literature review, five semi-structured interviews with self-employed home based-business owners in Germany were conducted. In order to organize and illustrate the interviewees' narratives about their residential and employment biographies, a timeline was handed to them. The timeline gave the interviewees the opportunity to fill out their periods of education and work as well as residential locations throughout their life. At the same time, the interviewees had the chance to talk about motivations and incidents which caused changes of workplace, employment statuses and residential locations, as well as events which led to their current working and housing situations. To ensure the acquisition of longer biographies, the interviewees had to be at least 40 years old. They also had to work alone – be solo-self-employed – and live alone, to exclude that their decisions for life and work were influenced by household members or employees.

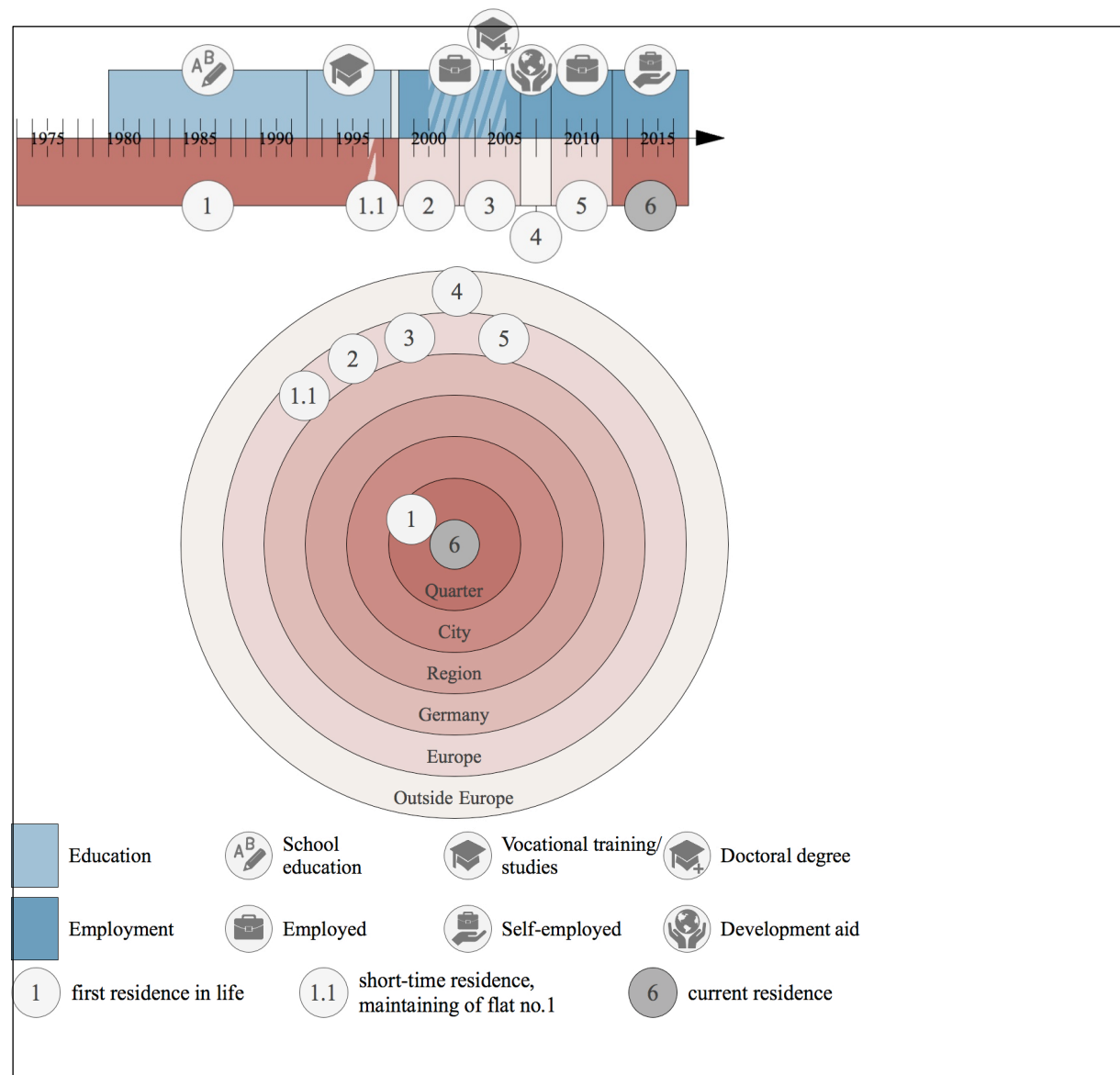
This study identified several motivations for becoming and staying self-employed.

Interviewees mentioned one specific impulse to become self-employed, like a crisis situation at the previous job, e.g. termination or strong dissatisfaction, or an ill family member. These incidents gave a first impetus, but a coexistence of several reasons led to self-employment, like the wish for a better financial situation, flexible and independent working hours and

structures. In addition, the normality of being self-employed for workers in specific industries characterised by project work and low employment rates was mentioned as a reason to become self-employed. The chance of going back to or staying in a particular region where participants wanted to live because of social relationships or structural characteristics was also mentioned as a motivation for becoming self-employed. Reasons to operate the business from home were reduction of travel and rental costs, the comfort of home and the wish for a better work-life balance. Interviewees had worked from home since the beginning of their self-employment and were able to realize their wishes for a better financial situation or work-life balance. Mentioned disadvantages were the distraction of housework and loneliness when working at home.

The interviews also resulted in detailed residential and employment biographies and the spatial localization of former residential locations related to the current residential location (see figure 1). The filled timelines were useful to observe connections between the employment and residential biography. It was interesting to see that the interviewees stayed at their family's house for their first 18 to 25 years of life, without relocation. For their studies or first jobs the interviewees moved to cities near to the respective study or work place – also to other regions or countries. Thus, at the beginning of their working career the residential decisions depended on the study or job. After a couple of working years and jobs in other regions or countries the interviewees started to go back to the city or region of their birthplace for different reasons. The latest residential decisions were made because the interviewees wanted to live in their home region, city or even quarter, and becoming self-employed helped the interviewees to go back or to stay. It is important to consider that living for 8 to 25 years within the same quarter can result in a high degree of spatial binding and that people who often moved in their childhood can have less binding and desire to return to these places (see Albrecht 2015: 255).

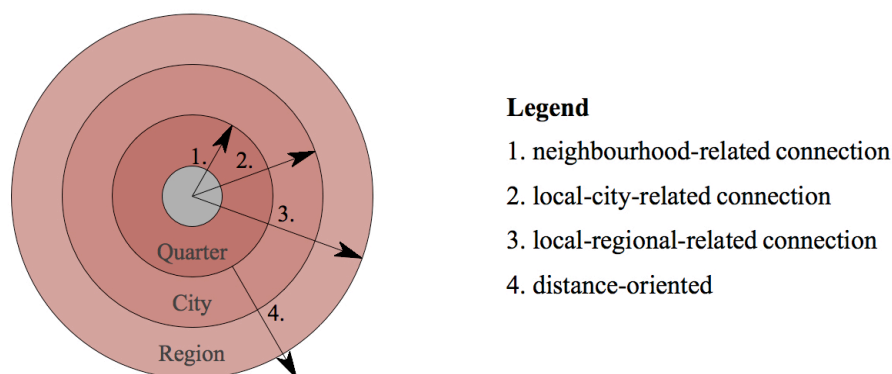
Figure 1: A residential and employment biography and the spatial localization of former and current residential locations (own illustration)



Statements about the importance of the residential location for the living and working worlds of self-employed people were made. The importance of the current residential location for the everyday life of self-employees differs among interviewees, and a spatial connection to the location can be associated with social and structural characteristics of the flat, the quarter, the city, the region or places beyond. In particular, the social networks of family members and friends as well as structural conditions like nature within the quarter or the city, leisure time or supply infrastructures, motorway or public transport access can cause spatial bindings to the residential location. Some people have such a high connection to places like their childhood or youth residence that they live their whole life within that city or region or come back after a couple of years. Some employees even decide to become self-employed in order to have the chance to live in specific places where a connection was

established. The importance of and spatial binding to the residential location can relate to different levels: the spatial binding can be neighbourhood-related, when people just use their own quarter or nearby quarters for their everyday life, e.g. in big cities and neighbourhoods near the city centre with necessary shopping or leisure facilities. The connection can be local-city-related, when they use their neighbourhood, but also different places within their city, e.g. in medium-sized cities. A local-region-related spatial binding is given when the people use their neighbourhood, the city but also the region for their everyday life, e.g. in small towns or country towns with fewer shopping or leisure facilities. People who never use their quarter in their everyday life are more *distance-oriented*. This type did not occur within the interviews, but can be found in literature which did not focus on home-based business owners but on residents in general (e.g. Hesse/Trostorff 2006: 192).

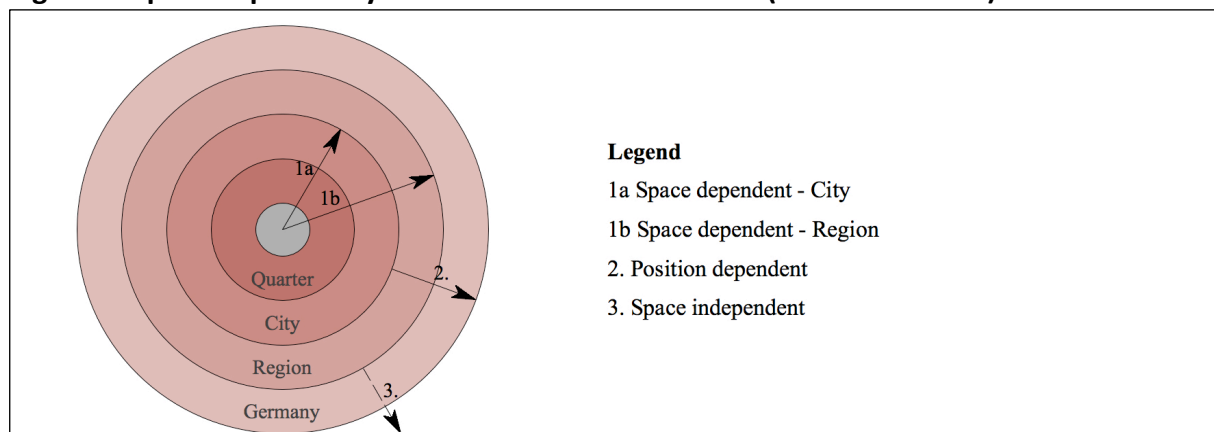
Figure 2: Spatial connection to the residential location in everyday life (own illustration)



The residential location can also have a differing importance for the home-based business and the working world of the self-employed, because the home-based business can have different requirements for the location, such as an existing working network to receive assignments or to exchange expertise. In particular for the self-employed, who often work away from their home or receive clients, customers or business partners at their home, good access to public transport systems or motorways and well-working service infrastructures are important. In some industries, specific sector-dependent infrastructures near the home can be necessary to run a business. The Internet has an especially important role for a home-based business, as it enables the self-employed to communicate with clients, customers or business partners. Furthermore, the flat can be important for home-based business owners, when they need an extra room or bigger space within the living rooms for their working objects like computers, telephones or in some cases sales or other working materials. Home-

based businesses are *space dependent*, when they need specific sector-dependent infrastructures as well as a well-functioning working network within their city or region to gain work and projects. On the one hand a city or region can help to run the business, when the required infrastructures and persons are available. On the other hand the city or region can prevent running a business, when the infrastructures and people are not available. A home-based business can also be *position dependent*, when the self-employees need a well-working public and private transport system to visit or receive clients from nearby cities or regions. The city or region itself is not necessarily needed for the business. In contrast, a *space independent* business does not rely on any infrastructures or conditions within the city or region. Only the Internet is indispensable to run the home-based business.

Figure 3: Space dependency of the home-based business (own illustration)



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