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From Disadvantage to Advantage: Digital performance of ethnicity in migrant entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Immigrant entrepreneurship literature has discussed ethnicity mainly as a source of disadvantage which triggers many immigrants decide to be self-employed as a way to enter the labor market. However, when immigrants embark on their entrepreneurial journey, ethnicity can be utilized as a commodity and a resource in several ways.

Based on netnography research, this study examine seven successful Vietnamese restaurants in Sweden. For these entrepreneurs the Vietnamese ethnicity is a resource responding to customers' expectations of an exotic and authentic food experience. However, to run popular restaurants the entrepreneurs also need the knowledge of the host community, and we relate this to Georgios *Transnational habitus skill*, the "ability to use mobility, connectivity, and transnational association to achieve certain goals" (Georgiou 2019:73). Although ethnicity as a resource has been discussed in the entrepreneurship literature, little is known about how immigrant entrepreneurs turn ethnicity from disadvantage to advantage. Therefore, we focus on how ethnicity is used and digitally performed in immigrant's businesses, as a part of the process of transforming ethnicity from a disadvantage to an advantage.

Our point of departure is that digital technologies has become an integrated part of the social production of space through mediating socio-spatial relations (Ash et al., 2018). In this study, the use of social media is therefore central for the understanding of the production of space and performance of ethnicity and how the ethnicity is used as an asset. Visual content of Facebook, Instagram and webpages of the restaurants are the main empirical material. However, we are interested in more than the content of images themselves, as we understand them as a part of the social context and relationships for which they are produced, that is, the social relation between immigrants and their new home-place, and the relation between restaurant owners and their customers.

Biographical note

Lena Grip PhD, is a Assistant Professor in Human Geography at Karlstad University, Sweden. Her main interest of research is in social aspects of community and spatial planning, and how the practical output of planning are met and understood by those directly concerned. This also includes an interest in how to work for social sustainable development on a local and everyday level. Gender equality in the rescue service has been researched from this perspective, as well as questions about integration policy in medium sized and small towns. She is a part of the

Geomedia research group at Karlstad University and currently works on two different projects relating to issues of integration, belonging and media use. Lena Grip is the managing editor of *Gender, Place and Culture*.

Quang Evansluong, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship at Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics, Umeå University and a Visiting Research at Gothenburg Research Institute, University of Gothenburg School of Business, Economics and Law, Sweden. His research interests lie in the area of migrant entrepreneurship, family entrepreneurship, integration, corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurship. He has published in the journal of *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* and *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*. He also co-organized several workshops, seminars and conferences on migrant entrepreneurship across Sweden and the United Kingdom.