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International opportunities on the way up: alternative career paths of descendants of migrants from Turkey in the field of professional business services

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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study examines the career paths of descendants of labour migrants from Turkey in the field of professional business services. Through in-depth interviews with upwardly mobile professionals in leading positions, the article presents evidence from four countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden). Respondents reflect on their professional career as a process constituted through personal interactions while displaying their perceptions of restrictive national conditions that affect their professional success in this field. There seem to be three discernible "ideal type" alternative career paths for newcomers. First, the corporate career path consists of building a widely recognized "international" profile. The second alternative is a "niche" path that emerges by making use of one's individual background in order to climb up the corporate ladder. Finally, there is a path of self-employment for individuals who have experienced blocked opportunities and therefore want to become "independent" of corporate hierarchies.

Introduction

Despite the persistence of institutional barriers (Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012; Heath, Rothon, and Kilpi 2008), some children of migrants from Turkey enter leading positions in European labour markets and achieve steep intergenerational social mobility. Contemporary research on career paths and perspectives indicates that ongoing social changes contribute to an increasing standardization on the one hand, and an emphasis on the importance of building a "boundaryless career" on the other (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). These careers are dynamic and prone to change, emphasizing the

importance of individual agency in order to initiate challenging transitions. Broadly speaking, the business sector is one of the primary settings where one can encounter these "boundaryless" paths.

Business professionals nowadays almost necessarily have to be capable of working in an international context since the increasing integration of economies entails a continuous movement of migrants, ideas, knowledge, information and skills (Favell, Feldblum, and Smith 2007). Especially persons employed in corporate settings usually have to follow specialized training that equips them for their increasingly standardized capital- and knowledge-intensive service jobs. Zikic, Bonache, and Cerdin (2010) distinguished three dominant career orientations of qualified migrants – embracing, adaptive and resisting – each with its own distinct patterns of motivation, identity and coping. Similar to their analytical approach that they base on subjective interpretations of objective barriers, this article identifies three "ideal type" alternative career paths for children of lower educated migrants from Turkey who occupy leading positions in the field of professional business services.

The empirical data consist of qualitative in-depth interviews with descendants of migrants from Turkey in four countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden). The aim is to answer the following research question: *How are obstacles towards upward mobility reflected in ideal type career paths of business service professionals with lower educated migrant parents?* According to Weber (1978), ideal types are crucial sociological definitions that allow an understanding of complex correlations through rational simplification. The main practical purpose of the ideal type is that one is able to abstract certain distinct phenomena from the realm of complex societal reality and thus it enables one to scientifically describe "a form of social action that is rarely or never found by itself" (Collins and Makowsky 2005, 113).

Zhou et al. (2008) propose a subject-centred approach in order to methodologically underline processes by identifying key choices at specific points during individual careers. They argue that this turns both "success" and "failure" into rather vague sequences. This is not to say that the author of this article assumes a direct correspondence between the attitude and behaviour of respondents. In fact, the analysis targets an explanation of their meaning making within the interview situation while placing their perceptions within wider institutional contexts and the processes of change therein (Lamont and Swidler 2014). The subsequent theoretical framework conceptualizes the role of group disadvantage, institutional barriers and professional standardization on career paths. This is followed by a description of the methods, which precedes the presentation and discussion of the main findings. Finally, the article concludes with a deliberation on the wider implications concerning the emergence of newcomers in leading professional positions.

Theorizing the advancement of newcomers in the field of professional business services

Institutional arrangements structure connections between social origin and educational attainment as well as between educational attainment and labour market positions. In their classical study, Lipset and Bendix (1991, 1–2) define social mobility as "the process by which individuals move from one position to another in society – positions which by general consent have been given specific hierarchical values". Stratified societies have to cope with a limitation of mobility as agents who occupy high-status positions generally try to preserve their privileges for members of their own group. Although this "reproductive bias" makes it difficult for newcomers to get ahead and establish themselves, it cannot eliminate the occurrence of social mobility due to inevitable structural changes in demand and supply. According to Bourdieu (1984), people can counteract these reproductive tendencies only as an outcome of interactions between specific rules of the field, individual habitus and capital.

Bourdieu (1990) further developed a theory of practice according to which individual actions in the field follow an instinct of common sense. He asserts that contingent experiences determine differences among individuals who share similar social and economic conditions. Social agents act according to their "feel for the game" that is inscribed in their habitus and they develop strategies that are adapted to their needs. That is to say, children of migrants face structural challenges that threaten to obstruct their economic success in their respective societies. In achieving upward social mobility they experience situations to which they, as newcomers, have to adapt in order to achieve their goals (also see the article by Keskiner and Crul, in press). As it will be explained in more detail later on, this study argues that professional business services is a field in which ongoing professional standardization might lead to alternative career opportunities.

National conditions: group disadvantage and institutional barriers

The national institutional context and a potential group disadvantage play a role at different stages of the career development of descendants of migrants from Turkey (cf. the introduction of this special issue for a broader overview). One prominent way these national conditions shape individual careers is through the education system: In France, knowledge on the different possibilities when moving into higher education is crucial in order to make appropriate choices. Therefore, immigrant parents' low educational levels can pose an obstacle for the educational career of their children especially in post-secondary and tertiary education (Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012). In the Netherlands, only about a third of the Turkish

second-generation youth gets a recommendation for an academic track. The alternative through the "long route" in which pupils start in lower vocational education in order to reach higher education, takes up to three years longer than the direct route (Crul and Heering 2008). Likewise, studies demonstrate that in Germany a disproportionately high amount of migrant children receive a recommendation for the lowest level of secondary education (Kristen 2002).

Furthermore, various studies have documented that descendants of migrants from Turkey have to cope with the consequences of group disadvantage when entering the labour market. To give a few specific examples from the four countries: in France, descendants of migrants from Turkey are segregated in specific occupational sectors and women in particular do not hold high-status occupations (Silberman and Fournier 2007). In Sweden, young people whose parents were born in Turkey are less likely to have a job that fits their qualifications than young people without a migration background (Behtoui 2013). Thus, in spite of higher levels of education when compared to Germany, France and the Netherlands, Behtoui (2015) identifies a restricted access to social capital for descendants of migrants, which limits their social mobility opportunities. Recent research in the Netherlands underlined the difficulties experienced when trying to gain access to the labour market by portraying the subtle discrimination during the job application process for second-generation Turkish and Moroccan professionals (Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2015). In Germany, children of migrants from Turkey also have lower returns from education with regard to occupational attainment (Kalter and Granato 2007).

On the one hand, national institutional arrangements can create and reinforce structural disadvantages that have consequences for individual life chances. On the other hand, skill and credential thresholds characterize the private sector (Waldinger 1994). Social networks can help individuals to compensate for a lack of instrumental resources in their immediate environment. "Significant others", as Granovetter (1973, 1983) calls them, can literally provide one with what is needed to become a successful professional in a specific area of work. Coleman (1988, 98) defines social capital as a particular kind of resource consisting of social ties that facilitate action. However, social capital can also constrain actions through closure. Although this is necessary to create cohesive trustworthiness, it can also lead to the exclusion of certain persons from entering a social network.

Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as accumulated labour that can be either materialized or embodied since it exists in three different forms (economic, cultural and social). He sees economic capital at the root of all the other types of capital, but states that the latter two forms in particular contribute to the reproduction of social structure by being a transformed and disguised form of the former:

> As an instrument of reproduction capable of disguising its own function, the scope of the educational system tends to increase, and together with this increase is the unification of the market in social qualifications which gives rights to occupy rare positions. (Bourdieu 1986, 254–55)

That is to say, education, connections and titles can turn individual improvement and useful personal contacts into markers of distinction that could be valuable on the labour market. However, these forms of capital are merely potential resources for the achievement of social mobility. Their convertibility into economic capital is dependent on individual interactions with structural conditions.

Whereas traditionally, institutional arrangements were under the control of the nation-state, increasingly private actors such as transnationally operating companies influence individual trajectories. According to Merton (1968), social structure can limit individual access to economic success through institutionalized means. Those lower on the socio-economic ladder are particularly vulnerable due to their relatively disadvantaged starting point. Furthermore, not only formal and open discrimination, but also informal or everyday practices and routines put newcomers (be they migrants, their descendants or women) at a disadvantage in professional contexts. Liu-Farrer (2011) underlines this by showing how an ethnic occupational niche might be the only way for some individuals to overcome barriers. However, the ongoing international standardization might lead to the emergence of alternative ways in which individuals can adapt to conditions that could hinder their professional success.

International opportunities: professional standardization and alternative career paths

Examining mobility pathways in different countries enables a better understanding of structural conditions in contemporary processes of social mobility (Crul and Schneider 2010). However, Lamont and Thévenot (2000, 10) state a valid warning for researchers who make comparisons at a national level:

> […] generalizations concerning national differences can be dangerous as they are bound to lead one to overlook variations and the specificity of structured contexts in which people use principles of evaluation. They can also lead one to confirm a view of differences as national character traits attributed to almost all the citizens of a country and expressed in a heterogeneous range of situations.

Multinational corporations on the free market and the homogenization of values, ideas and practices (Ong 2006) are increasingly challenging the authority of the nation-state over individual trajectories. The subjects of the privatization agenda that is inherent to neoliberalism are oriented towards individual success through increasingly uniform means in order to benefit

from the global economy and its de-nationalized opportunity structures (Calhoun 2002).

This process is also visible in the standardization of careers in the field of professional business services with its mobile professionals that often operate transnationally. Favell, Feldblum, and Smith (2007, 21) argue, "non-spatially located forms of capital have essentially interchangeable values in different locations". These forms of capital can sometimes turn into tools of resilience for individual performances after an individual has been exposed to factors that put this performance at risk (Hall and Lamont 2013). As it was argued in the previous section, social structure can limit individual access to economic success through institutionalized means (Merton 1968). However, through pursuing goals by new and alternative means, individuals may bypass structural constraints that decrease the likelihood of their success.

When the second generation acquires middle-class status, they might employ a common set of cultural elements responsive to distinct problems that accompany their situation (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). For example, they might mobilize "middle-class ethnic capital" to create professional associations in ethnic communities that provide valuable business skills, networks, and social capital to co-ethnics (Vallejo 2009). Recent research on the Mexican second generation has shown how, in order to make occupational gains, they have to activate resources in mobility-promoting ways given the demographic, economic and social characteristics of their community. These resources include parental support, advice and guidance from extra-familial mentors, as well as their bilingualism (Morando 2013).

Kupferberg (2003, 102) proposes that the business world might be open to newcomers and change, since it:

> […] thrives on and values innovative business concepts, [and] is generally indifferent to national cultures and gender roles. As an institution, the business world has incorporated the tension between the established and newcomers into its own structure, which explains its dynamic nature.

While acquiring the skills necessary to succeed in a specific professional context, individuals socialize into distinct roles through discourse and practice. In addition to the similarities caused by professional socialization, there are normative pressures to conform through the standardization of educational credentials and inter-organizational networks (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). However, a full-fledged standardization of procedures in professional work environments seems rather unlikely due to the significance of soft skills and interpersonal relations, which might even reproduce existing group disadvantage (Moss and Tilly 1996). The fact that employers eventually have to evaluate the "employability" of an applicant reinforces the view that "newcomer" career paths are hardly independent of socially constructed barriers (Salaff, Greve, and Ping 2002).

Research indicates that professional prestige and privilege can be denied to persons with stigmatized identities (Slay and Smith 2011). Thus, group disadvantage could reinforce itself, so that individuals can be subjects of blocked opportunities in spite of objectively fitting the job criteria and having the right credentials. This is why business ownership often seems as a last resort for immigrants and their descendants (Raijman and Tienda 2000; Sanders and Nee 1996). It can enable individuals to follow a path that circumvents barriers such as the infamous "glass ceiling". Moreover, the importance of networking as a career management strategy shows that "the burden of responsibility for one's career has shifted from the organization to the individual, with the notion of employability becoming one's career goal" (Forret and Dougherty 2004). Work relationships are strategically chosen means to career mobility as well as career-defining ends, while negative relationships may be as consequential as helpful ties (Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek 2000).

The following section presents a brief overview of the methods employed for this study. The subsequent analytical section shows how ongoing social change, in addition to the emphasis on innovation that is inherent to the field of professional business services, can lead to career paths alternatives for newcomers such as descendants of migrants from Turkey.

Method

Data collection

The empirical part of this article is based on qualitative interviews with descendants of migrants from Turkey occupying leading positions in the corporate business sector in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. The author collected all the data in Germany and Sweden, while the other researchers involved in the ELITES project and junior researchers assisted in the Netherlands and France. This ensured that interviews could be conducted in the national language if respondents were not able or willing to do the interview in English or Turkish. The final selection of respondents was based on at least one of the following criteria: (1) persons with organizational and managerial or employee responsibilities within a company; (2) persons working in a senior position in a smaller service firm (including owners and self-employed professionals) and (3) persons occupying a specialist or expert position within a company.

The mapping of more prominent professionals in each setting preceded the use of the snowball technique to finalize the collection of data. The semi-standardized qualitative interviews collected information about career paths, how their family background had influenced their work, their social networks and their sense of belonging to their place of work and residence. Moreover, each interviewee helped to further structure the conversation

with his or her answers and comments, although the same set of key questions was used for each interview (Gomm 2008). Respondents were also permitted to raise their own issues. The request to record the interviews was explicit and verbatim transcriptions were made afterwards. The anonymity of all respondents was guaranteed beforehand, and this allowed them to share delicate information and engage in a frank discussion.

Overview of the sample

As mentioned earlier, the positions of interviewed professionals in the corporate business sector is diverse. In order to ensure better comparability the decision was taken to focus on the corporate sector's non-legal business service professions. However, no further limitations were imposed for two reasons: first, the emerging business service elite of Turkish descent is still small and a more restricted definition might have missed key people. Secondly, preliminary analyses showed that the people in this broad category do not differ much in terms of their pathways, the boundaries they needed to cross and the obstacles they had to overcome to attain this position.

The diversity of professions in professional business services, as well as the close interrelatedness of jobs in this field, with professionals often switching between sectors, subsectors and positions, necessitated a decrease of the sample for the sake of securing a feasible in-depth analytical comparison of interviews. The introductory article of this special issue discusses and embeds the sample of this research project in more detail (see Crul, Keskiner, and Lelie, in press). The core empirical material in this paper consists of twenty-one corporate business professionals (seventeen men and four women) in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt, Paris, Stockholm and Randstad (a region in the Netherlands comprising the four large metropolitan areas of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht). Table 1 gives an indication of the professional titles they held by providing an anonymous overview.

Usually, both parents of the respondents had been born in Turkey and migrated to their country of destination between the late 1960s and early

Table 1. Respondents' year of birth and professional title.

Place of residence	Year of birth	Professional title
Frankfurt	1968–76	Director of Finance, Internetworking Consultant, Head of Bank, Senior Specialist, Audit Partner, Recruitment Consultant
Paris	1969–83	Portfolio Manager, Senior Analyst, Product Engineer, Sales Manager, Application Manager
Stockholm	1965–73	Senior Advisor, Management Consultant, Business consultant, Project Manager, Senior Specialist
Randstad	1969–83	Senior Manager, Senior Consultant, Company Owner, Business Consultant, Director of Finance

1980s. After their migration, an overwhelming majority of these parents occupied low-skilled manual jobs in the respective labour markets. In fact, only a small minority of the interviewed persons had parents who had managed to start their own businesses after their migration. Twelve out of twenty-one respondents were born and raised in their parents' destination country, although three of them were brought to Turkey for at least a part of their primary school education. All of the nine respondents who were born in Turkey joined their parents before reaching primary school age. Most respondents acquired a higher education degree broadly centring on the subject areas of business, economics and finance. However, the collected data also contain three individuals (one in Frankfurt, and two in Stockholm) who only have a secondary school degree. Respondents' total work experience in the area of professional business services falls within a range of five to more than twenty years, with most professionals having more than ten years of experience.

Analysis

The following analysis examines individual career trajectories in four countries with regard to the experiences of descendants of migrants from Turkey. The analytical approach of this article assumes an increasing standardization of career paths in the field of professional business services. In general, careers can be seen as individual projections about occupational status and prospects (Hughes 1964). External events might disturb career plans to the extent they could be subjectively perceived as individual turning points (Strauss 1959). This could necessitate a reorientation or re-evaluation of career paths (Zikic, Bonache, and Cerdin 2010). The resulting alternative pathways can be considered as successful attempts at contributing to, or even remaking the mainstream. In accordance with the central research question of this article, the following analytical sections present three ideal type career paths in the field of professional business services that emerge against the background of experienced obstacles: building an international profile (cf. section "Building an international profile"); carving out a professional niche (cf. section "Carving out a professional niche"); becoming independent from corporate hierarchies (cf. section "Becoming independent from corporate hierarchies").

Building an international profile

The first ideal type consists of a career path that aims at building an international profile that is internationally accepted and recognized. As it was discussed in the previous theoretical framework (cf. section "International opportunities: professional standardization and alternative career paths"), the ongoing internationalization in the business world leads to the

emergence of standardized career paths across national borders. This creates opportunities especially for those individuals that experienced disadvantages within a national context due to their individual background. Indeed, respondents mentioned difficult periods especially in their early educational career as well as when entering the labour market. Coming of age, they learnt to deal with difficult situations:

> I was part of those people that did not really know that well the French educational system by then. Nowadays, if someone is good at high school, the University is not the best anymore to get education from, it is better to get into a preparatory programme [classes préparatoires[1]]. (Mr Uzun[2], France)

Nevertheless, they adapted themselves to the specificities of national institutional arrangements that potentially reinforced their group disadvantage. This self-confidence is visible in the following statement:

> Until recently, I had a German customer, a German CEO, now he was replaced by someone from Britain and then they asked me whether the fact that I do not have a German contact person anymore is a problem for me. My answer was: "I made it as a Turk in Germany, then I guess I will manage with a few British people". (Mr Eren, Germany)

In general, their career narratives stress that one needs to be capable of recognizing potential opportunities in order to get where one wants to be professionally. Many respondents highlighted the importance of individual skills. There were hardly any differences in respondents' accounts with this regard. A predominant theme was the necessity of a drive to be good at what one is doing. In addition, in spite of the emphasis on having the right credentials, so-called soft skills as opposed to mere formal and technical knowledge were deemed essential to get ahead in the corporate business sector.

There are many subsectors in the field of professional business services. In general, one can state that there are several career options from finance to banking and consulting, and many of these jobs need advanced degrees or specialization. Due to the competence-oriented and innovation-driven nature of these jobs, they seem open to newcomers regardless of individual background characteristics (Kupferberg 2003). For the professionals who managed to end up in a leading position, the national context had mainly played a role in their past, and was predominantly important during their educational careers. Most professionals argued that the ongoing internationalization of the field works in their favour. Their underlying assumption was that in an international field, the focus would lie more on their professional competences than on their personal background:

> I had a lot of energy and all that international character also suited me, I grew up in the Netherlands which is quite monotonous. And then in the international

arena, I was suddenly in a multicultural area where ethnicity is no longer impor-
tant, and I felt like a fish in water. (Mr Gencer, The Netherlands)

It seems that the best way to overcome national conditions to their success
was to work for an internationally operating firm, or to push for an agenda
at work that enables them to build an international profile. Many respondents
tried to find work in an international context early on in their careers. They
stated that people are simply more used to cultural differences in internation-
ally operating companies. They also noticed that hierarchies are less rigid and
more permeable, thereby offering more possibilities for individual
development:

One has to say that this company really works a lot different culturally. They have
an open culture. I knew that I would feel comfortable there. (Mr Bilkent,
Germany)

They perceive the international arena quite literally as a "saving" ground that
protects them from earlier experienced restrictive national conditions.
    It seems that their professional success literally seems capable to move
them beyond national conditions. Entering their jobs and subsequently
moving up into leading positions, they experience the importance of interper-
sonal relations. Since most of their superiors or colleagues were members of
the majority population – and they themselves are "one of the few excep-
tions" throughout their careers, they have to adapt themselves to this social
world. The international context plays an important role in their achievement
narratives and their rejection of victimization (Konyali 2014). They can ration-
alize their situation by linking experienced obstacles to a restrictive national
context, but they also persisted and "made it" on an international level. Build-
ing an internationally recognized profile seems to be the ultimate evidence
for a successful passage through and beyond national career impediments.

Carving out a professional niche

The second ideal type illustrates how some individuals adapt to dominant
social structure by carving out an ethnic or migrant niche as a career path
towards labour market integration. It is an often-employed strategy to over-
come obstacles, exclusionary rules and structures imposed by established
groups (Liu-Farrer 2011). Migrant entrepreneurship can lead to "altered
rules of entry and promotion in ways that reduce[s] access to a new set of out-
siders" (Waldinger 1994, 28). Here I will show how such a professional niche
can provide opportunities for business service professionals. They can
present themselves as possessing an inherent competence by doing business
with Turkey or Turkish clients within corporate settings and thereby take over
leading positions and high-status business responsibilities (Konyali 2014).

This second ideal type career path in the field consists of following the alternative of working closely within the national context to carve out a niche for themselves based on their individual background characteristics and the specificities of the labour market. The opportunity to represent their company in Turkey was a viable career alternative for some of my respondents. Some respondents grasped the opportunity, for example, when the company announced it had plans to expand to the Turkish market. Respondents therefore made use of a competitive advantage over other applicants, who do not speak the Turkish language or know the country as well as they might do:

> And they asked me if I wanted to go abroad. […] They had taken over a Turkish bank and since I am of Turkish descent and I know the bank well, they thought I could be a good link in that. I left with my family and stayed in Turkey for four years. […] By the end I was managing 1200 men. (Mr Kule, The Netherlands)

> [After my studies] I had difficulties finding a job. I decided to go to Turkey for a while. Once I returned, I received a call from the French branch of a Turkish bank. I had applied before leaving, but only a year afterwards did they call me and this is how I started. (Mr Öztekin, France)

Another respondent noticed that the background of having migrant parents from Turkey helped her to advance professionally in spite of not having a university degree. After a couple of temporary jobs for which speaking the Turkish language was essential, she established herself in a bank by occupying the position of a diversity manager. At the time of the interview, she was participating in an internal leadership programme provided by her company for which her superiors had selected her. Like other respondents, she was very conscious of her rather extraordinary pathway to a leading position in the field, while she also saw herself as an indication of an ongoing change:

> No matter where you look in the bank, there aren't many people with a foreign background. […] However, I feel that there has been an obvious change going on for the past few years. […] And it is going to change even more. (Ms Topal, Sweden)

Respondents in this ideal type are innovative within the available margins while making use of opportunities. They do this by employing individual background characteristics as cultural competences in order to cater to a specific clientele, or they shift the focus of their activities towards the market in Turkey. This opens up new career possibilities. The emphasis on individual attributes stands in contrast to the increasing standardization of required professional capital that characterized the ideal type career path that was presented in the previous section. It seems that they rely more on individual attributes and less on their credentials:

> Of course the education one obtains is very important in life, but I think above all, and this also goes for you, more than the education you receive, you should know what you want in life. If you know what you want, then education is only your decoration, let me tell you that. No one, neither in my banking career, nor in my previous positions, no one has asked me so far whether I studied at university. I mean they did not ask about my academic career. I work at this bank since thirteen years. About half of these 13 years, I have worked in a professional context where the people I talk to are important persons. The meetings are materially very heavy meetings, but thanks to Allah, my head functions well. This means it works. It is not necessary to graduate from university, or to be an academic. Because in the end, even if you are working in a bank, from a certain position onwards you have to act as an entrepreneur. (Mr Beyazıt, Germany)

Many respondents recall being "lonely rangers" in various instances. Often they built up their own network with people who sometimes in a very literal sense taught them about what they need in order to become a successful professional in their area of work. Thereby they often distinguished among so-called internal and external networks. Whereas the former is important to move up within one's current company, the latter are personal references based on the work one delivers that can be useful when one decides to change to another employer, or when one wants to become self-employed.

Becoming independent from corporate hierarchies

The third ideal type is becoming independent from corporate hierarchies. The sections above illustrated once again that having the professional expertise, suitable credentials, and soft skills and significant others are key factors in corporate settings. In these cases, being successful means to climb up the corporate ladder by building an international profile or a professional niche based on individual background resources. However, success can also come about by seeking new opportunities in case of blocked ones. Self-employment is a typical route to upward mobility for individuals who are confronted with limited opportunities. Although it is often perceived as inferior to professional employment in a corporate environment, self-employment can result in substantial economic mobility (Sanders and Nee 1996). Moreover, it can also be a means to come to terms with the frustration and discontent that minority group members might experience in corporate settings. Facing barriers to their advancement, they often become independent in order to make up for a lack of recognition and appreciation (Heilman and Chen 2003).

Indeed, looking at the interviewed respondents, they often linked the plan to become independent to the experience of blocked opportunities. On the one hand, these obstacles are a generic aspect of hierarchies in the corporate environment. On the other hand, respondents also associate them with their ethnic background and the resulting group disadvantage. This is illustrated by

Mr Kaya who tried developing an international profile early in his career by spending a period of his studies abroad, at a time when it was not common to do so in Germany. This made it easier for him to enter the labour market in an international company, which simplified subsequent job application procedures: "that is to say, you then enter a certain circle, where your origins are not so relevant anymore". His career has been shaped by changing positions and companies. After three different jobs in three years, he was recruited to a big company where he stayed for five years. In the end, he also left this company and decided to start his own small firm:

> It is quite clear that you must adapt to the existing culture. And here in Germany that is just the dominant German culture. And if that is not the case or if one has difficulties with it, even if unintended, because there were times, although it has never been my intention, when I just had difficulties integrating.
>
> […]
>
> Actually, I have the feeling that I am confronted with less rejection being self-employed or working as an independent consultant than as an employee within an organization. First, I am freer. Second, the clients definitely accept me. I do not think it would make a big difference if my name was let's say Markus Hoffmann. (Mr Kaya, Germany)

Working in small firms with a few colleagues, and self-employment are other recurrent alternative paths we came across in our respondents' stories. Several people in the sample had done so at different stages of their career. While some professionals had been very successful in managerial positions at multinational companies before entering a smaller firm or starting their own company, others used self-employment as a stepping-stone to prove themselves on the labour market, before being headhunted by larger companies. Furthermore, self-employment means setting up an independent business rather than working for an employer, which has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, it means that one is solely responsible for how work is performed, which also entails a certain degree of risk due to the freedom it provides with regard to structuring one's work:

> I was tired of [being an employee] and wanted to run my own business. This business is what I believe in and I think I want to do this. There are advantages to running your own business and your own company. Success actually depends on how you do your work. (Mr Dost, Sweden)

This ideal type also exemplifies how even for those respondents who managed to establish themselves in a multinational company, leaving for better opportunities is always an option:

> [In five to ten years] I might have my own company. It depends on what chances I will be offered here, whether I can continue following a good path. I have to

have the feeling that I am being rewarded fairly and getting fair chances. Thus, it could also be somewhere else, at another company. (Ms. Karaca, The Netherlands)

Thus, instances where difficulties caused individuals to leave corporate settings in order to seek new opportunities, once again indicate that individual success does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of group disadvantage and institutional barriers at the national level. In fact, if professional achievements depend on "soft skills" and being accepted by "significant others" it is often an indication of structural barriers that can potentially interfere with successful professionalism.

Conclusion

This article paid particular attention to three ideal type alternative career paths, which socially mobile children of migrants from Turkey follow based on their experience of typical national conditions that hinder their advancement. Striking similarities across four countries provide evidence for the increasing standardization of the field, whereas variation lies among individual responses to structural barriers. The analysis has shown that being able to acquire a leading position in this predominantly international context is not in itself a way to surpass the impact of national conditions on career paths. There are three distinct alternative career paths across settings to overcome this (see Table 2). The findings once more indicate how success and failure are not simply two opposite points but rather should be seen as a continuum. It seems that even professionally successful children of migrants who attain high-status positions experienced national conditions that impede their opportunities.

The three alternatives are ideal types. That is to say, individuals often experience several transitional career stages. Furthermore, when looking at

Table 2. Three ideal type alternative career paths.

Career path	Perceived impact of national conditions
Alternative 1: Building an international profile	Entering the field and climbing up the corporate ladder in spite of difficulties that are related to the national context → Working in international companies as a way to avoid further impact of national conditions on individual career paths. Credentials provide evidence for professional competence.
Alternative 2: Carving out a professional niche	Experiencing initial difficulties that are related to the national context when entering the field or climbing up the corporate ladder → Carving out a niche is a way to navigate through national conditions in corporate environments by making use of individual background resources.
Alternative 3: Becoming independent from corporate hierarchies	Blocked by obstacles that are related to the national context, which prevents them from climbing the corporate ladder → Working successfully in this field by becoming independent from corporate hierarchies through working in smaller firms or becoming self-employed.

single cases, one can see that various elements of the different ideal types may overlap. For instance, the "niche" career path might eventually be considered just another way of entering position that enables one to build an international profile. Likewise, the "independent" path could be seen as an instance of failure that provides the counterfactual to the other two alternative career paths that take place in corporate settings. However, whereas some international professionals in the field founded their own firm before being "headhunted" by other companies, others had enjoyed considerable success in the corporate environment before deciding to become independent.

Studying an under-researched group of newcomers such as descendants of migrants from Turkey in leading professional positions, provides valuable insights into how even "successful" individuals experience structural barriers and the impact of national conditions. Although, as Schinkel (2007, 2013) argues, they cannot logically be "outside" of their societies as the dominant integration paradigm conceptualizes them, migrants and their descendants are continuously confronted with discrimination and exclusion. Nonetheless, the presented ideal type career paths are consistent with the *embracing* and *adaptive* career orientations identified by Zikic, Bonache, and Cerdin (2010). That is to say, their reflections on their career paths and prospects were overwhelmingly positive, whereas there was no compelling evidence of a lack of motivation to adapt in the face of obstacles. One might argue that this is simply caused by a self-imposed methodological limitation due to "selecting on the dependent variable" (cf. conclusion of this special issue – Crul et al. in press). However, this seems only part of the story, as it is more convincing to view their embracing and adaptive attitudes as part of their overall perseverance in seeking opportunities.

Notes

1. He refers to the *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles (CPGE)*. These preparatory classes consist of at least two intensive years of training with the foremost aim to prepare undergraduate students for the enrolment in one of the *grandes écoles*.
2. Respondents' names were changed in order to maintain their anonymity.

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