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Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

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Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE) is a concept developed in the 1990s as a result of a shift away from an individualistic and personality-based view of entrepreneurship towards understanding entrepreneurship as a social process embedded in a local context shaped by cultural, historical, political, economic, and social factors and structures (Figure 25) (Friederici et al. 2020: 152; Galperin and Melyoki 2018: 31 ff.).

The term **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem** describes the complex system of a wide variety of firms, institutions, and organisations that entrepreneurs and their ventures are operating in (Neumeyer and Corbett 2017: 36).



Figure 25: Stakeholders and context factors in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. Source: Own representation

According to this approach, firms, and entrepreneurs always operate in a system composed of other entrepreneurs, regulatory institutions, consumers, suppliers, financial institutions, equity investors, support services, universities, and other institutions (**Figure 25**) (Spigel 2017: 49; Stam 2015: 1763). The management scientist James Moore was among the first to use the **metaphor** of the ecosystem for this purpose (Moore 1993: 76). He compared the system, where entrepreneurs are building their ventures, to a natural ecosystem. Thereby, he emphasized the extensive **interdependencies** and **interrelationships** of the various stakeholders and also pointed to the dynamic nature of the entrepreneurial environment (Moore 1993: 76 ff.; Neumeyer and Corbett 2017: 36). The concept is mostly applied as an analytical tool to understand the economic structure in specific places around the world, including in African countries. It should help identify the structures' weaknesses and potentials, in order for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and other actors to optimize the system in terms of ease of doing business (Chohra 2019: 248; Neumeyer et al. 2019: 463).

According to the dominant perception, a 'good' EE features synergetic interrelationships and interactions among its stakeholders, sufficient resources (human resources, finance etc.), adequate infrastructure, and a policy framework that encourages

entrepreneurship (Galperin and Melyoki 2018: 30; Neumeyer and Corbett 2017: 36).

The approach of EE is usually employed in connection with a narrow understanding of entrepreneurship in terms of **high-tech** and **high-growth ventures**. Even among African countries, the EE of Silicon Valley is often regarded as the ideal model to aspire to (Friederici et al. 2020: 119; Neumeyer and Corbett 2017: 38). A large share of entrepreneurship in the world, particularly in many countries of the Global South, consists of **survival ventures**, that are far away from the Silicon Valley inspired dreams of growth into corporations worth billions.

Survival ventures, also known as **necessity ventures**, are small and micro enterprises that serve as a means of generating a basic income, for example, due to a lack of wage labor or as a supplement to it (Gugu and Mworira 2016: 442; Neumeyer et al. 2019: 469).



Photo 25: Symbolic image of a high-tech venture. Source: <https://unsplash.com/photos/IZLgqliFHSw> (accessed on: 01 March 2022)

By focusing almost exclusively on high-growth ventures, both academia and policymakers fail to conceptualise and act on the realities of a large proportion of entrepreneurs (Gugu and Mworira 2016: 442; Neumeyer et al. 2019: 463–470).

However, there are exceptions, (e.g., Neumeyer et al. 2019; Neumeyer and Corbett 2017), who do not provide a comprehensive fundamental critique but include survival ventures and apply the concept of EE to address inequalities and discrimination in entrepreneurship, pointing out, for example, that women are severely underrepresented in high-growth and high-tech start-ups (Neumeyer et al. 2019: 464). Mainstream perspectives often underestimate the **heterogeneity** of EEs and their stakeholders. Class, ethnicity, gender, education, relationships and network, and other factors alternate the experiences entrepreneurs make in an EE, by influencing access to the system and its resources such as finance (Friederici et al. 2020: 145; Neumeyer and Corbett 2017: 38). Not only are women, less educated people, and minorities less likely to be granted loans, but they also receive only a small fraction of the **venture capital** that is available in an EE (Naegels et al. 2018: 19; Neumeyer and Corbett 2017: 38).

Venture capital refers to temporally limited capital investments in start-ups. In the process, investors buy equity shares with the aim of executing an exit after a certain period of time, selling the shares or being paid out by the founders. Venture capitalists speculate on the multiplication of the firm's value so that their investments correspondingly increase in value over the fixed period. For start-ups, venture capital can be especially valuable in the early stages of their business, when little if any revenue is generated, as large sums of money become available without interest rates (Zhang 2017: 1–4).

Besides the disparities within individual EEs, the distribution of venture capital also reveals differences between ecosystems on a global scale. For example, in 2019, on the entire African continent (with a population of 1.3 billion, and a GDP of US\$2.2 trillion) only US\$725.6 million was invested in the form of venture capital, while in the same period, the city of Berlin alone (with a population of 3 million, a GDP of US\$18 billion) attracted a total of US\$2.6 billion (Friederici et al. 2020: 149).

Some governments and development actors (e.g. GIZ, World Bank) recognize these seeming deficiencies in EEs, especially in those on the African continent. In order to improve the conditions for entrepreneurship

and thus generate economic development, efforts are undertaken to 'optimize' EEs (Friederici et al. 2020: 142 ff.).

Yet Entrepreneurial Ecosystem is a **Western concept** that was developed in adoption to the local contexts in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, it is being applied all over the world by policy makers and international economic and development actors without adjusting it to the given contextual conditions, which are, for example, influenced by colonialities. As a result, policies related to EEs are primarily aimed at creating economic conditions that are as similar as possible to those in the West, in order to facilitate the growth of enterprises that correspond to a Western understanding of entrepreneurship. Many of the efforts to build "good" EEs in the Global South can thus be situated in the realm of **catch-up development** – an idea based on the Western racist and colonialist **superiority complex** (Gugu and Mworira 2016: 432; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 3; Sambajee and Weston 2015: 2 ff.).

Chatch-up development is the conception of development according to which "inferior" non-Western states should modernize and industrialize themselves, following the example of the "superior" West. This approach is based on a racist colonialist and Euro-American-centric hierarchical world view and finds its origins in W.W. Rostow's stage-oriented conception of development from the 1960s (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 2 ff.; Ziai 2016: 47 ff.).

Materialisation of “Entrepreneurial Ecosystems” in Dar es Salaam

By far the largest entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tanzania, in terms of number of entrepreneurs and volume of resources, is the one in Dar es Salaam (Galperin and Melyoki 2018: 37). According to the Statistical Business Register Report, in 2015 there were almost three times as many firms in Tanzania's most populated city as in Mbeya, Morogoro or Ruvuma and more than seven times as many as in the second largest city Mwanza (**Figure 26**) (The United Republic of Tanzania 2016: 25).

Number of business establishments ■ = 100

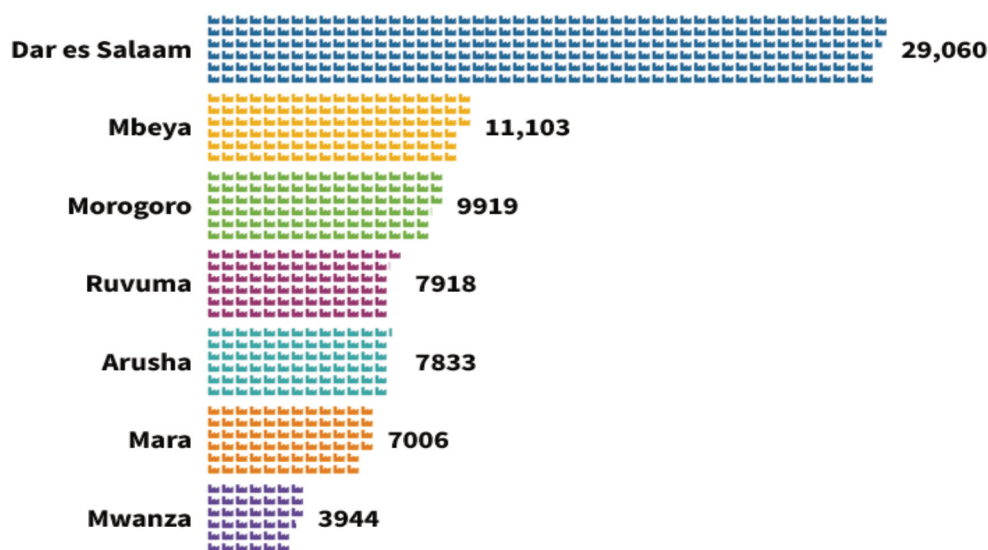


Figure 26: Number of business establishments in Tanzania's urban centres in 2015. Source: Own representation based on The United Republic of Tanzania 2016: 25

Since the early 2010s, it has been repeatedly predicted that in Dar es Salaam, among other major African cities, ‘vibrant’ EEs will emerge. Population growth, a stable government, growing middle classes, and high urbanization rates - Dar es Salaam is one of the ten fastest-growing cities in the world - have been cited as drivers of this anticipated development (Friederici et al. 2020: 117; Galperin and Melyoki 2018: 37; Gugu and Mworira 2016: 431). In contrast, however, more pessimistic scholars describe the EE in Dar es Salaam as deficient and emphasize the **institutional voids**, such as lack of infrastructure, lengthy and complicated bureaucratic processes, underdeveloped capital markets and a weak regulatory environment (Naegels et al. 2018: 2 ff.). Mwandiyosya et al. for example, point out that

entrepreneurs face the risk of their ideas being stolen by others due to a lack of intellectual property rights (2016: 4).

Like many development actors, the Tanzanian government considers the enhancement of its EEs as an integral vehicle for Tanzania's economic development. Accordingly, wide-ranging policies and development projects have been launched addressing Dar es Salaam's EE, including the establishment of **support organisations** such as start-up hubs and business incubators (Galperin and Melyoki 2018: 46–50). Support organisations function as an entry point for foreign investors is particularly important from the policymakers' point of view, as the finance sector of the EE in Dar es Salaam is considered to be particularly ‘underdeveloped’ (ibid. : 42 ff.).

Support organisations are bodies that are intended to strengthen the links between actors within the EE, reduce fixed costs and facilitate the growth of start-ups by providing office space, consultancy and other support services. Moreover, support organisations serve the purpose of attracting foreign investors (Friederici et al. 2020: 138 ff.; Mwandosya et al. 2016: 1 ff.).



Photo 26: Symbolic image of a support organisation. Source: <https://unsplash.com/photos/gIRqyWJgUeY> (accessed on: 01 March 2022)

Most business entities obtain their starting capital from private sources and through loans from friends and family. Only 20% of Tanzanian businesses receive funding via loans from banks or micro-finance institutions (Naegels et al. 2018: 9). This is mainly the result of unfavorable conditions such as high interest rates and extensive collateral requirements. At the same time, as noted

elsewhere (see e.g. Greene et al. 2001), patriarchal structures come to light. Not only are women at a disadvantage under the Tanzanian inheritance law and therefore tend to have fewer assets to list as collaterals, but women also receive less education, while banks tend to give loans on better terms to individuals with a higher level of education (Naegels et al. 2018: 17 ff.). In a study by Naegels et al. only 38% of women entrepreneurs claim that access to credit is 'women-friendly' (2018: 17).

Venture capital is scarce in Dar es Salaam and is usually only invested at later stages when significant market traction has already been gained and initial sales have been generated (Mwandosya et al. 2016: 5). Most venture capitalists in Tanzania originate from **Europe** and invest primarily in the companies that correspond best to their Western ideas of doing business. They are said to interfere more in the management, strategy, and governance of Tanzanian start-ups they have invested in than they typically do with their European counterparts (Gugu and Mworira 2016: 432; Mkwana 2020). This not only leads to skepticism on the part of entrepreneurs who want to retain control of their venture but is also a manifestation of a colonial European superiority complex that leads venture capitalists into believing they are more capable of successfully running a firm despite a lack of contextual knowledge (Gugu and Mworira 2016: 431–441).

The policymakers' activities, however, do not only relate to the area of support and financial institutions but also aim to bring about a cultural change. The objective is to promote an **entrepreneurial spirit**, which is allegedly lacking due to Tanzania's socialist past (Galperin and Melyoki 2018: 47–50; Mwandosya et al. 2016: 5). In fact, in 2020 56.1% of Tanzania's working population was self-employed (**Figure 27**) (The United Republic of Tanzania 2021: 7). This suggests that there is not a

lack of entrepreneurial spirit or of entrepreneurs per se, but only of those who match the high-growth companies exemplified by their counterparts in Silicon Valley (Naegels et al. 2018: 9). It implies a perceived superiority of Western (entrepreneurial) culture, which once again reveals that at the core of entrepreneurship policy making lies the **colonially-inspired ethos** of catch-up development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 3; Sambajee and Weston 2015: 3–7).

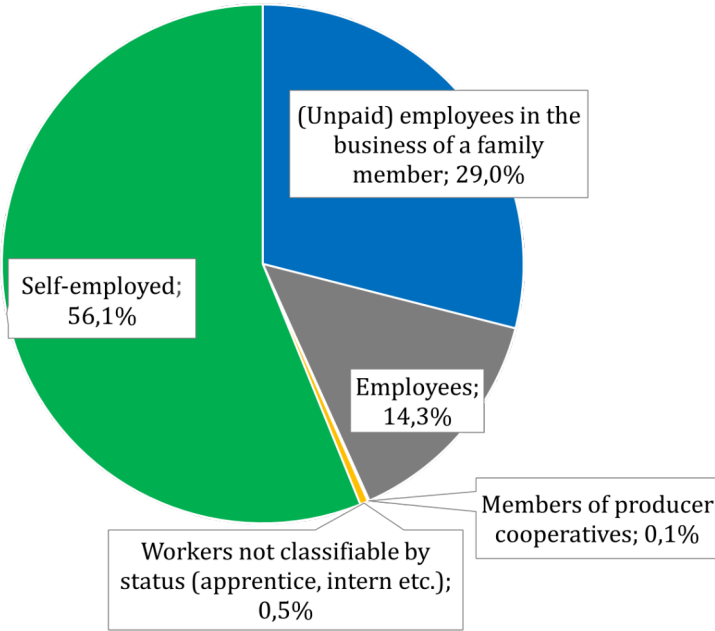


Figure 27: Status of employment of Tanzania's working population in 2020. Source: Own representation

Script for the Excursion Day



Figure 28: The locations of the day's activities. Source: Open Street Map (accessed on: 01 March 2022)

1st Part: Meeting with Professor Bwire, Dr. Nguni and Dr. Machuve (08:30 am)

We will start the day by meeting the team of Professor Bwire, who directs the University of Dar es Salaam Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre (UDIEC). The team will introduce us to the mandate, strategies and operations of the Centre, as well as the challenges and opportunities found within the Dar entrepreneurial ecosystem. This will also involve addressing issues such as uneven access to venture capital and the role of gender, ethnicity, race and skills in shaping this.

2nd Part: Group work (10:15 am)

After our meeting with Prof Bwire and his team, we will stay at the university and conduct two group exercises. In the first, we will take a closer look at the actor landscape in Dar es Salaam's EE, while with the second exercise, we will try to think our way into the processes of a support organization.

3rd Part: Meeting with Jumanne Mtambalike (1:00 pm)

After a strengthening lunch, we will visit the entrepreneur Jumanne Mtambalike in his office. Jumanne Mtambalike is the founder and CEO of Sahara Ventures, a consultancy and investment firm with a focus on Start-ups in Dar es Salaam (Sahara Ventures 2022).

Mr Mtambalike will share with us his inside perspective as an entrepreneur in Dar es Salaam. We will also have the opportunity to talk to him about the particularities of EE in Dar es Salaam.

Postscript for the Day of the Excursion on: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Summary of the Day

The first appointment of the day, a meeting with Prof. Bwire and his team (University of Dar es Salaam), unfortunately, could not take place due to a lack of communication on both sides and the circumstance that the excursion day took place on Good Friday, a public holiday in Tanzania. Potentially, the meeting would have offered an insight into the University of Dar es Salaam's engagement in entrepreneurship. However, the fact that the University of Dar es Salaam Directorate of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (UDIEC) is provided with its own four-storey building indicates the importance the university attributes to entrepreneurship (**Photo 27**).



Photo 27: Building of the UDIEC.
Source: Own Picture, 2022

Prof. Ouma utilized the spare time slot by presenting a research project and a master's thesis, both dealing with inequalities and discrimination in the field of entrepreneurship on the African continent.

The day continued with group work in which the students discussed different types of stakeholders (entrepreneurs, support organisations etc.) in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE) of Dar es Salaam. Here, the most important learning was how diverse and at the same time intertwined the different groups of actors are.

Since we did not receive any feedback despite numerous requests sent to different support organisations, our meeting with Jumanne Mtambalike was the only item on the afternoon's agenda. However, he offered us interesting insights into Dar es Salaam's EE and shared with us his exemplary perspective as a participating entrepreneur.

Reflecting on the Keyword Entry “Entrepreneurial Ecosystem” after the Field

Through the various program points, many new views on the EE of Dar es Salaam were gained. Prof. Ouma's presentation demonstrated that inequalities in access to venture capital are not

limited to the forms of discrimination emphasized in the keyword entry – gender and education – but also **race and nationality**. Particularly striking was the case of Kenya, where only 6% of enterprises receiving funding of at least USD 1 million were founded by Kenyans. In similar fashion white founders are 47,000% more likely to be funded in Kenya than they are in the USA (Ndemo et al., 2022). Even though such surveys are not available for Tanzania, according to Jumanne Mtambalike, foreign entrepreneurs are active in Tanzania as well and claim a significant share of venture capital, since "entrepreneurs know no borders, only potential". Yet, it takes place on a different scale in Tanzania compared to Kenya, as the entrepreneur pointed out during our meeting. This is also due to the different paths taken after independence. Prof. Ouma noted that Kenya made little effort to dismantle colonial structures after independence, while Tanzania pursued radical **anti-imperialism** and ensured that Tanzania did not develop into an "expat economy", a term often used by critics, to characterize Kenya's economy.

The concept of EE, as it is described in the keyword entry, is understood as a locally contained system, despite certain connections to the "outside". However, examples provided by Jumanne Mtambalike show that European investors are not exclusively invested in one specific market and move capital between markets depending on

the local economic or political situation. Likewise, entrepreneurs originate from all over the world, and often they are active in different locations simultaneously. Additionally, enterprises based in Dar es Salaam can move their headquarters to where they see the greatest advantages - for example, to tax havens such as Mauritius.

Thus, two theses can be deduced. Firstly, it shows that EE is not an isolated and spatially delimited system, but rather that it is debound by **translocal** participants. Therefore, it might be more accurate to speak of a superordinate **global Entrepreneurial Ecosystem** that is comprised of regional and local subsystems, such as Dar es Salaam's EE. Secondly, it suggests that actors and resources in this sector are mobile and not tied to a particular place. Hence, Dar es Salaam as a space for entrepreneurship only emerges through social interactions that entrepreneurs and other involved stakeholders engage in, while temporarily sharing a **spatial relationship** to the city.

The keyword entry emphasises the interactions and interdependencies between the different stakeholders in the EE. However, in the group work, we observed the extent to which the different actors are interwoven and can no longer be clearly distinguished from each other. The career path of Jumanne Mtambalike confirms this observation. While he considers himself an entrepreneur,

Mr. Mtambalike's firm offers various support services for start-ups. He also works at the University of Dar es Salaam, advises established multinationals such as Uber, is currently preparing a project for USAid and has worked with and for the government in the past. He can therefore no longer be defined as a sole entrepreneur, but rather combines, hyperbolically put, the types of actors of entrepreneur, university, government, other companies, and development agencies in his person.

About those development agencies, Mr. Mtambalike expressed critical remarks. While they are an important early-stage funder, through the awarding of grants they leave the enterprises in later stages to their own devices, even though there is a lack of capital providers, especially for these phases. Pitching competitions, which are often used by development agencies to award grants, would also negatively affect the climate in the EE of Dar es Salaam, by changing it from cooperative to competitive. Moreover, the development agencies reinforce existing inequalities. The target group of most programs are well-educated young adults in urban centres. According to Jumanne Mtambalike, they are already a privileged group and are therefore fostered in their privileged status, while underprivileged groups and particularly rural dwellers usually do not gain access to these programs.

Mr. Mtambalike further confirmed the claim made in the keyword entry that European investors, as well as development organisations, are most likely to promote firms that embody Silicon Valley inspired mentalities of fast growth and/or Western ideas of doing business.

According to Jumanne Mtambalike, many of these companies, whose primary goal is rapid growth, are not able to accurately address existing societal concerns and sometimes actively evade **social responsibility**, for example, by moving their headquarters to tax havens in order to deprive the Tanzanian government of its due tax revenue. Moreover, they are not successful in the medium and long term because these "Silicon Valley-type" ventures are often insufficiently adapted to local conditions.

Such views are opposed by Moses Nyangu, a scholar at the Strathmore University Business School in Kenya, with whom we had a conversation over breakfast on the day of our departure. He favors the involvement of development agencies because, in his opinion, they are able to see the "bigger picture" and achieve long-term goals for the improvement of living conditions in Dar es Salaam as they are not dependent on quick returns. However, this presupposes that development organizations, firstly, know the actual needs of society, secondly, priorities these and not, for example, the interests of their own government and, thirdly, are

able to identify the ventures that deliver the appropriate solutions.

Moreover, our visit to the GIZ two days prior revealed that development agencies are often unable to pursue their own agendas. Rather, they are in constant conflict between the goals of the institution to which they are bound and those of the local authorities, which forces them to compromise accordingly.

Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Upscaling the Topic

When conducting a scaled-up fundamental critical research on the EE in Dar es Salaam that includes interviews with experts, more and broader interviewees are needed. Interviewing an insider like Jumanne Mtambalike can add value to the research, as his claims may contribute to an understanding of the structures and processes in the system, which the researcher subsequently critically analyses on his own. However, being a participant and profiteer of the EE, he can hardly be expected to question its fundamentals. In doing so, he would possibly dispute the system's legitimacy, and thus also the legitimacy of his own occupation and biography.

Nevertheless, Jumanne Mtambalike also expressed critical positions that we had not expected. We anticipated stereotypical narratives that prioritise profit and lack

consideration for the creation of social value. This shows our **bias** towards the interviewee, which can result firstly in us being overly critical of them and secondly in misinterpretations of what is being said. Thirdly, it can also lead us into unprepared interview situations, where the flow of the conversation is disrupted (Holmes, 2020: 2). In the present case, however, the latter was not an obstacle since our conversation with Jumanne Mtambalike can be understood as a narrative interview according to Lamnek (2010: 349 ff.). By narrating freely, he provided us not only with information from the content of what is said but also what he prioritised to say, which therefore might be meaningful to him (Mattissek et al., 2013: 158–174).

Yet, as Jumanne Mtambalike knew about our background in humanities and could have discovered with a short internet search that Prof. Ouma engages in critical research, chances are that he adjusted his statements and, for example, expressed certain critical stances that correspond to our orientation, although they are of low priority in his personal view. In scaled-up research, such **adaptations to the researcher** can be problematic as they distort the findings and the researcher is potentially insufficiently challenged in her/his views (Bogner and Menz, 2002: 16–20; Mattissek et al., 2013: 163 ff.).

Hierarchies were not necessarily pivotal for Jumanne Mtambalike potentially adapting his remarks to

us, since according to his own criteria he himself is privileged as an urban and educated entrepreneur. Nevertheless, particularly in social configurations where a strong hierarchy prevails between the researcher and the respondent, it is particularly likely that the latter will alter her*his responses because s*he does not dare to oppose the researcher, out of intimidation, respect, or other related sentiments. However, such hierarchies are often not apparent at first glance, hence it is crucial to be aware of the own **positionality** and to critically reflect on it (Kaaristo, 2022: 2–5).

The excursion increased my awareness of my positionality and especially my own privileged status, as it became evident, for example, in the fact that various interlocutors and organisations took a considerable amount of time and effort for us, even though we hardly had anything to offer them in return (**Photo 28**). Whereas, due to unequal and colonial global power relations that surround mobilities, it seems questionable whether a Tanzanian student group would have been able to make an educational trip to Germany at all and whether they would have received the same special treatment (Kunz, 2016: 97 ff.). It is particularly problematic when it is acknowledged that these privileges are the result of colonialities (Mekonnen Tesfahuney and Schough, 2016: 4–9).



Photo 28: Our excursion group sitting in the front row reserved for us, at a public lecture held on the occasion of our visit to Tumaini University, Usa River. Source: Rehobuamu Magadu

This raises the question of whether it is ethically justifiable at all for a white European to take advantage of colonial privileges to travel to African countries, let alone to work or to conduct research there. The latter may also reproduce the hegemonic position of academia from the Global North and possibly occupy space that authors from the Global South may use for self-representation (Cook, 2005: 22; Müller, 2021: 1442 ff.; 1448 ff.). Acknowledging that my presence on the African continent is inescapably accompanied by **colonial privilege**, my first notion was to stay out of African countries “touristically”, academically, and professionally (Kunz, 2016: 91 ff., 98; Oliveira Andreotti, 2014: 22–26). But in doing so, am I perhaps just taking an easy way out? After all, my staying away in no way changes the existing colonialities. Do I maybe even have a responsibility to use my privilege to draw attention to the structures and to challenge them? If I work do I maybe even have a responsibility

to use my privilege to draw attention to the structures and to challenge them? If I work academically or professionally on Africa-related issues, am I taking up space that could be occupied by Africans? Or would the space, because of the existing racist and colonial structures, be occupied by another white person from the Global North anyway?

In conclusion, the field trip provided valuable insights into the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. It also suggested that a more comprehensive approach would appear to be desirable for scaled-up research, especially in terms of interviewees, while it raised questions rather than answers regarding my approach to my own positionality. Perhaps, however, it lays in the very nature of critical science that questions occur, where no answers are in sight (Marinopoulou, 2019: 147 ff; Oliveira Andreotti, 2014: 27).

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