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Benitez Avila, C.A.; Delgado Medina, Fátima

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The Coloniality of the "Entrepreneurial Ecosystem" in the Obsession for Urban Global Competitiveness

Camilo Andrés Benítez-Ávila and Fátima Delgado Medina

Introduction

"Entrepreneurship ecosystems" (EEs) literature compels urban governing coalitions to coordinate actors, institutional arrangements, and resource endowments to increase the net output or capacity of regional economies to produce additional economic outputs (Stam & van de Ven, 2021). This approach recommends urban interventions to attract "creative people" with skills and knowledge to match infrastructure, finance and demand, leading to a competitive city. Particularly, setting the right entrepreneurial culture is the common denominator of universalising urban models such as the eco-managerial, smart, resilient, and sustainable "city," often fuelled by conceptual tools, methods, and practices sponsored by international organisations. Overall, entrepreneurship at the core of contemporary urban governance influences cities, neighbourhoods, and inhabitants' identities (Luederitz et al., 2023). Being entrepreneurial is the urban policy by default to the extent that, for many, differences in urban direction are a matter of degree rather than substance (Davidson & Gleeson, 2014). However, such influence is not necessarily positive. There is increasing evidence that the "EEs" rhetoric negatively influences the self-perceptions of entrepreneurs that do not fit the canonical entrepreneurial model (Lassalle & Shaw, 2021). Our contribution

C. A. Benítez-Ávila (✉) · F. Delgado Medina
Delft Centre for Entrepreneurship, Delft University of Technology, Delft, The Netherlands
e-mail: c.a.benitezavila@tudelft.nl

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adds to this conversation by disentailing the nature of the "EEs" discourse as an instantiation of a wider structural form of "Coloniality of power" intrinsic to the contemporary obsession with urban global competitiveness.

Alfonso Quijano coined the term "Coloniality of power" to conceptualise the structure of power based on the *idea* of race, setting the hierarchical social classification co-determining world capitalism (Quijano, 1992). The main novelty is Quijano's conceptualisation of global labour division as a function of racialised domination reproduced through European ways of producing knowledge. This insight has been foundational for the contemporary critique of the Eurocentric production of knowledge disguised as universal in social and critical entrepreneurial research. However, critical scholars often overlook that Quijano's original concern was accounting for the articulation of "labour" and "race" in the hierarchical system of world capitalism (Mendoza, 2020). In this context, accessing knowledge and ways of being of the coloniser opens a possibility for social mobility in the hierarchy of the racialised economic organisation, and simultaneously, such material possibility rests upon the mystification of European epistemological structures presented as "superior." Hence, power originates from seduction, fascination, and the "*aspiration of being*" embedded in the colonised mind (Mendoza, 2020), luring the imagination with the opportunity to access colonial power through appropriating the aesthetics, knowledge, and European ways of being.

We define "aspiration of being" as the desire to adopt a dominant power's values, behaviours, and identities to overcome inferior status and gain social or economic mobility, even though this aspiration might be unattainable. We argue that the "EEs" concept operates like a typical mechanism of an "aspirational being" in the context of the "entrepreneurial city." Not only do "EEs" marginalise alternative entrepreneurship to emphasise the accumulation of capital (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2018), but it also feeds an obsession for innovation, ranking, and city marketing (Hollands, 2023). This obsession for global competitiveness trickles down to an internal compulsion to classify localities and inhabitants based on their functional contributions to the competitive city in many places of the Global North. Legacies of past waves of low-skilled migrants become liability references for the city**,** so "EEs" re-introduce them as a second order of entrepreneurs or as individuals responsible for assuming an entrepreneurial attitude to address their own vulnerability. Hence, "being entrepreneurial" operates as a mystified knowledge and practice "promising" cities and inhabitants to overcome the liabilities attached to their low-skilled and racialised identities.

Our contribution is conceptual in nature, supported by an exploratory empirical approach to illustrate the concept. Accordingly, we first present the

state of the art to make a case for understanding marginal entrepreneurship and "EEs." Then, we introduce "entrepreneurial city" as a form of urban governance and "EEs" as an instantiation of its rationality. We, therefore, illustrate how the entrepreneurial city unfolds as a hierarchical system with an obsession for re-configuring urban spaces and populations to lure capital investors. Then, we question if such an "aspiration of being" operates upon the "coloniality of power" premises as obsession, establishing three conditions upon which one could claim such a case. Namely, (1) city branding for competitiveness (2) ethnic-based problematisation of citizens (3) dialectics of luring as desire. The third condition is the existence of a chance to overcome citizenship inferiority by embracing entrepreneurial values, yet realising one can never fully become the entrepreneur idealised for global competition. We discuss the presence of these conditions in the case of Rotterdam (the Netherlands) based on long-term authors' research on urban governance discourses in the city. The discourse problematises the migrant background turned obsolete due to economic transformation and simultaneously opens opportunities to valorise them as entrepreneurs for dealing with their vulnerability. The implication is a desvalorisation of the citizenship condition of those who have turned as economically vulnerable in the guise of their inclusion in the entrepreneurial ecosystem from a subaltern perspective.

Theoretical Background

Entrepreneurship Ecosystems "EEs" and Marginal Entrepreneurship

"EEs" literature has predominantly associated productive entrepreneurship with the technology sector in thriving urban areas (Acs et al., 2017; Colombo et al., 2019), led by high-growth firms (Tsvetkova et al., 2019) and associating entrepreneurship with venture capital (Aldrich & Ruef, 2017). This niche approach has permeated scholar circles and influenced public perceptions and policy-making frameworks in urban entrepreneurialism (Marvel et al., 2020). There is, therefore, plenty of research on how entrepreneurship shapes the configuration of the urban as entrepreneurial actors exchange knowledge and build entrepreneurial social capital (Fischer et al., 2022; Khurana & Dutta, 2024; Schutjens & Völker, 2010). Nevertheless, the emphasis placed on the net output of regional economies necessarily entails a narrow selection of the types of entrepreneurial activity deemed worthy of study. A selection, which, in practice, entails the exclusion of alternative entrepreneurial actors and

activities. "EEs" marginalise alternative entrepreneurship to emphasise capital accumulation (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2018). When the narrow focus of "EEs" scholarship turns into policy advice, it reinforces the obsession for rankings and competitiveness and determines who can benefit from these ecosystems portrayed as goals of public interest.

The exclusion of diverse manifestations of entrepreneurship is a subject of recent empirical research questioning the relevance and long-term viability of the narrow scope of the "EEs." In particular, these scholars question what defines an "EEs" and what types of entrepreneurship it should support for a future for many rather than a few (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2022). Empirical research on entrepreneurship of marginalised groups includes informal workers (Igwe et al., 2020), refugees (Meyer, 2020), immigrants (Duan et al., 2021), elderly entrepreneurs (Chang et al., 2024; Kupiainen et al., 2023) and women (Lassalle & Shaw, 2021). These empirical approaches aim to counteract the lack of attention put in by the prevailing "EEs" framework that overlooks the experiences of racialised and marginalised entrepreneurs who do not fit within this idealised model. These contributions move away from the "heroic individual" concept (Kupiainen et al., 2023; Ogbor, 2000) and bring to the front end the wider concern for inclusive economic growth (Bakker & McMullen, 2023). Entrepreneurship can promote economic empowerment and reduce inequality for historically disadvantaged groups (Lyons et al., 2018). The increasing attention to multiple manifestations of entrepreneurship calls for a more inclusive approach to "EEs" design and theorisation to better understand the experiences of underrepresented groups in ecosystems (Fini et al., 2024).

One influential approach for theorising alternative entrepreneurship focuses on the intersectional experience of entrepreneurs confronting the "EEs" rhetoric. Bruton et al. (2023) call for a racialised view of entrepreneurship, highlighting the distinct challenges underrepresented entrepreneurs face and questioning the generalisation of mainstream research findings to non-marginalised contexts. EEs often perpetuate biases and structural inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalised groups. The research examines sociocultural factors like gender (Brush et al., 2009) or economic class (Audretsch & Belitski, 2021) in isolation, failing to consider how these factors intersect and influence entrepreneurial outcomes. For marginalised entrepreneurs, venture creation is not just about economic opportunity; it also serves as a tool for challenging existing social and cultural constraints, offering a way to reshape relationships with resource providers and affirm their identities in the business world (Rindova et al., 2009). The intersectional approach is relevant to understanding how multiple identities—such

as race, class, and gender—interact to shape the experiences of entrepreneurs from marginalised backgrounds.

Accounting for the diversity of experiences faced by racialised and marginalised entrepreneurs helps recognise entrepreneurship as a means for economic innovation and a vehicle for empowerment and social transformation. In our opinion, this important phenomenological contribution of intersectional entrepreneurship requires being complemented with a structural account of the cultural and social conditions that shape the experience of racialised entrepreneurship in urban areas. In this regard, the work of the Peruvian sociologist Alfonso Quijano on the coloniality of power and theorisation on urban governance provides a framework for grasping this structural landscape where cultural and socio-material orders are shaped by what we call "aspiration of being" of urban entrepreneurialism.

Urban Entrepreneurialism and "*Aspiration of Being*"

From 1960 onwards, the urban became the crucial geographical unit for deploying and developing the global division of labour and resource production. (Lefebvre, 2003). Alfonso Quijano himself conceptualised urbanisation as a process to explain the transformation of rural and urban relations in Latin America (Vegliò, 2021). Socio-spatial structures inherited from colonialism, typically rural, were re-configured in the emergence of a world-economy society dominated by industrial capital and labour logic. Hence, for Quijano, the "urban" is not just a place but a social relation emerging from the economic process driving migration from rural areas to the city. Consequently, Quijano shares the basic tenets of Critical Urban Studies and Human Geography scholarship, which assert that "urban" comprises the set of socio-economic relations that exceed the city's space (Vegliò, 2021). Socio-spatial dynamics taking materiality in urban areas are merely outcomes of the re-configuration of socio-economic and cultural relations that often extend beyond the city's geographical boundaries. Correspondingly, "the viability of all capital accumulation strategies, modes of state regulation, and forms of socio-political mobilisation have come to depend crucially upon the ability to produce, appropriate, organise, restructure, and control social space." (Brenner, 1998, p. 1).

The restructuring of relations and human economic activity in cities lead to the emergence of the entrepreneurial city as the archetypal form of urban governance (Harvey, 1989). Since 1970, city governing coalitions have become managers whose main responsibility is guaranteeing the conditions for development, economic growth, and job creation. Providing a "good

business climate" is the main mechanism of inter-urban competition in the context of the flexibilisation of capital after the crisis of Fordism (Harvey, 1989). Inter-city competition poses pressure on cities to structure an enabling environment for exploiting competitive advantages to attract the "right" labour power (knowledge economy, manufactory), exploit the spatial division of consumption and quality of life (i.e., tourism, creative industries), control key control and command functions (i.e., finance, information) or compete for national budgets (i.e., defence subsidies) (Harvey, 1989). In all cases, the public sector operates as a corporate actor, providing the enabling conditions for public–private partnerships to attract capital while usually absorbing risk. The "enabling" role and corresponding investments seek to impact beyond the immediate territory (and its inhabitants) to the wider effect on growth, local labour markets, and city competitiveness.

Certainly, the diverse paths of historical development, agential mediation of structural pressures, and the confluence of multiple rationalities shaping locality discard that urban outcomes follow a single top-down profit-driven logic (Robinson, 2005). Harvey (1989) could not account for the multiple urban transformations introduced by technology (Pollio & Rossi, 2024), let alone that cities have also turned into the locus for experiments and solutions to build resilience and tackle sustainability problems (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2020; Elmqvist et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the urban remains the privileged place for investment and the grounding area, linking sustainability concerns to the economics of innovation for transition and giving rise to a "governmentality rationality shaped by the culture of urban entrepreneurialism" (Pollio & Rossi, 2024, p. 320).

Such influence, we argue, shapes a cultural-political-economy upon an "aspiration of being" and the concern for innovating strategies to enhance and maintain their competitiveness vis-à-vis other economic spaces (Jessop & Sum, 2000). Quijano had already noted that "urbanisation" exceeds the economic and political sphere and entails a cultural and psychological process where urban becomes a reference of superiority (Vegliò, 2021). In the context of inter-city competition, the aspiration for superiority manifests as an obsession with innovation, ranking, and city marketing (Hollands, 2023). This obsession conforms with a cultural performative practice insofar as it self-orients cities within globally competitive markets and imposes identity-building practices to increase reputation (Pollio & Rossi, 2024). Growing coalitions purposively strive to forge, monitor and mobilise a coherent entrepreneurial community upon a narrative that simultaneously frames problems as past failures and portrays the future as a source of opportunities that impose an imperative to avoid actual or potential losses (Jessop & Sum,

2000). This master narrative operates as a myth that articulates an imagined coherent community suitable for competitive purposes (Mosco, 2019), which otherwise entails exclusion as presupposes the existence of the *right people for prosperity* (Recke, 2021).

The Coloniality of the Entrepreneurial City and Entrepreneurship Ecosystems "EEs"

Having established that the entrepreneurial city and its "EEs" instantiation operate upon an "aspiration of being" at a global level that trickles down in narratives shaping social control mechanisms around the idea of "right people for prosperity." What remains to be discussed is whether the performative nature of such aspiration can be considered as a sort of "colonial of power."

Coloniality of power describes a pattern of power based on the *idea* of race, setting the hierarchical social classification co-determining world capitalism (Quijano, 1992). Coloniality of power conceals the historical domination process underlying the empirical correlation between biological characteristics and social positions. Hence, coloniality makes many believe in a false causal relationship: skin colour defines worldview and intellectual capacities. In this way, the *idea* of race enabled the reproduction of hierarchies and privileges, constructing an inferior "us" and a superior "them." Canonical ways of knowledge produced in Europe colonise the minds of the colonised by disregarding non-European ways of knowledge as inferior (Quijano, 1992).[1]

> The conquered and dominated peoples were placed in a natural position of inferiority, and consequently, so were their phenotypical traits and mental and cultural achievements. In this way, race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the global population into ranks, places, and roles within the power structure of the new society. (Quijano, 1999)

Europe (its thought and its ideology) conquered the subjectivities (that is, the behaviour) of the leaders, the rulers, and the elites of, firstly, Latin America. In this way, despite losing territorial control, Europe continued to dominate this region, a situation that would later be repeated with Africa. However, this hierarchical structure is not static but has inherent dynamics linked to the

[1] Colonial epistemic violence is a necessary consequence of the subject-object duality grounding European rationality disguised as universal (Quijano, 1992). The "subject" is mainly conceived as an "individual" with no relation to the "object," which, in the social realm, entails the radical absence of the " reciprocal other" non-European or, in other words, denies any reference to other "subject" beyond the European context. Therefore, other cultures can only be "objects" of the universal knowledge held by Europeans and are thus intrinsically inferior and deemed to be dominated.

seductive character of "aspiration of being." There is a possibility of accessing colonial power by adopting the aesthetics, knowledge, and ways of being of the coloniser (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992).

In the context of inter-city competition, one should demonstrate the existence of geo-cultural identities and desires that articulate "labour" and "race" to the urban governmentality rationality shaped by the culture of entrepreneurialism and operationalised in EE policy advice.

In the urban area, "race" is a lived experience of socio-spatial segregation (Lipsitz, 2007). Cervio (2021) defines spatial segregation as the result of a *social differentiation mechanism* based on hierarchies of human groups (i.e., ethnic background) with a spatial expression of *social inequality* (i.e., deep gulfs between homogenous urban areas), leading to a spatialisation of *social distances (i.e.,* deep-seated distrust). Here, it is relevant to introduce the difference between ethnicity and race in Quijano's work. Ethnicity is a typical formal ordering category for the emerging world system during the colonial era, which set the communal boundaries that served to "locate our identity and our rank within the state" (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 550). Consequently, ethnicity was sometimes simplified or complex depending on political and economic local dynamics to commensurate social conflicts or elaborate the division of labour during colonial rule. In the post-1879, ethnicity, as a formal political category, lost its operational function, and racism emerged as a "means of shoring up the cultural and economic hierarchy" (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 550). Racialised subjects are culturally constructed "within a structure of power that classifies, names, and distinguishes humans according to phenotypic, linguistic, geographical, and hereditary criteria, among others" (Cervio, 2021).

Conditions for Claiming Coloniality in the Entrepreneurial City

Accordingly, one can make a parallel in the urban area to what Quijano denounced as a myth: "the view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power" (Quijano, 2008, p. 190). Ethnicity is a pseudo-political category. Population indications often use "ethnicity" along other categorizations to structure urban policies by tracking dynamics, income, mobility, and family and religious backgrounds. Hence, urban racialisation emerges from the reproduction of stereotypes in narratives that transform ethnic classifications into a priori racial categories. These categories naturalise urban divides,

rather than explain spatial segregation. Therefore, they obscure social, political, economic, and cultural interventions shaping the history of differential appropriations of urban rights, residences, infrastructures, and services along "ethnical" lines (Cervio, 2021). Racialised subjects carry the material path-dependence burdens of the ethnical division of labour and, symbolically, are continuously naturalised as inferior and, therefore, less successful entities that generate anxiety, fear, desire, and rage (Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

Simultaneously, the coloniality of power reproduces the hierarchical system as much as it establishes "turning white" as a rule for overcoming subordinating rankings and social mobility (Castro-Gómez, 2008; Mignolo, 2003). A possibility that, nevertheless, operates upon a dialectic of desire. On the one hand, there is an objective horizon in which the desire can be consumed, and one can overcome one's subaltern identity and participate in the colonial order. On the other hand, desire operates upon an impossibility, a "realisation of being in the imagine and likeness of what [one] will never be: the Western European Human Man" (Tianshi & Polanco, 2021, p. 127). Therefore, we establish three conditions for claiming that the entrepreneurial city entails coloniality:

- There should be a clear obsession with competitiveness and city branding in the context of inter-city competition, and this should be explicitly articulated to shape city governance around innovation ecosystem tenants.
- Second, the entrepreneurial narrative at the governance level problematises the city's demographic profile in spatial divides, assuming a hierarchical classification of the "desired people for prosperity" taking a priori racial categories. As a caveat, the entrepreneurial narrative articulates a desire for re-configuration of the population.
- Third, the problematised population is not completely exterior but is included under the "aspiration of being." The third condition entails that the entrepreneurial narrative lures the imagination of the "problematised population" in a dialectics or desire: overcome their condition of inferiority to participate in the entrepreneurial city and, simultaneously, might come up with the realisation of "being" in the image of what one will never be.

Case and Method

We explore these conditions in the contemporary urban policy discourse and practice in Rotterdam (the Netherlands). Rotterdam is the biggest port in Europe which dynamism had its peak during the demand of the petroleum industry between 1945 and 1970, enabling the arrival of south European (1949–1966), Turkish (1964), and Moroccan (1973) low-skilled guest workers which would turn into permanent residents. The oil crisis and later port technification turned the once-needed low-skilled labour force into an unfitted population for post-industrial economic development. Consequently, since 1980, Rotterdam has strived to transform the city's economic structure (Bochove & Burgers, 2019). The 2008–2009 economic crisis entails a shock in the political economy order and the emergence of the "participatory society." Such a governance model reallocates national responsibility to citizens and local governments, promoting self-organisation (Fenger & Broekema, 2019). Additionally, in 2008, the city reframed its official branding in international terms to further "strengthen Rotterdam's international competitiveness." We select this case as entrepreneurship has been a continuous reference in the urban governance discourse in Rotterdam, to the point that "being enterprising is believed to be part of the 'DNA' of Rotterdam" (Al Sader et al., 2022, p. 57).

Therefore, the case is emblematic of studying the implications of urban governance culturally structured around entrepreneurship as a founding value. Our reflections are grounded on long-term research conducted by the first author on Rotterdam within the urban resilience framework. In particular, the reflections presented here are grounded on previous research where the first author conducted a qualitative and quantitative discourse analysis of a data set of 688 paragraphs retrieved from documents published between 2013 and 2022 accounting for the designing and implementing of a social resilience strategy in the city (Benitez-Avila et al., 2025). Following a reflexivity methodology, this chapter retrieves the empirical insights from such review and those existing in the literature on urban governance in Rotterdam. This methodology is an unstructured engagement of literature and research on a topic, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). In other words, our method is reinterpreting the first author's research and engagement of the urban governance literature in Rotterdam from the perspective of coloniality and entrepreneurship. Accordingly, the research question is explorative: To what extent can the three conditions for claiming that the entrepreneurial city

entails coloniality be identified in the current research on urban governance in Rotterdam?

The Rotterdam Case

First Condition: Obsession with Competitiveness and City Branding in the Context of Inter-City Competition

The current city brand is "Make it Happen," which emphasises values such as "international, worldly, ground-breaking, entrepreneurial, no-nonsense and raw" (Belabas, 2023). The recent political economy imagination grounds the "Next Economy" as a post-carbon model based on sharing and technological innovation requiring high-skilled jobs (MRDH, 2016). The Next Economy discourse for the Rotterdam-The Hague area defines the region's vulnerability in terms of "a large number of lower educated and unskilled people" at the same level as "energy use, pollution, the impact of climate change, health issues, water and overall quality of living"(MRDH, 2016, p. 4). Simultaneously, these challenges are defined as sources of opportunities for developing a flourishing and resilient economy based on "EEs" around "new digital, circular and renewable energy technologies [that] will also require a tremendous amount of labour at various skill levels." (MRDH, 2016, p. 4). Achieving this ambition entails "building upon the existing and growing sparks of entrepreneurial spirit [enabling] a business ecosystem [of which] entrepreneurs, investors, financial institutions, corporations, knowledge institutions and government [can] benefit." (MRDH, 2016, p. 32). The key factor in shaping such an ecosystem is the so-called "mental impulse" as an "entrepreneurial region is not so much characterised by the number of start-ups or entrepreneurs. It is more about whether the culture is conducive, stimulating and appreciating entrepreneurship, and whether risks are tolerated that are connected with entrepreneurship" (MRDH, 2016, p. 7). Furthermore, "a flourishing and dynamic economy will attract talented people from outside. Cities and regions are competing in setting the most attractive conditions, a.k.a. the war on talent" (MRDH, 2016, p. 45).

The implementation of ambitions has enabled the city to go from a "sick man" to the "capital of cool" (Custers & Willems, 2024). The city has purposively taken measures to attract new high-skilled inhabitants, with relative success in balancing the low-skilled share. The middle-income population has replaced lower and medium-income populations with lower education

levels (Custers, 2021). Additionally, large-scale infrastructure and real estate projects were designed to create a new city image to attract tourism and companies, reducing the dependency on the industrial port (Hein & van de Laar, 2020), even when it is not clear the extent to which Rotterdam has effectively matured Next Economy business models around new digital, circular, and renewable energy technologies. In any case, the city has managed to attract national and international attention within the paradoxical normalisation of its super-diverse population profile shaped by waves of migration and a repressive urban disadvantaged management considered discriminatory (Custers & Willems, 2024).

Second Condition: Ethnic-Based Problematisation in the Narratives of the Competitive City

Since early 2000, the city has problematised its population and the high rates of working-class migration (Crul et al., 2019). Before the crisis in 2002, the rise of the Populist Party Leefbaar Rotterdam problematised the migration background of criminal offenders, stating that things must change and cohesion restored under the Dutch culture (Dekker & Breugel, 2019). Since then, neighbourhood indicators provide a common reference with the shared goal of improving neighbourhood scores (Uitermark et al., 2017). Initially, the city elaborated on the "security index," associating migration background, deprived areas, and criminality (Noordegraaf, 2008). Upon this artefact, the urban policy aimed at avoiding the "accumulation of problems" by banning unemployed renting in the areas with a low-security index, police task forces controlling irregular activities in houses located in hotspots, and a large-scale urban regeneration programme. This Dutch urban revanchism territorialises social risk by disciplining the ethnically marginalised while simultaneously demanding autonomy (Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011; Van Eijk, 2010).

The concern for implementing a post-industrial imaginary shifted the problematisation from explicit ethnic lines to the duality of low-skilled and high-skilled migrants. The ambition is to rebalance the population and transform a relatively unilaterally economic structure that constantly threatens to become obsolete (Bochove & Burgers, 2019). The new angle targeted "disadvantaged households" regarding income rather than ethnicity (Dekker & Breugel, 2019). Methods and urban policies remained less divisive by emphasising individual responsibility and entrepreneurial attitude within self-organisation, self-sufficiency, and participation. During the 2006–2014 social democrat government, the ethnic background turned irrelevant, giving place to policies focused on self-sufficiency. Accordingly, the city introduced

the social index (2008) and physical index (2014) to reflect unvalued values such as cohesion and participation in the neighbourhood profile (wijkprofile) (Custers, 2021, p. 31). These artefacts remain justifying policies for avoiding problem accumulation, often taking as reference "migration background" as much as focalising "result-oriented" interventions to foster self-sufficiency and participation (Dekker & Breugel, 2019). In other words, less explicit problematisation along ethnic lines continues as a latent assumption of the geo-identities forged around the "concentration of problems."

In particular, the policy discourse refers to South Rotterdam as a reference to problematisation, where the municipality has implemented a large-scale renovation to balance housing value distribution within the framework of the National Program on South (NPZR). The NPZR is currently the subject of an investigation by the UN-OHCHR Special Rapporteur on the right of no discrimination as housing policy appears to marginalise minorities purposively and citizens with migration backgrounds (UN-OHCHR, 2021, 2024). Furthermore, "problematic districts" elsewhere in the city are often considered enclaves of the "South," such as the Boospolder and Tussendijk neighbourhoods (BoTu) in the city's North West. BoTu is compared to three of the seven focus neighbourhoods in South Rotterdam due to similar demographic and social composition. Diagnosis for entrepreneurship explains the spatial segregation as the result of the "'white flight' of the 1960s and 1970s to the suburbs and the influx of migrants into the neighbourhood [resulting] in a disproportionately burdened people with a vulnerable socio-economic status [so]In the 1980s and 1990s, the [area] area was known as the Wild West"(IARB, 2019, p. 9). Therefore, there is a degree of naturalisation of the marginality of the area as ongoing issues are the result of a "combination of inexpensive housing and the availability of unskilled work in the port, different groups of migrant workers laid down roots in BoTu" (Gemeente, 2019, p. 2).

Third Condition: Luring in the Dialectic of Desire

Essentialising Rotterdam's city identity concerning entrepreneurship and consistently portraying the population with a migration background as problematic shapes citizens' desire for entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, entrepreneurial language in Rotterdam urban policy targets so-called vulnerable populations, including migrants, the elderly, and the youth, let alone that welfare receivers are obligated to do voluntary work in return for their benefits (Al Sader et al., 2022). There are multiple expressions where the enactment of entrepreneurial interventions is presented as the condition

for individuals with low-skilled and migrant identities could claim fully their citizenship. One emblematic example is the economy and resilience discourse around self-organisation in the next economy that configures a possibility of social mobility by enacting an entrepreneurial spirit. In particular, the conditions for accessing welfare benefits upon entrepreneurial attitudes often targeting ethnically defined marginality against the Next Economy discourse illustrates how the idea of entrepreneurship in practice is the realisation of being in the "imagine" and likeness of what one will never be.

The discourse around the "Next Economy" acknowledges the increased financial uncertainty of several city actors, so it is important "to reduce societal resistance against these changes" and "create attractive perspectives for citizens in the short term." Hence, a "Next Economy" requires a "Next Society" (MRDH, 2016, p. 7). The "Next Society" projects a society operation upon "collaborative sharing platforms, new organisational forms, new ways of managing, working, training and learning" at the basis of new labour relations based on "more loose and temporary, short term contracts and engagements." The assumption is that the more vibrant society interacting in sharing platforms and new organisational forms offset the "less job security" that benefits skilled labour in the knowledge and collaborative economy. Growing inequality is justified by arguing that "great transitions in the past, like in the nineteenth century, has led to growing social inequality," so "we need to reinvent the notion of solidarity to prevent a societal divide […] a new social contract is needed" (MRDH, 2016, p. 44).

In particular, it is unlikely "that [the lower segment of the labour market] will be able to find work on their own," so they are included by "so-called participation jobs" that precisely the ongoing social policy in Rotterdam obligating welfare receivers, often racialised, to show initiative and do voluntary work in return for their benefits (Al Sader et al., 2022). Hence, the new social contract is the desired labour structure and the conditions for social success (or survival), where the entrepreneurial attitude of the marginalised is the condition for maintaining social citizenship rights. This social structure also defines the normative structure of entrepreneurship. On the top, one finds the economy-grow-oriented "entrepreneur" benefiting from the flexibilisation of labour contractual relations and, therefore, benefiting from "EEs" at the same level as "investors, financial institutions, corporations, knowledge institutions, and government" (MRDH, 2016, p. 32). At the bottom is the entrepreneurial being from the margins that cannot be absorbed as labour. Yet, it is "imagined" in the likeness of what it will never be: the economy-grow-oriented entrepreneur. The way to escape from social marginalisation is

"anticipating," "mobilising," and "learning" towards a higher responsibility to deal with own economic precarity in the "participatory society" (Doff, 2019).

Accordingly, the imperative for "competing in setting the most attractive conditions [to attract talent], a.k.a. the war on talent" (MRDH, 2016, p. 45), is complemented by incorporating social policy into economic policy. This is the cse of the social resilience intervention for Boospolder and Tussendijk neighbourhoods (BoTu), which encourages social entrepreneurship to overcome marginality. Nevertheless, this type of entrepreneurship is subject to the tensions of the underlying economic and policy model.

Ethnographical research in Boospolder en Tussendijk points to an elitist vision of sustainability promoted by knowledge-based entrepreneurs and the everyday realities, increasing the burden assumed by women as domestic leaders (Nolan, 2021). Migrant women's sense of care and responsibility becomes an asset for promoting energy transition through the programme (Drijfhout, 2021), which nevertheless does not address the precarious conditions under which responsibility is assumed (Nolan, 2021). Even knowledge-based entrepreneurs participating in the energy transition enter an asymmetrical relationship with energy corporations and municipalities (Drijfhout, 2021). Therefore, the daily life of small parties and citizens is characterised by the struggle to find a space to operate and take advantage of the conditions defined by the framework arrangement with the energy companies. There is no clear space for trained communities in the labour market. Furthermore, unpaid care work can be effectively taken up as a best practice of entrepreneurial resilience but also a clear indicator of precarity under a lack of real perspectives of putting obtained capacities on a level that can sustain a livelihood (Rahmawan-Huizenga et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The recent interest in bringing to light the experience of intersectional entrepreneurs requires, nevertheless, situating the critique of "EEs" in the broader structural process that configures the socio-material and cultural conditions for such marginalised experience. Intersectional research focuses on experience, which, in our opinion, requires the complementary view of the coloniality of power and urban governance. Our work provides a structural approach to the coloniality of entrepreneurship that gives feedback to the more "phenomenological" approach from other critical approaches to "EEs" (impacting the self-perceptions of entrepreneurs). The intersectional lens reveals how race, class, and gender intersect to shape

the experiences of marginalised entrepreneurs within "EEs." For instance, racialised women entrepreneurs face compounded exclusions, with their entrepreneurial efforts often marginalised in a system that privileges white, male, high-growth entrepreneurship. Our approach notes that this experience of exclusion is embedded in the broader structures of urban governance, in which entrepreneurial success is measured by standards inaccessible to many marginalised groups.

In particular, our work introduces the concept of coloniality of power as a cultural and economic structural approach that defines the "desire" to become (the entrepreneur) and impossibility given marginality, which leads to the "marginal entrepreneurial being" that reproduces their precarity.

Previous literature showed that race and class are pivotal in determining access to these ecosystems, further perpetuating inequality. At the same time, the "EEs" theory emphasises "culture," which is set as a canon economic actor that impacts a region's overall economic output. Our work shows that such culture operates upon the wider coloniality issue: lure and the dialectics of desire. Inspired by the original work of Alfonso Quijano, we provide the wider context of urban entrepreneurship in the interplay between race, labour, and power. We retrieve the concept of "aspiration of being," which regards how "being entrepreneurial" operates as a mystified knowledge and practice "promising" cities and inhabitants to overcome the liabilities attached to their low-skilled and racialised identities. "Productive entrepreneurship" is attractive insofar as it promises individuals to overcome the liability of a "low-skilled" and "migrant" identity. However, this promise is illusory, as the structural exclusion built into the EE systematically marginalises those who do not conform to the ideal entrepreneurial archetype as relevant for the desired future of the city.

We established three conditions by which one could claim that the entrepreneurial city entails coloniality: (i) Obsession with competitiveness and city branding in the context of inter-city competition, (ii) ethnic-based problematisation in the narratives of the competitive city, and (iii) luring in the dialectic of desire. For example, in Rotterdam, policies aimed at marginalised groups (such as welfare recipients) often require them to exhibit entrepreneurial behaviours to access basic services. This creates a system in which marginalised populations are compelled to adopt entrepreneurial attitudes, reinforcing the "EEs" colonial logic by controlling access to social welfare through economic self-responsibility. This perspective, inspired by Quijano's work on coloniality, bridges intersectional entrepreneurial scholarship and urban political economy as the culture of urban entrepreneurialism shapes its governmentality rationality (Pollio & Rossi, 2024). Alternative and

community-based entrepreneurship are presented as mechanisms for social mobility, economic empowerment, and inequality reduction. However, in practice, such recognition is given to such entrepreneurial situations not as part of the desired economic model but as a "social policy" to address the expected marginality of such an economic model. Hence, fostering alternative entrepreneurship is, in practice, a means for dealing with the symptoms of social marginality, accepting as inevitable the undesirability of people who carry the liability of not having the right education and skills.

In other words, the Rotterdam case shows that the potentiality of entrepreneurial activity is framed in the first place to deal with the symptoms of economic marginality, accepting such marginality as inevitable of a higher end. It is attractive because it offers an objective possibility for the subaltern to participate in the desired order, particularly by meeting the "right" subjectivity. Simultaneously, the subaltern is subject to the dialectic of desire: alternative entrepreneurship is a "second-class" actor, still functional to the envisioned city but still far away in the discourse and practice of the productive entrepreneur. This is reflected in the daily frustrations of small parties and citizens as documented by entrepreneurship experiences for social resilience, let alone the precarity of unpaid care work to contribute to the neighbourhood. This is colonial because this urban governing mechanism unfolds under the context in which the migrant background is problematised. This population segment is the heritage of previous waves of working-class migration from the south functional to an economic model in the North that turned obsolete. Their very existence is what points to the problem of Rotterdam as a city with an unbalanced population with little capacity to attract talent that fits the demands posed by international competition.

On top of that, we also draw the attention of scholars to situate "EEs" in the wider cultural-political economy of urban areas and regions. In other words, decolonising "EEs" requires revealing the embedded nature of their classification within the broader citizen categories based on their "functional liability" for the envisioned "competitive" city. Entrepreneurship needs to be also read in terms of labour studies and the transformation of labour within the viability of capital accumulation strategies, modes of regulation, and forms of socio-political mobilisation (Brenner, 1998, p. 1).

Once again, the value of Quijano's work emphasises that it brings together cultural and economic elements to articulate the type of relationship structuring the global economy. Translated to EEs, such insight invites entrepreneur scholars to consider what underlies hierarchical classification: an internal relation between different entrepreneurial situations. Capital-oriented entrepreneurship is internally related to entrepreneurial solutions

for marginality, as the former creates the latter's possibilities. Urban political economy provides a framework to articulate and analyse these internal relations (Pollio & Rossi, 2024).

This insight grounded on the original contribution of coloniality theory is also a call for transcending the strong emphasis on epistemological vindications in critical theory. Many in entrepreneurial studies have called for reframing "EEs" through a decolonial lens to disrupt the Eurocentric ideals of entrepreneurship that dominate the current narrative. The "EEs" model marginalises non-Western, community-based forms of entrepreneurship that emphasise social solidarity and resilience. We certainly endorse this call and recognise the value of these alternative forms of entrepreneurship. Shifting away the research interest from the narrow focus on global competitiveness is a performative research practice to build inclusive, equitable ecosystems rooted in local knowledge and cultural practices. And we reaffirm that we see the importance of moving away from the "heroic individual" concept (Kupiainen et al., 2023). However, in our opinion, understanding the experiences of underrepresented groups in ecosystems is insufficient to advance to a decolonial approach to entrepreneurship. In this regard, we side with emerging voices that see the decolonial turn only at the epistemological level as minimum, incomplete, and sometimes inconvenient (Temin, 2024).

Particularly, we plead with research and practice to take a critical distance from the instances where alternative and community-based entrepreneurial discourse is presented as a mechanism for social mobility, economic empowerment, and inequality reduction. Particularly, researchers have to question whether praising grassroots entrepreneurship can be instrumentalised by the order that establishes social hierarchies in the first place. The valorisation of the entrepreneurial attitude of citizens in Rotterdam and the official support of social entrepreneurship comes with the legitimisation of the precarity of a segment of the population with lower chances of accessing welfare services. Certainly, it is necessary to carry out embedded research to explore whether, despite such instrumentalisation in the hegemonic discourse, there are instances where entrepreneurship leads to collective action to vindicate rights. There is also agential mediation of structural pressures, and urban outcomes do not follow a single top-down profit-driven logic (Robinson, 2005). The concern that we bring is that the "aspiration of being" comes with the realisation that not all citizens can ever fully become the entrepreneurs idealised for global competition. Therefore, citizens should be protected from being demanded to enact entrepreneurial subjectivity. Entrepreneurship should be viewed only as one way—optional, but never necessary—for empowerment and social transformation.

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