



# Using Go-Alongs for exploring immigrant entrepreneurs' native customers

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the methodological practice of Go-Alongs for exploring immigrant entrepreneurs' native customers, a barely developed subfield within immigrant business research. Through accompanying individuals on outings in their familiar environments, Go-Alongs as a qualitative data collection method are used to gain access to practices, experiences and interpretations of individuals in their everyday routines. Drawing on current qualitative research on native customers in immigrant grocery shops in Vienna, the article demonstrates how Go-Alongs can be used for exploring consumption practices and patterns of interethnic interaction in this specific setting. What becomes apparent is that Go-Alongs provide an opportunity to gain access to reflexive aspects of lived experience in situ, in the present case expressed by spontaneous and emotional comments when the shop, ethnic products or interethnic interactions are commented on and evaluated. Moreover, Go-Alongs allow insights into modes of self-expression. However, Go-Alongs have limitations as they cannot capture consumption practices beyond the limited time and space of shopping. Furthermore, they do not fully provide access to narratives and discourses; therefore, Go-Alongs are most useful in combination with in-depth interviews.

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## Keywords

Consumption practices, Go-Alongs, immigrant business research, immigrant entrepreneurs, interethnic interaction, native customers, qualitative research

## Introduction

In the last decades, immigrant businesses have increased significantly in many Western European cities. In Vienna, nearly 30% of the entrepreneurs presently active have a migrant background (Schmatz and Wetzel, 2014). Similar findings have been reported for Berlin and Hamburg (Hillmann and Sommer, 2011), Zurich (Rebsamen, 2008), London (Sepulveda et al., 2011) and Amsterdam and Strasbourg (Rath and Eurofound, 2011).

The significance of immigrant economies is reflected in a substantial body of literature, ranging from approaches that describe and explain immigrant economic activities (Kaplan and Lee, 2006; Kloosterman and Rath, 2003; Light and Gold, 2000; Waldinger et al., 1990) to analysing their relevance for local economic development (Kloosterman and Van der Leun, 1999; Leicht and Langhauser, 2014) and urban renewal and revitalisation (Aytar and Rath, 2012; Hillmann, 2011; Nuissl and Schmitz, 2015, Parzer and Huber, 2015). However, research suffers from two intertwined blind spots: first, there is a predominant focus on the perspective of the entrepreneur, while customers have been rather neglected. Where customers are examined at all, it is mainly from the perspective of the entrepreneurs (Dyer and Ross, 2000) and in the context of marketing strategies (Jones et al., 2000; Parzer and Czington, 2013; Rusinovic, 2008). Despite their economic and symbolic relevance, customers as active players in immigrant businesses have not been addressed systematically. Second, immigrant entrepreneurs are, by tendency, discussed in the context of their co-ethnic embeddedness. Scholars emphasise the role of immigrant economies as enclave economies (Portes and Bach, 1985; Portes and Shafer, 2007), immigrant businesses' co-ethnic networks (Zhou, 2007), their co-ethnic employment (Den Butter et al., 2007) and immigrant businesses' role in supplying co-ethnics with products and services (Waldinger et al., 1990). However, the multiple interdependencies with what is called the 'majority' population have gained only scarce attention.

Both shortcomings disguise the role of non-migrants in immigrant economies. Cultural practices such as buying bread at the Turkish corner shop, strolling along the multicultural shopping avenues or dining in Indian restaurants have become popular among natives. While this phenomenon is discussed within food studies (Johnston and Baumann, 2015; Long, 2004), the sociology of cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1990; Kendall et al., 2008; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002) and gentrification research (Aytar and Rath, 2012; Zukin, 2008), we know little about the consumption of 'the other' in the context of immigrant economies. How do customers use immigrant businesses? How do they choose and purchase products? Which (inter)ethnic interactions take place? How are these practices shaped by power relations and social status? How are they intertwined with issues of integration and social cohesion?

In this article we primarily address these questions regarding methodological issues by shedding light on Go-Alongs, a method which we have chosen for exploring

immigrant entrepreneurs' native customers. By accompanying individuals on outings in their familiar environments, as well as asking questions and observing, Go-Alongs serve as a technique to gain access to practices, experiences and interpretations of individuals in their everyday routines, paying special attention to the meaning of the physical environment. Methodologically, Go-Alongs are based on interpretative sociology, in particular phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge, focusing on the processes by which individuals and groups understand and apply meaning to their physical and social world. Go-Alongs are used in different fields of research, such as urban studies (Anderson, 2004), health studies (Carpiano, 2009; Garcia et al., 2012) and youth culture research (Pfadenhauer, 2005). However, as far as we can see, Go-Alongs have not yet been applied in the context of immigrant business research.

Drawing on our research on immigrant grocery shops and their native customers in Vienna, we aim at evaluating the methodological practice of Go-Alongs in this particular field. First, we review the literature on native customers in immigrant economies. Second, we describe Go-Alongs as a qualitative method of data collection and its methodological foundation in phenomenology. Third, we discuss how we have adopted and adapted this method for purposes of our own research by applying a heuristic inspired by practice theory. Finally, we discuss the strengths and limitations of Go-Alongs, concluding that this research technique is most effective when applied in combination with in-depth interviews.

## **Researching immigrant entrepreneurs' native customers**

One of the most striking issues in immigrant business research is the often ambivalent role of immigrant entrepreneurs acting as intermediaries between the majority population and minorities (Bonacich, 1973; Dhingra, 2012; Min, 1996). In this context, non-migrant customers have gained some attention when scholars have examined the implication of interethnic contacts within immigrant economies for social cohesion and integration processes. Everts (2008) in his ethnographic study of immigrant grocery stores in the city of Stuttgart shows how consumption practices of natives foster everyday interactions between minority and majority culture, resulting in a positive classification of immigrants and a dissolving of ethnic boundaries. Looking at urban markets and diversity, Hiebert et al. point out that markets 'bring together people into a public arena who might otherwise remain apart' (Hiebert et al., 2015: 15). Similarly, Kasinitz et al. recently studied local shopping streets in different cities. Drawing on the role of immigrant businesses, they point out that 'at their best, the super-diversity of many local shopping streets eases the way towards civility and tolerance as normal conditions of urban public life' (Kasinitz et al., 2016: 196). Also concerned with questions of social cohesion and integration, Peters and De Haan (2011) show how interethnic interactions in public spaces and immigrant shops in the Netherlands contribute to a higher degree of acceptance of multiculturalism and ethno-cultural diversity. Although there is evidence that ethnic neighbourhoods facilitate interethnic contacts (Petermann, 2014), a number of studies show that these are mostly limited to ephemeral contacts which hardly ever result in the development of strong interethnic network ties (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010; Butler, 2003; May, 1996).

While these studies are primarily concerned with interactional encounters between immigrants and natives, other research emphasises the ways consumers buy, use and appropriate ethnic products. Drawing on interviews and participant observation, Jamal (1996) sheds new light on the cultural transformation of native tastes as a result of encounters with immigrants and ethnic food. Taking the case of Pakistani shops, he shows how native British customers use and attribute meaning to ethnic food by negotiating categories of 'traditional' and 'exotic' food. Applying the concept of acculturation, he suggests that immigrant shops play a significant role as cultural intermediaries.

Another branch of research, in a more critical vein, highlights mechanisms and effects of exotic appropriation. Partly inspired by theories of postcolonial studies, a number of scholars examine how the consumption of 'foreign' culture may contribute to the production and reproduction of imaginations of 'otherness', taking into account matters of power and social inequality (Johnston and Baumann, 2015; Long, 2004; Molz, 2007; Pang, 2002). In this context, the social construction of 'authenticity' is considered to play a crucial role in the positive evaluation of the 'other' (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). Following Zukin's study of authenticity and urban gentrification (Zukin, 2008), Stock (2013) provides a rich qualitative analysis of Arab snack bars in Berlin. She argues that the construction of authenticity cannot be separated from the strategies of the entrepreneurs themselves. Similarly, in their participant observation in Chinese restaurants, Lu and Fine (1995) show how the desire for authenticity is anticipated by the entrepreneurs: by providing 'authentic Asian cuisine' – as negotiated by entrepreneurs against the background of a society's expectations – restaurants seek to develop a profitable economic niche.

By applying a range of different methods of social research, these studies have contributed to our understanding of non-migrant customers in immigrant economies. However, little is known about consumption as a social practice, including the bodily enactment which comes into play when entering and moving in a shop, appraising and purchasing products as well as interacting with the staff or other customers. To capture these dimensions, a methodological approach is needed which is able to study these consumption practices in situ. We therefore propose Go-Alongs as a qualitative data collection method that enables access to the practices, experiences and interpretations of individuals in their everyday routines.

## **Go-Alongs as a tool of qualitative social research**

Go-Alongs are a research method by which individuals are accompanied on outings in their familiar environments and simultaneously observed and asked questions. Kusenbach (2003, 2008) was one of the first to use this term, locating Go-Alongs in a phenomenologically oriented ethnography and describing them as a technique to reveal the meanings of place in everyday experience and practices. During walking, the researcher asks questions about the surroundings, invites the participants to speak about what crosses their mind and listens to the comments while observing them moving through the environment.

For Kusenbach, Go-Alongs may bring to the foreground some of the transcendent and reflexive aspects of lived experience which cannot be captured by using solely participant observation or interviewing: 'Because people usually do not comment on "what is

going on” while acting in “natural” environments, it is difficult to access their concurrent experiences and interpretations through a purely observational approach. On the other hand, conducting sit-down interviews usually keeps informants from engaging in “natural activities”, typically taking them out of the environments where those activities take place’ (Kusenbach, 2003: 459). Kusenbach considers Go-Alongs as hybrids between interviewing and participant observation allowing ethnographers ‘to observe their informants’ spatial practices *in situ* while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time’ (Kusenbach, 2003: 463).

By referring to the phenomenological foundation of Go-Alongs, Kusenbach (2003) points out that Go-Alongs provide privileged access to perceptions, spatial practices and social realms. Go-Alongs focus on how individuals experience and perceive their physical and social world, how people engage in and with their environment and they reveal patterns of social interaction.

With their focus on lived experiences and the awareness for spatiality, Go-Alongs seem to be well-suited for the empirical study of consumption practices.<sup>1</sup> In the following, we explore the method’s applicability within consumption research and describe our adaptation of the method for our own research purposes.

## **Adopting and adapting Go-Alongs for researching native customers in immigrant grocery stores**

Our research aimed at revealing the experiences of native customers when purchasing goods from immigrant grocery stores. It is centred on the following questions: What does it mean for native customers to shop in an immigrant grocery store and to buy, use and appropriate ethnic products? Which classifications, categorisations and evaluations made by native customers have an impact on symbolic boundaries (Wimmer, 2013)? Do these evaluative practices contribute to the erosion or strengthening of ethnic boundaries? What significance do class boundaries have within consumption practices?

In order to address this research interest, we conducted 15 Go-Alongs and 31 in-depth interviews with native customers of immigrant grocery stores in Vienna, namely Austrians without a migrant background.

Our endeavour to fill the research gap concerning non-migrant consumers in immigrant economies goes along with a specific categorisation that requires thorough reflexion. First, the category ‘non-migrant customers’ suggests that non-migrants are a homogeneous group. Actually, individuals subsumed under the category ‘non-migrants’ do not only vary according to class, occupation and gender, but also according to their lifestyle (an argument which is also true for the category of ‘migrants’). Nevertheless, these groups are not equally represented among the customers of immigrant businesses. There is some empirical evidence that migrant shops and restaurants are appreciated more by the higher educated inhabitants of Vienna (Verwiebe et al., 2015: 80). This is also reflected in our sample: although we aimed for heterogeneity, the sample finally comprised an extraordinary share of highly educated persons. This overrepresentation of well-educated customers could be an indicator of the above-average level of education of the immigrant grocery stores’ clientele, but may also have been influenced by the different willingness of customers to participate in the Go-Alongs.

Second, the term 'non-migrants' somehow implies the maintenance of a boundary between 'migrants' on the one hand and 'natives' on the other. Highlighting the criterion of migration and/or migrant background, however, disguises other important factors of differentiation in a society and may contribute to essentialist categorisation. Nevertheless, for actors (migrants as well as non-migrants) this legal, political, cultural and/or symbolic boundary still plays a crucial role in everyday life. This can at least partly be explained by the specific context of Austria's migration history (Marik-Lebeck, 2009). A large share of the current population in Austria originates from areas of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, including Bohemia and Moravia. A vast labour migration started in the 1960s when workers were recruited in Turkey and the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Until the oil crisis of 1973, the share of immigrants increased mainly due to influx from these two countries and remained constant until the 1990s when immigration accelerated again partly because of the civil war in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and the fall of the Iron Curtain. Migration from China and India started in the early 1980s. Although these migrant groups constitute a comparably low share of the Austrian population, they are overrepresented according to immigrant businesses in retailing and gastronomy. The European Union enlargement between 2004 and 2007 increased immigration from countries of the former Eastern bloc thereby replacing immigration from Turkey and the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Currently, migration flows are increasingly shaped by refugees arriving from the Middle East who will influence the structural composition of immigrant economies in Austria. However, although many migrants and most of their children and grandchildren are Austrian citizens, they are categorised and partly categorise themselves as 'persons with a migrant background'.

When we recruited participants for the Go-Alongs, we did not classify potential customers according to their assumed status, but rather asked them to reveal if they see themselves as 'Austrians without a migrant background'. However, we acknowledge that the difficulties regarding this kind of categorisation remain.

In the following, we describe how we adopted Go-Alongs theoretically by referring to a practice-theoretical perspective on consumption. Then we show how we used Go-Alongs practically in our field research.

### *Capturing consumption practices by using Go-Alongs*

Consumption is not just an economic action, it is also a social and cultural phenomenon (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1986). As Campbell (1995) has suggested, 'consumption' is not limited to the act of purchasing a certain product, but involves 'the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service' (Campbell, 1995: 102). Following Warde's (2005) broad definition, we understand consumption 'as a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion' (Warde, 2005: 137). Therefore, Warde advocates a practice-theoretical understanding of consumption: referring to Reckwitz (2002), he conceptualises 'practice' as bodily routines of behaviour, collective patterns of meaning, subjective ascriptions of meaning, symbols, identity and practical knowledge. Thus,

consumption in the light of practice theory is not reduced to individual behaviour; rather it is seen as social practices that are embedded in processes of meaning-making (Benzecry and Krause, 2010; Warde, 2005).

This practice-theoretical conceptualisation of consumption fit our research aims and was used as both theoretical background and a heuristic concept for analysis (Kelle, 2010). In doing so, we were able to capture the consumption practices of natives in immigrant grocery stores in terms of their actual bodily behaviour in the stores, their handling and use of products, their practical knowledge, as well as their subjective ascriptions of meanings. This practice-theoretical orientation of our research is highly compatible with the phenomenological foundation of Go-Alongs. As a flexible technique (Carpiano, 2009), Go-Alongs allow for capturing the bodily routines and give insights into the processes of meaning-making of natives shopping in immigrant grocery stores.

### *Go-Alongs in the field*

In concrete terms, we accompanied customers during their everyday practice of shopping in immigrant grocery stores. The Go-Alongs took place in a well-defined spatial context, namely the space of and around the stores.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent to the Go-Along (or on a separate occasion if the participant did not have time), an in-depth interview (Witzel, 2000) was conducted with the participant.

In the course of recruitment, which mainly took place in front of diverse shops, we informed the participants about the method in broad outline and asked for permission to accompany them during shopping. Prior to shopping, we asked the participants to shop in the way they usually do and to report on their shopping experience while telling us about everything that crosses their mind (Kusenbach, 2003).

During shopping, we tried to keep our intervention to a minimum. The main aim was to motivate customers to talk about everything that is important for them. However, some open questions helped to facilitate the participants' reflexion on and verbalisation of self-evident and routinised everyday lines of actions and ways of thinking.

The focus of attention was on three aspects: the observations aimed for (1) *the act and behaviour of consumption* (process of shopping, handling of the products, (inter) actions, etc.) within (2) *the spatial arrangements* (way through the store, disposal of products, etc.): What is the participant doing when moving through this environment? What is perceived and experienced, and in what way? The conversations with the participants were of significance, enabling access to (3) *explicit and implicit forms of knowledge*: What do customers know about the products and the shop and their (supposed) ethnicity? How is expertise shown? Which implicit knowledge structures customers' classifications, categorisations and evaluations made at the moment they walk through the shop?

We accompanied the participants two by two. One of the research team was responsible for interviewing and keeping the participant talking, whereas the other made detailed notes in the background. As a method of analysis, we applied a coding process suggested by Charmaz (2014) in the tradition of Grounded Theory.

In the following, we outline how Go-Alongs have contributed to our understanding of immigrant entrepreneurs' native customers.

## Benefits of Go-Alongs

The main benefit of Go-Alongs is that the accompanied subjects comment on and explain what they are doing – and often what they are thinking, feeling, expecting or hoping – at the moment. As such, they provide access to reflexive aspects of lived experience in situ, in our case expressed by spontaneous comments, reflections and evaluations concerning the shop, ethnic products or interethnic interactions. Due to the immediate context and the variety of stimuli in the immigrant grocery store, we increased our knowledge of the Go-Along method as well as of the research area of immigrant economies. The latter concerns four main issues: (1) routines of behaviour, (2) emotions, (3) modes of self-expression and (4) processes of evaluation.

### *Routines of behaviour*

Go-Alongs produced data which provided insight into routines of behaviour, the spatial setting and the bodies moving in this space: How do they enter a shop and how do they move through it? How do customers select and purchase products? How do they interact with others?

Go-Alongs helped us to identify two different modes of shopping which contributed to a typology of consumption. We drew a line of distinction between what we call ‘consuming for convenience’ and ‘consuming for exceptionality’. ‘Consuming for convenience’ is driven by aspects of practicability: customers highlight that the shop is just around the corner, that it is open late at night and on weekends, and that the products are cheap (at least compared to ‘regular’ supermarkets). Usually they purchase ‘native’ products which are also available in ‘regular’ shops such as milk, bread or vegetables. As the Go-Alongs revealed, customers move through the shop very quickly and goal-oriented and usually buy only a few products. Many specified that they used immigrant shops additionally to their shopping in ‘regular’ supermarkets. The shop’s ethnic (self-)classification or the shopkeepers’ ethnic origin were not mentioned or discussed during the Go-Along in any way; rather, practical reasons were emphasised. ‘Consuming for exceptionality’, on the contrary, is related to the attraction of ‘the foreign’: customers mainly purchase ‘ethnic’ products such as spices associated with Asia (e.g. curcuma), foreign fruits or vegetables (e.g. kaki) or sweets from Turkey (e.g. baklava). Here, alterity and cultural difference – as social constructs – are constitutive of the whole shopping experience. This becomes most visible in the way customers look at and select products:

The participant takes a shopping basket and moves slowly and consciously through the store. He puts several products in his hands in order to view them more precisely. He places most of these products back on the shelves. During shopping he does not talk much. However, he tells us that he is looking for humus. He searches for this product in the shop, but he cannot find it. Instead, he finds a can of meat. He examines this product in detail and then puts it in his shopping basket. He tells us that he does not know this product, but he wants to try it in order to discover how it tastes. (Mr Fuchs,<sup>3</sup> Go-Along 4)

Customers are curious about products they have not tasted before and therefore take a lot of time to explore the product range, always keeping their eyes open for



unknown products. Furthermore, they examine products in detail, take certain groceries in their hands, touch them and comment on their experience with these products. 'Trying new things' is one of the main motives mentioned for selecting and purchasing a certain product.

Customers who 'consume for exceptionality' take a lot of time over their shopping even if they have a clear plan which products to buy. They do not hurry, and rather seem to enjoy the atmosphere. Also, these customers actively try to get into contact with the owner or their employees and do not seem to feel any barriers in asking for certain products or how to use them in cooking.

By evoking comments on and explanations of their 'doings' and helping to link these doings to their previous experiences, Go-Alongs serve as a tool to capture and understand routines of behaviour in a special spatial setting. However, they are not limited to comments on behaviour, but also reveal emotions.

### *Emotions*

During our fieldwork, Go-Alongs have soon proven to be well-suited to capture emotions in situ. This was an unexpected benefit for our research as we did not consider emotions explicitly at the outset. However, it was astonishing how often feelings and emotions were mentioned during the Go-Alongs: most often, customers expressed positive feelings when they walked through the shop commenting on the products, the staff or the shopping experience. Some highlighted the fascination of interethnic encounters and the confrontation with cultural differences; others were quite euphoric about the great variety of products. As already mentioned, discovering new and unknown products seems to be one of the greatest pleasures of going shopping in immigrant shops. This often leads to expressions of great enjoyment:

The participant takes a lot of time for his shopping and examines many products in detail. He says that he always enjoys shopping here because he likes trying new products. When he finds an interesting product, he bursts out: 'Oh, this sounds great, I've to taste this', and puts the product in his shopping basket. (Mr Steiner, Go-Along 2)

Often, the whole atmosphere is commented on by referring to emotions, for example when the shopping experience is compared to holidays in foreign countries or the cultural differences experienced in the shop are described as something exciting or electrifying. However, not all comments on feelings are thoroughly positive, but reveal ambivalences. Customers mentioned uncertainty, uneasiness or fear when they enter a shop, purchase unknown products or (have to) start a conversation with one of the salespersons. While these 'barriers' find expression in a certain way of moving through the store (e.g. slow and insecure), the way the customers commented on barriers at the moment of shopping shed light on the ambivalence of consuming 'foreign' culture as being simultaneously fascinating and scary.

This ambivalence is most visible with regard to being attracted by certain products and, at the same time, feeling unsure of what a specific product is and whether to buy it or not:

The participant eyes up mixed pickles, which are packed in transparent plastics, and wonders which vegetables these could be. Finally, he decides against the product and puts it back in the shelf by saying: 'I do not have the guts to buy it.' (Mr Frank, Go-Along 5)

Furthermore, the fear of misunderstanding can have an impact on the way of acting in an interethnic interaction:

Being at the cash desk, the participant passes a five Euro banknote to the salesperson. Then she asks the salesperson if he could hold on because she wants to find the rest of the money in loose change in order to give him the precise sum. The salesperson does not understand what she is saying. As she recognises this, she quits looking for the loose [coins]. The salesperson passes the change to her. (Ms Fritz, Go-Along 6)

Concerning our research interests, these accounts helped to reveal the ambivalent character of natives' consumption practices in immigrant grocery stores. Even customers who buy in immigrant shops regularly and tend to see themselves as open-minded and tolerant appear to show an element of fear or anxiety when they enter the shop, when they purchase products which they have not tasted before or when it comes to interethnic conversation. This challenges the widespread tendency to idealise native customers as confident and unshrinking actors (see also Parzer et al., 2016). Regarding methodology, Go-Alongs again enable a perspective far beyond solely participant observation where fear is hardly commented on, or interviews where fear and anxiety are no longer 'physically' observable.

### *Self-expression*

Our Go-Alongs were characterised by the presence of researchers who explicitly focused on the act of shopping. This may produce a highly artificial setting; it is, however, a setting where actors – in our case the customers in immigrant grocery stores – are stimulated to explain what they do, and how and why they do it. They therefore legitimise their way of shopping in immigrant grocery stores by referring to their experience, knowledge and expertise. This can reveal how the act of shopping in an immigrant grocery shop is intertwined with certain forms of self-expression.

Regarding our data, it is apparent that a certain way of handling the products or certain ways of interethnic interaction are often used for impression management in the sense of Goffman (1959). Many customers display a high level of expert knowledge of foreign products, cuisine or more generally of foreign cultures, which is most often revealed by commenting on certain products:

When catching sight of several products, the participant asks us if we know about these. We negate, whereupon he tells us what he knows about these products and his experiences with them. With a pack of abalone-flavoured instant noodles in his hands, he tells us that abalone is a big slug, which you can cook like a steak. (Mr Steiner, Go-Along 2)

Displaying knowledge is often combined with demonstrating a 'cosmopolitan lifestyle', showing openness and tolerance towards the 'other' but also by pointing out experiences during trips to 'other' cultures:

When we move through the shop, the participant tells us that he stayed in China and just came back a week ago and that this is the reason why he now wants to know if he can buy the products that he ate and drank in China in this store too. He stops in front of a shelf and places two bottles of Japanese beer in his shopping basket. In so doing, he tells us that he knows this kind of beer from China and that he likes it. (Mr Reiter, Go-Along 14)

Regarding the literature on interethnic interaction in immigrant economies, our findings from this form of self-presentation contribute to recent debates on cosmopolitan openness and social distinction. There is much evidence that the demonstration of openness towards the 'other' is used as a kind of cultural capital to maintain or pursue social superiority (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010; Butler, 2003; Cappeliez and Johnston, 2013). This 'cosmopolitan cultural capital' is reflected in our data – in particular in those accounts where customers do not only talk about their openness and tolerance but show their 'cosmopolitan disposition' in actu. As this 'cosmopolitan cultural capital' is typical for members of the middle and upper middle classes, we should be more aware of the impact of native consumption practices not only on ethnic boundaries, but also on symbolic boundaries along class. Our findings show that cosmopolitan cultural capital is used for social distinction and, as such, it contributes to what Bourdieu (1984) called the symbolic reproduction of social inequality. Taking into account recent debates in research on cultural consumption and the trend 'from snob to omnivore' (Peterson and Kern, 1996), it would be worth bringing together these strands of research (see also Kendall et al., 2008).

## *Evaluation*

Go-Alongs have also proven appropriate when examining aspects of evaluation. When customers explain and justify their use of immigrant shops, they often refer to various kinds of judgements – on the shops, the offered products, the shop-owner, their employees, the other customers, or even the 'whole package', including the shop's atmosphere. While in interviews customers usually express their evaluations by referring to the act of shopping retrospectively, in Go-Alongs they evaluate immediately when they enter and move through the shop or when they take, touch and select certain products. Thus, Go-Alongs enable the researcher to grasp judgements made by the customers in the moment of shopping.

Ms Riegler, for example, goes shopping in Asian supermarkets on a regular basis. Within our Go-Along, she euphorically emphasises the broad range of products and explains the way some of them can be (or have to be) used in cooking:

When we reach the section with the spices she shows her expert knowledge mainly by judging the quality, the taste or the specific characteristics of the various products. She recommends buying only pepper which hails from Vietnam as this would taste most aromatic. Then she takes a package of Thai-basil and tells us that this would taste completely different than 'our' basil. (Ms Riegler, Go-Along 8)

Similarly, other customers highlight the specificity of 'humus' offered in Turkish groceries or 'curry paste' you get in Indian supermarkets. Alterity seems to be one of the most relevant criteria of (positive) evaluation; it constitutes the exceptionality of the whole

shopping experience and is the basis of making a difference between 'them' and 'us'. However, in most cases it is not just alterity which becomes relevant, but its nexus to the ascription of authenticity (Molz, 2004). While many foreign products are also available in regular supermarkets, only those which are offered in immigrant shops (by migrants) are considered to be 'authentic', 'real' and 'original'. Authenticity is not only attached to products, but also to the shopkeepers themselves when, for example, phenotypical characteristics or their language are seen as an indicator of 'real' foreignness.

It is worth noting that not all evaluations of immigrant grocery shops are positive. However, Go-Alongs are not well-suited to capture negative judgements, as we show in the following section.

## Limitations of Go-Alongs

Although the Go-Along method for researching natives' consumption practices in immigrant grocery stores has clear benefits, there are limitations involved with this research technique. These concern methodical issues as well as the extent of knowledge that could be gained on the research topic by using this method. In the following, we focus on (1) the artificiality of Go-Alongs, (2) the limitation of Go-Alongs due to their spatial-temporal setting and (3) the shortcoming of Go-Alongs as they enable only restricted access to narratives and discourses. Additional in-depth interviews may offer a solution to some of these problems. Furthermore, the systematic combination of Go-Alongs and interviews provided crucial insights into the consumption practices of non-migrant customers in immigrant grocery stores.

### *Artificiality of Go-Alongs*

A major issue of most qualitative research, and therefore of Go-Alongs, concerns the fact that participants are confronted with a highly unfamiliar setting. Similar to participant observation, Go-Alongs are an interference in the everyday 'natural' situation of the studied people (Kusenbach, 2003). We tried to counteract this intervention by explaining to participants the procedure of the method and by thematising the unnatural situation. Furthermore, we encouraged the participants to shop as they usually would and comment on whatever crosses their minds. During the Go-Along, however, it was one of the most challenging tasks to find a balance between mitigating the artificial setting (by providing a familiar atmosphere and seemingly 'natural' conversation) and keeping the influence on the subject under investigation to a minimum (by not predetermining the situation or steering it in a specific direction). A good mix of active animation and restraint was provided by keeping the questions neutral, open and vague enough to give participants the chance to talk about what is important for *them*.

### *Spatial-temporal limitations*

Go-Alongs with non-migrant customers provided important insights into consumption practices in the specific setting of purchasing products in an immigrant grocery store. However, consumption is not limited to the act of shopping, but encompasses the use of

products as well: How do they store the products at home? How do they use them (for cooking)? How do they talk about the products with others? Such questions can only partly be answered by the interpretation of the protocols of Go-Alongs. One solution to this problem could be conducting extended Go-Alongs or participant observation immediately after shopping. Another possibility – and this is the one we had chosen – is to conduct subsequent in-depth interviews. Although interviews do not provide access to the social practice itself, the given accounts can shed light on these practices. In our case, interviews about the use of the products provided important additional data on the appropriation of ‘foreign’ or ‘exotic’ groceries. Many customers emphasise that they use these groceries in a manner that is typical for the respective country or culture, for example when they cook ‘true’ to the original (as they believe the natives would cook). These assumptions of how to use products in the ‘right’ way again refer to a construction of authenticity. For many customers, it is not only important to purchase authentic products (products which are produced in the region where they are supposed to originate from and which are offered by entrepreneurs who have an equivalent migrant background), but to use these products in an authentic manner as well. In this case, interviews provide a valuable supplement to Go-Alongs.

### *Limited access to narrative and discourse*

By combining observation and informal conversation, we revealed important characteristics of the daily routines of native consumption in immigrant grocery shops. However, due to the spatial-temporal setting, verbal accounts remain rather limited. Our interviewees talked quite a lot, but they hardly ever developed detailed accounts or stories. Furthermore, as the focus of Go-Alongs is on spontaneous reactions and actions during walking through the shop, stimulated by immediate impressions and experiences, this method hardly ever evokes narratives. As we consider narratives to be the key to reconstruct processes of meaning-making and discursive structures, we conducted additional in-depth interviews.

The interpretation of the transcripts sheds light on how native consumption practices are embedded in the wider field of discourses on migration and integration. For example, cosmopolitan consumption is based on the everyday assumption that interethnic encounters foster social cohesion and integration:

I’m convinced that [shopping in an immigrant shop] can help to reduce prejudices and to get more open. If you taste something new you have a positive association regarding a certain country. You would not get that without trying something new. Or if you establish a relationship with a salesperson. Of course this could contribute to integration. (Ms Waller, Interview 19)

It is remarkable that this kind of argumentation is linked to yet another everyday theory, namely that if people who are not (yet) tolerant went shopping in immigrant grocery shops, they would become more open towards cultural differences. However, this assumption, which we only found among the well-educated, disguises how they themselves had become so open-minded: because they had the chance to be equipped with and still accumulate high amounts of (cosmopolitan) cultural capital. This is highly

important in the context of cosmopolitan consumption as it reveals strong symbolic boundaries along class (Parzer et al., 2016).

Furthermore, our interviews have turned out to be crucial for another (but closely related) reason: they showed some notable discrepancies between what customers did during shopping and what they said about this afterwards. By systematically comparing interactions that took place in the immediately experienced situation during the Go-Along with the descriptions and explanations of interactions mentioned in the subsequent interview, we could gain additional (and somewhat unexpected) insights into the studied phenomenon. One of the most relevant findings in this context was the discrepancy between appreciating or even adoring a certain immigrant grocery store, on the one hand (especially during the Go-Along), and the articulation of resentment towards immigrants, on the other hand (during the subsequent interview) – a discrepancy partly reflected in previous research (e.g. Everts, 2008; Neckel and Sutterlüty, 2008). This becomes most visible in the case of Ms Weber, who regularly goes shopping in a Turkish corner shop which she uses primarily for practical reasons and to buy ‘native’ products. During the Go-Along, she emphasises the quality of the products and mentions that ‘the people are so friendly here’ (Go-Along 9). However, in the subsequent interview, she does not only mention a range of negative classifications of immigrant shops (e.g. untidiness, low standards of hygiene) but complains about the rising number of migrants in the urban neighbourhood where she lives:

I feel like [I’m] living in Arabia. Or anywhere else. You don’t hear any German word anymore. They get on [the tram] and then it’s over with the German language. (Ms Weber, Interview 15)

This discrepancy can be partly explained by the spatial limitation of Go-Alongs, which were often conducted in very small shops where people do not dare to be totally frank. However, it should also be taken into account that stocks of knowledge and action may diverge even without the awareness of the actors. Hammersley and Atkinson (2006: 232) have coined the term ‘reflexive triangulation’ to analyse these discrepancies by combining different methods.

Besides methodological issues, combining Go-Alongs and interviews had a practical advantage. In many cases, the Go-Alongs served as an ice-breaker for the subsequent interviews or at least helped to develop a trusting atmosphere. Therefore, within our research, Go-Alongs were most effective when used in combination with in-depth interviews.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to evaluate the methodological practice of Go-Alongs for exploring immigrant entrepreneurs’ native customers. Drawing on empirical research on Austrians without a migrant background and on the question of how they use immigrant grocery stores located in Vienna, we revealed and reflected on the benefits as well as the limitations of Go-Alongs in this particular field of study. On the one hand, Go-Alongs provide an opportunity to gain access to reflexive aspects of the lived experience in situ. This has proven to be fruitful, in particular when customers evaluated, classified, selected or even refused certain ethnic products or spontaneously commented on their emotions

when walking through the shop. Moreover, these accounts reveal modes of self-expression which cannot be captured with interviews. On the other hand, Go-Alongs also have limitations. We discussed problems regarding the artificiality of the situation and methodological problems. It is apparent that Go-Alongs cannot capture processes beyond the limited time and space of shopping. As Go-Alongs focus on the spontaneous situation of lived experience in situ, they also cannot provide sufficient access to narratives and discourses.

We tried to compensate these shortcomings with interviews after the Go-Along, which enabled access to more discursive levels of knowledge and meanings. Furthermore, the combination of Go-Alongs and interviews enabled systematic comparison between what customers do and what they say about their doings retrospectively, which provided pivotal insights into discrepancies between knowledge and action in this specific field. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that Go-Alongs are best applied in combination with subsequent in-depth interviews.

However, the Go-Along method does not need to be limited to the act of shopping and could begin at the customer's home. This would shed light on the perceptions and interpretations of the urban environment since very often immigrant grocery stores can be found in ethnic neighbourhoods. It would help to address the question of how these ethnic surroundings are interpreted and evaluated by potential customers of immigrant businesses. There is some evidence that immigrant shops are frequented regularly by some customers even though they see the rise of immigrant economies and ethnic neighbourhoods critically or even negatively. Extended Go-Alongs offer a way to explain ambivalences of this kind.

Go-Alongs could also be continued after the act of shopping, e.g. accompanying the customer back home and enquiring about how the purchased products are subsequently handled and used.

Regarding issues of native consumption in immigrant economies, Go-Alongs fill an important methodological gap; as an innovative method of data collection, they bridge traditional procedures of interviewing and participant observation.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## **Notes**

1. So far, Go-Alongs have not found their way into consumption research, however market and retailing research has applied models that follow the process of shopping, e.g. 'shopping with

- consumers' (Lowrey et al., 2005), or 'shop-alongs' (Doyle Research, 2015). Still, most of these techniques lack a solid methodological basis.
2. This 'spatial extension' beyond the building in which the store is located brings an interesting aspect to light: the way in which the shops are entered provides evidence about possible barriers, felt and experienced, and about boundary-making processes.
  3. The participants have been given pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity. We conducted all Go-Alongs and interviews in German. For this article, extracts from the field notes as well as quotes from the interviews were translated into English.

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## Résumé

Cet article a pour objet d'évaluer la pratique méthodologique des entretiens « Go-Alongs » dans le cadre d'une étude sur les clients de souche de commerçants immigrés, un champ de recherche encore peu exploré. Ces « Go-Alongs » sont réalisés en compagnie des individus au cours de leurs déplacements dans un environnement familial. Ces entretiens visent à recueillir des données qualitatives qui serviront à analyser les pratiques, les expériences et les interprétations au quotidien. À partir d'une étude sur les clients de souche des commerçants immigrés à Vienne, nous démontrons l'utilité des entretiens « Go-Alongs » pour étudier les pratiques de consommation et les modes de relation interethnique dans un contexte donné. Il apparaît clairement que les « Go-Alongs » facilitent l'étude des aspects réflexifs d'une expérience vécue sur place, notamment par le biais des commentaires spontanés et émotionnels exprimés par les individus sur place lors de leur évaluation des produits ethniques et des relations interethniques. Ces « Go-Alongs » permettent aussi d'observer en profondeur les modes d'expression personnelle. En revanche, ils ne peuvent capturer les pratiques de consommation au-delà du cadre limité de l'espace et du moment de l'achat. Ces entretiens ne fournissent pas non plus un accès complet aux récits et aux discours. Il semble donc pertinent de les utiliser en association avec des entretiens approfondis.

## Mots-clés

Go-Alongs, recherche qualitative, recherche sur l'entrepreneuriat immigré, entrepreneurs immigrés, clients de souche, pratiques de consommation, relation interethnique

## Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo es evaluar la práctica metodológica de "Go-Alongs" para explorar los clientes nativos de empresarios inmigrantes, un subcampo poco desarrollado dentro de la investigación empresarial inmigrante. Mediante el acompañamiento en las personas en las salidas en sus entornos familiares, el método de Go-Alongs para la recolección de datos cualitativos se utiliza para tener acceso a prácticas, experiencias e interpretaciones de los individuos en sus rutinas cotidianas. A partir de la investigación cualitativa reciente de los clientes nativos en las tiendas de comestibles de inmigrantes en Viena, demostramos cómo los Go-Alongs pueden ser utilizados para explorar las prácticas de consumo y patrones de interacción interétnica en este contexto específico. Lo que se hace evidente es que la herramienta de Go-Alongs proporciona una oportunidad de acceder a los aspectos reflexivos de la experiencia vivida in situ, en nuestro caso expresada por los comentarios espontáneos y emocionales cuando están en la tienda, cuando se comentan y se evalúan productos étnicos y las interacciones interétnicas. Por otra parte, el Go-Along posibilita interpretaciones de los modos de auto-expresión. Sin embargo, esta herramienta tiene limitaciones ya que no puede capturar las prácticas de consumo más allá del tiempo y el espacio limitado de las compras. Por otra parte, tampoco proporcionan por completo el acceso a las narrativas y discursos. Por lo tanto, es más útiles si combinado con las entrevistas en profundidad.

## Palabras clave

Go-Alongs, investigación cualitativa, investigación de empresas de inmigrantes, empresarios inmigrantes, clientes nativos, prácticas de consumo, interacción interétnica