Who enters self-employment in the labor market? This is a question that has been extensively researched. To find answers, studies have been concerned with what characterizes the individuals who make the different employment choices. This dissertation takes another approach to the issue and shows how self-employment, just as any other type of employment, is socially preconditioned. Rather than focusing on what characterizes the individuals who enter self-employment, this study looks at what characterizes the social structures of particular fields, as well as at what position the self-employed individuals hold within these structures. We then gain an understanding of how social positions are related to employment possibilities, and which social groups enter self-employment. The study builds on the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

This dissertation examines two social fields: management consulting and artistic production. The results show that what characterizes the group of individuals who are self-employed is quite different depending on the social context. Among management consultants, self-employment is foremost related to social origin, while in artistic production it is related to investments made in the field itself. However, in both fields, the self-employed individuals hold a similar social position.