Immigrant self-employment and transnational practices: the case of Moroccan entrepreneurs in Amsterdam and Milan

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CHAPTER 7

Summing up: conclusions and discussion

What are the factors influencing transnational immigrant entrepreneurship and which resources do transnational immigrant entrepreneurs use to identify and seize opportunities for running their business? How do TIEs differ from DIEs in this regard? Are there similarities or differences among TIEs, and if so, what are they and why do they exist?

In this dissertation, I address the topic of immigrant entrepreneurship and transnational practices (transnational immigrant entrepreneurship), most particularly how transnational immigrant entrepreneurs (TIEs) identify and seize business opportunities, and what resources they mobilize to that end. In this concluding chapter, an answer to the questions posed in the introduction (see Chapter 1 and box above) will be provided.

In the empirical research, I analysed the case of Moroccan entrepreneurs in Amsterdam and Milan, I compared TIEs and DIEs, and I investigated dissimilarities among TIEs. The general approach was qualitative. However, the questionnaire combined qualitative questions with quantitative measures and techniques from social network analysis. The research consisted in interviewing 70 Moroccan entrepreneurs (30 in Amsterdam and 40 in Milan, 35 TIEs and 35 DIEs), all of whom were selected through a statistically non-representative sampling strategy, but with the aim of making it possible to compare TIEs and DIEs (see Chapter 3).

These conclusions read as follow. The first section (7.1) summarises the model and the concepts proposed in Chapter 2. Then, in order to connect the theoretical approach and the empirical results, the following sections address the main research questions illustrated in the introduction (see also box above). In particular, Section 7.2 focuses on factors that influence transnational immigrant entrepreneurship and resources used by TIEs to identify and seize business opportunities (Research Question 1). Section 7.3 highlights differences between TIEs and DIEs in how they identify and seize business opportunities (Research Question 2). Section 1

1 Here the term ‘resources’ should be interpreted in a broad sense, indicating any factors that might be considered a resource by the entrepreneur and might be used for the business. For example, embeddedness in places and groups is considered here as a resource that entrepreneurs use for the business, particularly to identify and seize available business opportunities.
7.4 deals with variations among TIEs with different characteristics, such as the sector and the market they cater to, whether they are 1st or 1.5-generation immigrants, and the city they live in (Research Question 3). Finally, Section 7.5 concludes the chapter and the dissertation with some reflections regarding the strengths, the limitations, and certain research and policy implications of the study.

**7.1 Theoretical and conceptual advancements: a multifocal model**

The starting point of this thesis is a conceptual model for understanding transnational immigrant entrepreneurship. This model is based on three schemes previously developed by scholars in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship - the interactive model (Waldinger et al., 1990), the mixed embeddedness approach (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Kloosterman & Rath, 2001), and the integrative model (Chen & Tan, 2009) -, but it also adds some key concepts.

The conceptual model rests on the assumption that we should take into account multiple places (not only the country of destination), different spatial scales, and different groups (not only the co-national group) to understand transnational entrepreneurial activities run by immigrants. To this end, I propose the concept of *multifocality*, which refers to *simultaneous links with multiple places and groups*. Concretely, this means that migrants take into account multiple places and groups for their entrepreneurial activities. Starting from this, I propose to add a new sphere to the two already illustrated in the literature (i.e. the political-institutional context and the economic context - see Schutjens, 2014). This new sphere is group modes of behaviours, namely the set of habits, role models and attitudes that are distinctive to a certain group. Examples of such modes of behaviour are consumer habits and entrepreneurial conducts.

Concerning how transnational entrepreneurs identify and seize business opportunities, i.e. the central topic of this research, the model identifies three processes involved. The first is linked to structural embeddedness, the second to relational embeddedness, and the third to individual characteristics. Structural embeddedness refers to profound and direct understanding of the features of places and groups. Relational embeddedness refers to embeddedness in social networks, and in particular to ego’s contacts, as well as relations with and among these contacts. The category of individual characteristics includes the entrepreneur’s skills (such as level of education and language skills), experiences (such as past work experience) and attitudes (e.g. pro-activeness).

Therefore, transnational immigrant entrepreneurs (TIEs) may be able to identify and exploit opportunities thanks to a deep understanding of, and integration in, the places and groups that they are connected with (structural embeddedness). The opportunities may also be recognised due to certain key contacts (relational embeddedness). Finally, individual characteristics can provide the ‘tools’ to identify and seize available opportunities.

**7.2 Immigrant entrepreneurs who run a cross-border business (TIEs)**

The main contribution of my study is to understand the mechanisms behind the entrepreneurial practices of transnational immigrant entrepreneurs (TIEs), an emerging category of
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immigrant entrepreneurs in contemporary society. This seems particularly interesting if we wish to understand how ongoing global processes (increased possibilities for international communication and travel) shape immigrant entrepreneurial choices and how immigrant entrepreneurs take advantage of these processes.

Concerning transnational immigrant entrepreneurship, as stressed by previous schemes and by the encompassing conceptual model introduced in Chapter 2, this clearly emerges - even more so than for immigrant entrepreneurship in general (see Section 7.3) - from the combination of contextual characteristics on the one hand, which create opportunities, and the entrepreneurs' resources (structural embeddedness, relational embeddedness, individual characteristics) on the other hand, which help identify and seize available opportunities. It follows that taking into account only one aspect (e.g. individual resources and contacts) of this combination would not have permitted to fully understand the processes involved in transnational immigrant entrepreneurship (i.e. opportunity seizing).

Regarding opportunity structure, in order to set up cross-border businesses, TIEs combine opportunities from different places. These opportunities are represented mainly by group modes of behaviours and the economic context of certain places. TIEs usually take into account different countries on multiple spatial scales. In particular, rather than considering only the country of destination (in our case, Italy or the Netherlands) and their country of origin (Morocco), they also focus on third countries, so they usually combine more than two countries (see Chapter 4). Therefore, they are multi-focal on a national scale, meaning they have links with multiple places, rather than bi-focal, as suggested by most of the existing literature (Vertovec, 2001; Portes et al., 2002; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). This multifocality is fundamental, since in the majority of cases connecting two countries would otherwise be insufficient for the purposes of implementing a cross-border business (see Chapter 4).

Besides this, TIEs also take advantage of opportunities located on different spatial scales, e.g. national, regional and local - city and neighbourhood - (multiscalarity). For example, many consultancy agencies exploit the fact that Italian and Dutch companies wish to penetrate the growing Moroccan market (opportunity on a national scale). Another example is a concentration of co-nationals (with their needs and habits) in a given city or neighbourhood providing the entrepreneurs with a market where they can sell their imported products (opportunity on a local scale).

However, when they consider group characteristics and modes of behaviours, TIEs mainly focus on their co-nationals, and are therefore mainly mono-focal when it comes to groups. In contrast with what the conceptual model suggests, TIEs are multi-focal only with regard to places, and not groups.

Given available opportunities, how do TIEs identify and seize these opportunities? Which resources are used to identify and seize opportunities? The conceptual model presented in Chapter 2 mainly includes three kinds of entrepreneurial resources: structural embedded-
ness, relational embeddedness, and individual characteristics (see Chapter 2 and Section 7.1). This is empirically confirmed. They use a mix of resources in order to identify and seize business opportunities. The immigrant entrepreneurs with this mix of resources seem more likely than others to be involved in transnational entrepreneurial activities (see also Section 7.3).

Due to their direct understanding of places and group characteristics and conditions (structural embeddedness), TIEs are able to identify and seize available business opportunities. Even though they take multiple places into account to do so, they usually exploit their embeddedness in their country of destination and their country of origin. However, due to their awareness and understanding of the habits and needs of the Moroccan diaspora in Europe (i.e. their structural embeddedness in the co-national group), to a certain extent they are also embedded in third countries (particularly in European countries where Moroccan immigrants are present, e.g. France and Belgium).

However, the precise relevance of structural embeddedness is not always the same among TIEs. Those who focus only on Morocco and their country of destination - namely, those who are bi-focal (indeed a minority in our study, see Chapter 4) - are among the respondents who take greater advantage of their structural embeddedness in places (e.g. Morocco and their country of destination) and groups (e.g. co-nationals), compared to multi-focal TIEs. Logically, since Morocco and Moroccan immigrants are the core of bi-focal TIEs, structural embeddedness in Morocco and in the co-national group is more important for them than for those who also have connections with other, third countries.

In comparison to the previous literature, this study confirms the importance of embeddedness (re-defined here as structural embeddedness) in the contexts where the business operates (Sequeira et al., 2009; Urbano et al., 2010). However, if we consider embeddedness in groups, the model introduced in Chapter 2 does not fit what emerges from the empirical data. Indeed, the model implies embeddedness in multiple groups, for which the interviews provided no evidence.

TIEs also need to have a given set of social contacts in order to identify and seize the ‘right’ opportunities to run a transnational business. Indeed, the entrepreneurs’ contacts, constituting their social networks, as well as their embeddedness in these networks (relational embeddedness), are important tools used to identify and seize business opportunities. TIE networks are generally not very dense, and they are rich in structural holes (Burt, 1992). They take resources from different, non-homogenous contacts. In other words, they make use of what the literature calls their ‘bridging social capital’ (Putman, 2000; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Baron, 2015).

In particular, they have links with Moroccans - who are mainly located in their country of destination and Morocco -, natives of their country of destination, and people of other nationalities who live abroad. In order to identify and seize opportunities, TIEs use both weak ties, namely people with whom the entrepreneurs have no emotionally-close relations (Granovetter, 1973 and 1983), in particular, exclusively work-related contacts, and strong ties (i.e.
mainly relatives, but also friends) to identify and exploit available opportunities. This is consistent with research results on both entrepreneurship in general (Uzzi, 1996; Davidsson & Honig, 2003) and immigrant entrepreneurship (Wong & Ng, 2002; Kariv et al., 2009; Patel & Terjesen, 2011), but was not expected, since TIEs have rather heterogeneous networks. This can be explained by many strong ties being what allows TIEs to bridge different contacts and opportunities. As also underlined for example by Jack (2005) concerning entrepreneurship in general, strong ties can represent a way to link with weak ties operating in a wider social context (e.g. outside the country of destination). Therefore, TIEs appear to take advantage of heterogeneous and geographically-dispersed contacts. This follows the results of Patel and Conklin (2009), who underlined that TIEs take advantage of balancing their networks in terms of the geographic location and the status of their contacts.

Most of these contacts were already present in the entrepreneur’s network before the business start-up, and so were not acquired in connection with the business. This is a new finding, since previous studies have generally not considered temporality, and it underlines the fact that their networks led Moroccan entrepreneurs to internationalise their business, and not the other way around.

Concretely, TIEs get support from their contacts in three different ways in order to identify and seize opportunities. First, the most important support received from their network is informational. The information provided is fundamental since TIEs cannot be expected to be aware of all the opportunities located everywhere. Therefore, thanks to their geographically-dispersed network, they receive information about a wide range of places. Second, strong ties (mainly relatives) help TIEs to manage the foreign side of their business. Since TIEs are not physically present in those contexts, they often need someone they can trust to help them. This support is crucial and allows TIEs to be involved in several places at once and, consequently, to identify and seize opportunities in more places than they would otherwise. Third, contacts often support TIEs financially. The findings underline the fact that suppliers often help entrepreneurs by allowing them to delay payment for the products provided. This allows entrepreneurs with limited financial resources to seize opportunities by starting to satisfy a certain request for products or services (e.g. a demand for goods from their country of origin) and, consequently, to internationalise their business.

Apart from structural and relational embeddedness, it clearly emerges from the interviews that TIEs need to have certain individual characteristics that allow them to identify and seize business opportunities. In particular, education, past work experience, or an entrepreneurial family background provide them with the basis for running their business. TIEs generally need to have an education that has allowed them to acquire the skills necessary to manage an international business. Furthermore, it appears that past work experience and family entrepreneurial background increase awareness of opportunities in a particular business sector. As stressed in the literature (Rusinovic, 2008; Terjesen & Elam, 2009), linguistic skills (mainly Arabic, French
and English) are also fundamental, since they provide a ‘transnational linguistic capital’ (Gerhards, 2012) that allows TIEs to identify and seize available opportunities abroad. For example, without their knowledge of Arabic, they would not be able to take advantage of the MENA (Middle-East and North-African) market. Finally, TIEs also have a certain degree of pro-activeness. For example, they strongly invest in individual research to identify business opportunities.

In conclusion, comparing the model presented in Chapter 2 and the empirical findings on transnational immigrant entrepreneurs, the results largely match the conceptual model proposed. In particular, the importance of stressing the role played by group modes of behaviours in creating opportunities that TIEs can seize is confirmed by the empirical data. Also confirmed are the relevance of multiple places and different spatial scales (multifocality and multiscalarity), as well as the role played by both structural and relational embeddedness to explain how entrepreneurs identify and seize business opportunities. However, regarding the role of groups, the conceptual model suggests a multi-group influence on transnational business practices, but this is not totally supported by the results. Indeed, when it comes to groups, Moroccan TIEs almost exclusively focus on opportunities linked to their co-nationals, and they take advantage of structural embeddedness only with respect to the co-national group. Therefore, the concept of multifocality, which is linked to both places and groups in the model, seems to be valid only in connection with places.

7.3 Differences and similarities between TIEs and DIEs

The thesis also explores differences between TIEs and DIEs. The results show that TIEs and DIEs have different profiles, albeit with some similarities. In general, in comparison with DIEs, TIEs in the sample seems to make more frequent use of their ‘mixed embeddedness’, thereby taking advantage of the interplay between the opportunity structure and their personal characteristics and contacts. Indeed, TIEs generally seize opportunities in the contexts where they have connections, whereas only DIEs in the ethnic market take advantage of contextual opportunities. DIEs in the mainstream market generally appear to be disconnected from the opportunities created by specific contextual conditions.

Besides this difference, TIEs and DIEs also diverge in the places (and the number of places) that they consider when it comes to seizing business opportunities. DIEs only take advantage of opportunities located in their country of destination, mainly on a local scale (their neighbourhood and their city of destination). Therefore, they are mono-focal and mono-scalar with regard to places. TIEs on the other hand benefit from opportunities located in multiple places - their country of destination, that of origin and third countries - (multifocality) on different spatial scales (multiscalarity). However, both TIEs and DIEs mainly deal with opportunities created by the presence of their co-nationals, and are thus mono-focal when it comes to groups.

Their structural embeddedness in these places and groups helps TIEs (in general) and DIEs (in the ethnic market) to identify and seize business opportunities. Apart from this em-
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beddedness in the co-national group that is common to both categories of immigrant entrepreneur, TIEs take advantage of their structural embeddedness in both their country of destination and their country of origin, whereas DIEs exploit their structural embeddedness only in their country of destination.

TIEs show greater diversity in the resources they use to identify and seize business opportunities, and this is particularly true regarding their embeddedness in social networks (i.e. their relational embeddedness). TIEs identify and seize opportunities by bridging several different types of social contacts (in terms of the contacts’ country of origin and residence). Their networks are less homogeneous, less spatially-concentrated and less dense, and this provides TIEs with a variety of resources and contacts. In contrast, DIEs tend to establish connections only with similar social contacts located in their country of destination. This is consistent with Portes and colleagues (2002), who stress the fact that DIEs are entrepreneurs with contacts within the city where they set their business. Such differences between TIE and DIE networks predate the business, in that the contacts that TIEs acquired before they started their business were already less homogeneous and less spatially concentrated than those of DIEs in the same situation.

But network structure and composition are not the only aspects differentiating TIEs and DIEs, as the role played by people in their networks also varies greatly. The contacts of TIEs have a more relevant role than those of DIEs. They provide important information regarding opportunities, and they support the entrepreneur in managing the foreign side of the business. In other words, TIEs would not be able to run a cross-border business without the help of these contacts. In contrast, the contacts of DIEs mainly provide advice regarding bureaucracy and, occasionally, labour support.

Moreover, TIEs and DIEs also differ in the way they use their individual characteristics for the purpose of identifying and seizing business opportunities. TIEs seem to take advantage of better-focused degrees (e.g. Economics, Management, International entrepreneurship), while DIEs generally exploit the fact of being well-educated for the purpose of better understanding how to deal with bureaucracy. TIEs also appear to be more pro-active than DIEs, something that emerges for example looking at how they use any entrepreneurial background in their family. DIEs are more likely to follow into the family footsteps. They either go on with the family business or they start a new one in exactly the same field. By contrast, TIEs may start from the family path, but they try to expand the business, for instance by crossing borders. TIEs also have better linguistic skills than do DIEs, and this helps them identify and seize new business opportunities all around the world. Our interviews highlighted the fact that these linguistic skills were usually acquired well-before the start-up of the cross-border business.

To summarise, TIEs and DIEs appear to differ in the breadth of their scope when it comes to identifying and seizing business opportunities, as can be seen from their level of structural and relational embeddedness. Furthermore, they also diverge in some of their per-
sonal characteristics and how they use them. However, as underlined in Chapter 6, education and other individual characteristics do not affect differences between TIEs and DIEs in terms of using structural and relational embeddedness to identify and seize business opportunities. In other words, even when controlling for individual characteristics, the effects of structural and relational embeddedness on the business practices of immigrant entrepreneurs still hold.

As for how differences between Amsterdam and Milan might impact on the dissimilarities between TIEs and DIEs, these seem to fundamentally affect only the spatial concentration of the entrepreneurs’ contacts. Since the Netherlands is smaller than Italy, and Northern-Holland does not share the strong productive structure that characterises Lombardy (i.e. an economic fabric made up of small- and mid-sized businesses), DIE contacts do not follow the pattern of being more spatially concentrated in the region and in the city of destination, as is the case for the whole sample.

7.4 Different profiles of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship

The results of the research also highlight the fact that there are some differences among TIEs. Two different contrasting profiles emerge. The first profile (Profile 1) is characterised by TIEs who strongly stress the entrepreneurial aspects of their migratory journey. The second (Profile 2) is particularly linked to emphasizing their profile as migrants.

In the sample, TIEs with a business in the service sector and/or serving a mainstream market more frequently fit in Profile 1 (stressing the entrepreneurial experience), whereas TIEs who run a business offering goods (import/export) and/or serving an ethnic market are more likely to fit in Profile 2 (stressing the immigration experience). Furthermore, 1.5-generation respondents and Amsterdam ones generally fit in the first profile, while first-generation interviewees and those in Milan are more likely to be included in the second.

Nevertheless, the main factor that seems to influence the two profiles is education. As the interviews show, higher-educated entrepreneurs are more likely to set up a business in the mainstream market and in the service sector than lower-educated ones. Therefore, education influences both sector and market choice, and thus the fact of falling into Profile 1 or Profile 2. Another key element is the city where the business is located. The production system of Milan and Lombardy appears to favour the start-up of goods-related businesses. In contrast, Amsterdam’s strong services sector leads TIEs to be more involved in consultancy agencies (see Chapter 3).

In general, TIEs who stress the entrepreneurial experience (Profile 1) usually follow the ‘breaking-out’ process underlined in the literature (Ram & Hillin, 1994; Engelen, 2001; Barret et al., 2002; Kloosterman & Rath, 2010; Arrighetti et al., 2014). They are not part of the ethnic enclave (Wilson & Portes, 1980) and they focus less on Morocco; they also mainly take advantage of business contacts outside the family and, partially, outside the group of their co-nationals. In contrast, TIEs in Profile 2 (those who stress their immigration experience) remain strongly connected to their origins and do not follow this breaking-out process.
In particular, the two profiles differ concerning three main elements:

- Compared to entrepreneurs in Profile 1 (those who stress their entrepreneurial experience), respondents in Profile 2 (those who stress their immigration experience) more frequently take advantage of their co-nationals’ modes of behaviours and are more likely to seize opportunities brought about through their structural embeddedness in the Moroccan group. TIEs in Profile 2 also have a higher number of business links with Morocco than TIEs in Profile 1.

- TIEs in the second profile (stressing the immigration experience) rely less on exclusively work-related contacts and weak ties, and more on relatives; they also have a higher number of co-nationals in their business networks than those who fall in the first profile. However, this difference appears relevant only if TIEs are sorted by the market addressed (ethnic or mainstream).

- TIEs in Profile 1 (i.e. the entrepreneurial profile) appear to be more skilled than TIEs from Profile 2, since they have better linguistic abilities and a more business-focused education. Furthermore, when it comes to their entrepreneurial path and how they identify and seize business opportunities, Profile 1 TIEs rely more on education, whereas those in Profile 2 more often take advantage of their entrepreneurial family background.

The research also underlines certain dissimilarities between TIEs in Amsterdam and Milan. The different contextual conditions in the two cities produce differences in transnational entrepreneurial activities. In particular, characteristics such as productive regional fabric are less relevant in Amsterdam than in Milan (Chapter 3). For this reason, TIE contacts in Milan are more concentrated in Lombardy than those in Amsterdam are concentrated in Northern-Holland. Indeed, the business connections of Amsterdam entrepreneurs are more widely spread all around the country. Interviewees in Milan often stress the importance of the production environment in the city, whereas Amsterdam respondents do not.

Embeddedness in their co-national group leads TIEs in Milan to maintain business contacts with those European countries where the presence of Moroccan immigrants is particularly relevant (e.g. France and Belgium). This is not the case in Amsterdam. It is possible to hypothesise that since there are many more people with a Moroccan background in Amsterdam (see Chapter 3) than in Milan, TIEs in the Dutch city tend to focus more on the internal market. This is confirmed by interviewees, who often refer to the many opportunities for Moroccans in the Netherlands.

### 7.5 Some reflections on the study's strengths, limitations, and research and policy implications

To conclude, this research contributes to the field of immigrant entrepreneurship, and in particular transnational immigrant entrepreneurship. The thesis provides a conceptual step forward by proposing a partially new conceptual model based on the concepts of multifocality and structural and relational embeddedness (see section 7.1), and represents one of the
first attempts in the field (another was Rusinovic, 2008a) to apply the mixed embeddedness approach to the study of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship.

Consequently, at an empirical level, the study also represents an endeavour in taking into account different elements that may influence transnational immigrant entrepreneurship (as well as immigrant entrepreneurship in general). Indeed, I have considered the individual level, i.e. individual characteristics and personal contacts (social network), and the level of contextual conditions and opportunities. So far, apart from a few exceptions (e.g. Portes et al., 2002; Brzozowski et al., 2014), the existing literature on transnational immigrant entrepreneurship has focused either on individual characteristics and social networks (e.g. Portes et al., 2002; Kariv et al., 2009; Sequeira et al., 2009; Patel & Conklin, 2009; Terjesen & Elam, 2009), or, separately, on contextual conditions and opportunities (e.g. Miera, 2008; Urbano et al., 2011).

Another substantial contribution of this thesis to the field of transnational entrepreneurship is the systematic comparison between TIEs and DIEs, a point which to my knowledge has only ever been addressed by Portes and colleagues (2002). Comparing TIEs and DIEs helps uncover the specific characteristics of transnational entrepreneurs as a group. As for how TIEs identify and seize opportunities, the study also emphasises that there are some dissimilarities among them, with respect to generation, city of residence, and market and sector addressed.

Finally, the research also provides a contribution from a methodological point of view, since a qualitative approach using mixed-method questions and measures was applied. This is a novel approach, since I used a threefold combination: qualitative questions, quantitative measures and techniques from personal network analysis. The ‘mix’ of these allowed me to capture different aspects and processes regarding the topic under examination.

The thesis, and in particular the empirical research on which it is based, also has some limitations, mainly due to the fact of addressing one specific group of immigrants. The focus on one group, in particular Moroccan immigrants, may have led to certain particular results. In fact, as underlined by Portes and colleagues (2002), different national groups can develop different transnational and entrepreneurial activities. For example, I found that Moroccan entrepreneurs have links abroad with third countries and not only with Morocco. This might be influenced by three factors. First, Moroccan immigrants are spread all around Europe (Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands) and therefore Moroccan entrepreneurs can easily have contacts with co-nationals in those countries. Second, Moroccans know the Arabic language, and this allows them to have business links with other countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The findings regarding other national groups might be very different in this regard. Third, Morocco is a country with a stable political situation and a growing economy (Arieff, 2015). This may have increased the number of links with the country of origin. For example, Brzozowski and colleagues (2014) found that immigrant entrepreneurs benefit from ties with their country of origin only if the economic and political situation is relatively stable. Therefore, as underlined also by Portes and colleagues (2002), the prevailing conditions in the country of origin are fundamental when it comes to developing a cross-border business.
Because of these limitations and as with any investigation, my research also leaves some open questions that could serve as the basis for subsequent studies on the topic. Concerning the future direction of such research, other studies analysing the empirical application of the conceptual model proposed and the concepts illustrated in this dissertation would be particularly useful for the field. The empirical results of the research show the relevance - although with some limitations (see Section 7.2) - of the model proposed in Chapter 2 (see also Section 7.1), and, in particular, the concepts of multifocality and structural and relational embeddedness as tools for understanding the entrepreneurial practices of transnational immigrant entrepreneurs. However, other studies - using both qualitative and quantitative methods - are necessary to further test the model and the explicative power of the concepts.

Moreover, additional research is required regarding differences, in terms of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship, between various national groups of immigrants in a European context. In fact, most studies focus on a single group of immigrant entrepreneurs (e.g. Moroccans), generally in one context. Moreover, in order to understand the impact of the conditions prevailing in the country of origin, I think it is necessary to compare national groups with different situations in their country of origin (e.g. stable vs. unstable political situations) and different ‘integration’ and/or residential patterns (concentration and segregation vs. dispersion and insertion).

My research also illustrates certain findings regarding temporality and causality. Indeed, it seems that, before the business start-up, TIEs already have a number of key contacts abroad and certain skills (e.g. linguistic skills) that they use when they decide to start their cross-border business. However, I retraced this through some questions regarding the past. In this regard, a longitudinal study would shed further light on the dynamics at play between entrepreneurial profile and transnational immigrant entrepreneurship, and would determine whether certain skills and contacts effectively predate the decision to start a cross-border business or if these are acquired through the entrepreneurial activity. This would be particularly interesting because the literature on business internationalization has emphasised the dynamic use of social networks (Agndal et al., 2008).

The study presented here focuses only on first- and 1.5-generation immigrants. In this regard, another open question - which was partially addressed by Rusinovic (2008) - would be how people who were born in a given country but whose origins are in another (second-generation immigrants) deal with a cross-border business, e.g. whether they focus on their country of origin or choose to concentrate on third countries.

Finally, the findings illustrated in this dissertation also have policy implications. In the text, I only touched upon the profitability of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship in comparison to immigrant entrepreneurship in general. However, as evidenced from my research, TIE businesses seem more profitable than DIE businesses, and they seem to have a stronger capacity for resilience when there is an economic crisis (see Chapter 5).

The whole study clearly underlines the fact that transnational entrepreneurial activities
represent a way to use their ‘immigrant’ background in a different way, and to value the resources that they already have (e.g., experience in multiple contexts, contacts all around the world, linguistic skills). This implies that policies could foster this particular form of immigrant entrepreneurship in order to lead immigrants to employ the resources they already have to start-up profitable small businesses and, consequently, achieve better economic integration in their chosen country. For example, a way to promote transnational immigrant entrepreneurship may be to create transnational incubators, i.e. business incubators geared to fostering business start-ups linked to the immigrants’ country of origin.2

Besides this, my research clearly shows that, as in the case of international entrepreneurship in general, linguistic skills are fundamental. In particular, they are crucial in order to avoid a ‘loop’ involving the country of destination and the country of origin, and to facilitate business links with third countries. Therefore, a policy target should be the stimulation and improvement of immigrants’ linguistic skills (for example, through language courses).

In conclusion, this dissertation has dealt with the topic of immigrant transnational entrepreneurship, by comparing Moroccan TIEs and DIEs in Amsterdam and Milan. In particular, it provides new insights regarding how transnational immigrant entrepreneurs identify and seize business opportunities, and traces a profile of transnational immigrant entrepreneurs.

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2 In this regard, an interesting experience was that of IntEnt which aimed to foster international entrepreneurship between the Netherlands and Morocco, Ghana and Suriname (see Rieddle et al., 2010 and 2011).