

Study and work paving the way for Moroccan migrants: the entrepreneurial path to transnational and domestic business activities

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Study and work paving the way for Moroccan migrants: the entrepreneurial path to transnational and domestic business activities

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Abstract: In this article we look at the various paths taken by transnational and domestic entrepreneurs based on their education and work experience. These act as catalysts for skills that allow migrant entrepreneurs to better position themselves in different markets. Differences in migrant entrepreneurs allow us to better understand the strategies employed and the consequences for society and the economy at both domestic and transnational levels. Earlier research has extensively analysed individual characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs and, to a much lesser extent, the geographical nature of their business activities.

This article addresses this gap by looking at the geographical orientation of migrant entrepreneurs' businesses. The research question is as follows: In what ways are transnational or domestic activities of Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands and Italy influenced by skills acquired in earlier experiences? We provide empirical evidence on the different paths leading to domestic and transnational activities using a micro-level perspective of the experiences collected in the narratives of first-generation Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs who have migrated to Milan or Amsterdam (N=70).

Four different paths combining these two life experiences emerged from the interviews: #1 Job-based, #2 Education-driven, #3 Job-education merger, and #4 By chance (neither education nor work experience). The most relevant paths for migrant entrepreneurs seem to be the first (#1) and third (#3) paths. Furthermore, our findings show that transnationally oriented entrepreneurs have an extended business-oriented education and rely on skills

learned, in contrast to domestically oriented entrepreneurs who become entrepreneurs 'by chance'.

Keywords: Size and Spatial Distributions of Regional Economic Activity, Migrant entrepreneurship in cities, Transnationalism

1 Introduction

To be an entrepreneur is usually associated with risk-taking and a thirst for innovation and profit (Morgan et al., 2018; Rogers, 2003). Studies have only recently started researching migrant entrepreneurs as agents in relation to markets where innovation is fuelled by diversity and new ideas are fuelled by migration (Alvarado Valenzuela, 2021; Nathan, 2015; Zhang & Zhang, 2016). In this paper, we analyse the activities and locations of businesses to find differences in the type of migrant entrepreneur behind those businesses. When customers or suppliers are located in the same country as the entrepreneur, we are referring to domestic activities that take the form of minimarkets, bakeries, grocery stores, etc.; when customers or suppliers are located in different countries than the entrepreneur, we are referring to transnational activities, such as import/export businesses or international consultancy.

Migrant entrepreneurs identify opportunities in a particular market or markets, and on this basis decide on the geographical orientation of their business (Bagwell, 2018; Kloosterman, 2010). Explanations point at that decision being driven by their individual situation and their capacities (Kloosterman et al., 2016), by their role in local and national economies (Autio et al., 2014; Toruńczyk-Ruiz, 2014), or by the nature of their economic activities (Solano, 2020; Valenzuela-Garcia et al., 2018).

The case of migrant entrepreneurs allows a further discussion about their position in relation to markets in which they operate. Existing research has extensively analysed individual characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs but, to a lesser extent, their incentive to carry out transnational activities (Bagwell, 2018; Rath et al., 2019; Solano, 2015). Previous literature labels those operating a busi-

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ness across borders as transnational entrepreneurs, and those active in the market where they themselves reside as domestic entrepreneurs (Barberis & Solano, 2018; Drori et al., 2009; Henn, 2012; Rath & Schutjens, 2019). However, the transnational and domestic orientation of migrant entrepreneurs have rarely been compared in the same study (see Portes et al., 2002). As a consequence, it is not completely clear whether the geographical orientation of their business activities is peculiar to the entrepreneurs' individual characteristics, or if the general category of migrant entrepreneurs fully applies to transnational activities too (Solano, 2015).

This gap provides us with the opportunity to compare the nature of activities of migrant entrepreneurs based on the geographical scope of their business. This article addresses the ways through which earlier experiences influence the choice of operating at a transnational and/or domestic level. The research question is therefore as follows: *In what ways are transnational or domestic activities of Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands and Italy influenced by skills acquired in earlier experiences?* And, as we expect notable differences, we have a supporting question, namely: *which experiences are crucial to triggering transnational business opportunities?*

We build upon earlier research in which the choice of business opportunities is linked to the acquisition of business skills. An entrepreneur has ideas and opportunities, acquires and uses resources, and then gets into action (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). The set of skills are explained in the Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, and they are developed in longer periods, especially by means of education and training. That is why we explore the stories of migrant entrepreneurs in relation to the educational qualifications and the work experience that trigger these skills. Furthermore, we add the family background as a long-duration experience (Antonioli et al., 2009; Bosetti et al., 2015; Hunt, 2011; Jensen, 2014; Saxenian, 2007; Scott, 2006).

We provide empirical evidence on the differences using a micro-level perspective of the narratives of first-generation Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in Milan and Amsterdam (N=70). We selected this group because Moroccans have a long history of migration to several European countries, since the 1950s and 1960s, and their long-standing presence has allowed a diversification of businesses (Bijwaard, 2010; Colombo & Sciortino, 2004). Amsterdam and Milan were chosen because both have experienced long-term migratory flows from Morocco, and both are crucial for their respective countries offering opportunities of various labour paths, and internationally oriented lifestyles (Ambrosini, 2012; Cesareo, 2018; Couzy, 2018; Hawes

et al., 2017; Solano, 2016a). Both cities also have a substantial number of migrant residents and high, although different, levels of diversity (Pisarevskaya et al., 2021).

The article proceeds as follows. In the theoretical background, we elaborate further on migrant entrepreneurs and their business opportunities in domestic or transnational markets. Then, we explain the methodology for data collection and data analysis used in this study, including the contextual background for these two cities. After, we show the results and discuss about the choice of domestic or transnational markets and the impact of studying this group. We conclude with reflections about the influence of skills and experiences on the entrepreneurial paths of migrants.

2 Theoretical framework

Two labels are combined in the group being studied: the entrepreneur, and the migrant. To start with, international migration flows move ideas, resources, cultural practices and more across territories (Schiller et al., 1995; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), and "... those who undertake it are usually selected on demographic, social, economic and psychological grounds" (Massey et al., 1994, p. 1495). The widely accepted definition is that migrants are those who are not born in the country where they live. For a better understanding, the country of origin refers to the place where the person was born and raised, while the country of destination is the place where these people are currently living and operating their businesses.

To complete the second part of this label, an entrepreneur refers to a person who owns a business and has full capacity to decide upon the actions undertaken. Cultural practices expressed in business actions, and access to labour markets, are multi-disciplinary topics that makes migrant entrepreneurs different to native entrepreneurs. In earlier research focused on different migrant groups, their businesses are described as different to those run by native entrepreneurs in a number of aspects, namely: innovative ideas brought to the market (Hunt, 2011), relationship with neighbourhoods and urban areas (Jones et al., 2014), the organisation of the labour force of low-skilled workers in a household (Colombo, 2007), the occupation of ethnic niches (Rath, 2002), and the use of transnational links to receive goods in order to satisfy local ethnic groups (Ambrosini, 2014).

These business activities are happening at both the local and international levels where migrant entrepreneurs are active: their relation with both the countries of

origin and destination is translated into many activities, sometimes including businesses, being carried out across borders.

In that line, domestic and transnational entrepreneurs have been researched separately in most of the existing literature (Drori et al., 2009; Solano, 2015; Valenzuela-Garcia et al., 2018). The term ‘domestic entrepreneur’ refers to a business that focuses exclusively on the domestic market of the country (Portes et al., 2002). Entrepreneurs in the domestic markets have been found to strongly rely on personal traits that provide great advantages in developing business practices, with particular attention for personal networks (Alvarado Valenzuela, 2021; Bilecen et al., 2018). A transnational business is a business which spans across borders and entails economic activities linked with other countries, namely outside the country of immigration, e.g. import/export businesses (Chen & Tan, 2009; Drori et al., 2009; Portes et al., 2002). Entrepreneurs who were studied in transnational markets appear to have slightly more skills (e.g., linguistic skills), higher and more business-related levels of education, and more relevant work experience than entrepreneurs in domestic markets (Rusinovic, 2008; Storti, 2014; Valenzuela-Garcia et al., 2018). One of the few comparative studies of these two groups found that “measures of socioeconomic background-education and professional/executive experience have the positive effects anticipated by the same literature: Both increase the probability of self-employment, but the effects are stronger on transnational enterprise than on domestic enterprise” (Portes et al., 2002, p. 288).

Transnational relations are experienced by migrants “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48). To live in transnational geographic spaces implies having continuous exchanges across countries, where business ideas are seen as an outcome of the combination of the human, social and financial sources of capital influencing that process (Aldrich, 2005; Granovetter, 2005; Powell & Grodal, 2006).

To enter and operate certain businesses, entrepreneurs need to develop certain entrepreneurial skills, in order to find resources and profit from opportunities in the market (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Skills for business are part of human capital, wherein episodes of education and work experience are shown to be two of the biggest drivers in entrepreneurship processes, and in the process of acquiring skills (Bosetti et al., 2015; Hunt, 2011; Scott, 2006). Education is one of the main episodes to develop a realistic view of entrepreneurship and even novel busi-

ness ideas (Alvarado Valenzuela et al., 2020; Bosetti et al., 2015), because it operates as a bridge to gain access to resources such as applied knowledge, to belong to closed circles, to get acquainted with business contacts or to get a certificate of recognition of expertise. In countries like the Netherlands or Italy, education and work experience are very important, and the level of education of migrant entrepreneurs is usually higher than the average of the entrepreneurs without a migrant background (OECD, 2010). Several studies have pointed out that matching the level of education and training could provide migrants with adequate entrepreneurial skills to manage their business and seize opportunities in destination countries’ markets (Bates, 1994; Beckers & Blumberg, 2013; Hawes et al., 2017; Kariv et al., 2009; Patel & Conklin, 2009; Valdez, 2008).

Work experience provides a different set of skills, usually related to being in direct contact with the product or service’s customers, or being aware of the situation in the market (Oesch & Rodriguez Menes, 2011; Scott, 2006). This provides inspiration for people’s own business ideas and facilitates the recognition of opportunities in the market. Potential entrepreneurs use work experience to develop skills related to the knowledge of the sector as well as some key contacts such as suppliers and customers (Ladkin et al., 2016). Ideally, work experience puts an entrepreneur in an easier position to seize opportunities, but differences exist: entrepreneurial skills developed by migrants do not always correspond to such skills developed in work trajectories for native-born people without migratory experiences (Kloosterman et al., 2016). Nevertheless, work experience is a key factor because earlier steps in the same sector strongly influence immigrant entrepreneurial activities (Basu, 2004; Brettell & Alstatt, 2007; Nee & Sanders, 2001; Patel & Conklin, 2009; Raijman & Tienda, 2000)

To compensate for limitations in educational credentials and work experiences in the country of destination, many entrepreneurs activate personal networks as business support (Bagwell, 2015; Vacca et al., 2018). Close and extended family as well as close friends, provide them with motivation, useful experience and support for their business (Alvarado Valenzuela, 2019; Ambrosini, 2012; Basu, 2004; Bird & Wennberg, 2016; Leung, 2001).

Specifically in entrepreneurship, work experience and education allow the identification of needs and changes to profit from production or commercialization (Morgan et al., 2018). Opportunities for business in the market are thus heavily influenced by the personal characteristics of the migrant entrepreneur. Studies have shown that those with higher education levels, social status and economic

positions try out risky ideas, lead cosmopolitan lifestyles and play a gatekeeping role among different social groups (Rogers, 2003). For example, the high-end technology of companies in Silicon Valley is fuelled by the recruitment, on a global scale, of migrants with international work trajectories, particular skills and homophilic ethnic and cultural connections with existing employees (Saxenian, 2002, 2007).

Following on from those studies, our research question about the influence of skills in the choice for domestic or transnational business activities is empirically explored. In the following section, we go deeper into the choice of the geographical locations for this study, as well as the population and the methodology used.

3 Methodology

To understand the particular skills that migrant entrepreneurs use for their businesses, interviews are important sources of information to collect the necessary data (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Seventy interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014 as part of a broader study that looked at the resources employed by migrant entrepreneurs (Solano, 2016a). In that study, the main focus was on self-employment and the practices of being a transnational Moroccan entrepreneur in Amsterdam or Milan. Although the data is not very recent, the stories still have the potential to provide insights into skills, transnationalism and business that is now even more relevant due to further technological developments, e.g. social media and new technologies which are critical for (transnational migrant) entrepreneurs (Andreotti & Solano, 2019). The data collected stems from extensive interviews, which often involved multiple visits to the respondents. The interviews aimed at identifying and unravelling entrepreneurial patterns, including the role of education and work experience. Therefore, this data is ideal to provide an answer to this article's research questions, also in light of the unique comparative nature of the sample (transnational and domestic entrepreneurs). It reveals clear patterns and mechanisms linked to the focus of this article.

3.1 Why Moroccan entrepreneurs in Amsterdam and Milan?

We interviewed first-generation Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in Milan and Amsterdam (N=70). This group was selected for two reasons. First, as mentioned above,

Moroccans have a long history – since the 1950s and 60s – of migration into several European countries, and the diversification of businesses has occurred organically over the years (Bijwaard, 2010; Colombo & Sciortino, 2004). Second, Morocco is also a country with a stable political situation (Arieff, 2015). If this were not the case, political conditions might have discouraged economic links with the country of origin (Baltar & Icart, 2013; Portes et al., 2002).

Amsterdam and Milan are both crucial for their respective countries, with the opportunities of various labour paths, and internationally oriented lifestyles (Alvarado Valenzuela, 2021; Ambrosini, 2012; Cesareo, 2018; Couzy, 2018; Hawes et al., 2017; Solano, 2016b). Both cities have also experienced long-term migratory flows from Morocco, accumulating a considerable number of migrant residents, although they do have differences in migratory history, with Amsterdam and the Netherlands having a longer tradition of being places of immigration (since the 1960s) than Milan and Italy (since the late 1980s) (Bijwaard, 2010; Colombo & Sciortino, 2004; Rath, 2009).

Furthermore, Amsterdam and Milan both belong to a select group of super-diverse cities, as illustrated by a recent analysis on the level of diversity in European cities (Pisarevskaya et al., 2021). Both are mixed cities with migrants who have different backgrounds. As a result of this superdiversity in the migrant population, entrepreneurship as a work trajectory within each respective group has flourished. In 2019, about 19,000 Moroccan immigrants lived in the Milan area (0.7% of the total population),¹ compared to 77,000 Moroccan immigrants in the Amsterdam area (9% of the total population).² Earlier studies and statistics have shown that around one third of those immigrants are entrepreneurs: around 33% in Amsterdam (Rath & Swagerman, 2016) and 29% in Milan.³

Thus, the choice to study both cities was based on the combination of entrepreneurship in large proportions and the possibility to look deeper into the different trajectories that led to entrepreneurship. The work and education experience used in those trajectories is crucial to understand the working paths leading to entrepreneurship at a domestic or transnational level.

¹ Figures provided by the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT, 2019)

² Figures provided by the Dutch Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS, 2018, 2019).

³ Figures provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Milan (Milano, 2019).

3.2 Sampling, respondents and fieldwork

In order to understand the situations of Moroccans in both cities, the selection of respondents followed guidelines aligned with the gender, age and education distribution of migrants in the Netherlands and Italy at that moment of time (OECD, 2010): most participants were male ($n=54$), middle aged (about 40 years old), and with a medium to high level of education (secondary school or degree) – see Table 1. To get a broad picture of this group, several entry points were used to find Moroccan entrepreneurial activities in each city (Solano, 2016a): 1) a list provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Milan, with a short business description; 2) key figures in Moroccan associations with an influential role in the Moroccan communities of Amsterdam and Milan; 3) ethnic shops and stores where entrepreneurs leave business cards and publicity; and 4) Moroccan shops and stores that were visible in central neighbourhoods of Amsterdam and Milan. From that group of seventy interviews, there is a division of 30 from Amsterdam and 40 from Milan. The interviews were given a code and the transcripts were anonymised. In line with the expectations, the businesses fell into the category of small businesses, with fewer than 20% having more than four employees. Special attention was given to cover both ethnic ($n=27$) and non-ethnic/mainstream ($n=43$) businesses. Following literature on the topic (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990; Ambrosini, 2012; Jones et al., 2014), an ‘ethnic market’ refers to a market in which the products are mainly for a clientele of co-nationals and other immigrants, while a ‘mainstream market’ is a market addressing all types of clients (natives mostly but also co-nationals and other immigrants).

As explained in the theoretical framework, an aspect of major importance is geographical, i.e. the location of the business, as well as the nature of the business activities. We follow this definition to categorize the businesses: transnational entrepreneurs are migrant entrepreneurs who own a business oriented to a transnational market and transnational activities, while domestic entrepreneurs are those owning businesses catering to local or national markets. It is important to stress that the word transnational, as opposed to domestic, refers to the business and not the migrants. The business might be transnational or might not be, while a certain degree of transnationalism characterises all migrants’ lives, transnationalism is seen in “individuals who migrate from one country to another, concurrently maintaining business related linkages with their former country of origin, and currently adopted countries and communities. By traveling both physically and virtually, [... they] simultane-

ously engage in two or more socially embedded environments, allowing them to maintain critical global relations that enhance their ability to creatively, dynamically, and logistically maximize their resource base” (Drori et al., 2009, p. 1001). To distinguish between transnational and domestic (non-transnational) business activities, the categorization is binary using the question in the interviews: ‘Is there a relevant part of your business related with your country of origin or with other countries outside Italy/the Netherlands?’ In order to avoid bias linked to self-reporting, the answer to this key question was discussed in depth during the interviews.

Within the group of respondents, there were two main types of transnational businesses: import/export businesses, and consultancy agencies (e.g. mediation and counselling for individuals and companies that want to invest in Italy/the Netherlands from abroad, or want to invest abroad from Italy/the Netherlands). Within the group of domestic businesses, there is more variety: retailers, supermarkets, cafes, bakeries, greengrocers, hairdressers and more.

The respondents answered questions of both a qualitative and quantitative nature (Yousefi Nooraie et al., 2020) about their individual experiences, business strategies, relations with other people and business situations. The interviews lasted between one hour and a half and three hours, and were conducted at the business premises. Interviews were conducted in either the official language of the destination country (Italian or Dutch) or in English, when the respondents opted for it. In the section on individual experiences, there were specific questions looking at: level of education and training, work experience, and family background.

The interviews were then analysed through the NVivo software, paying special attention to the relationship of life experiences with entrepreneurial opportunities and skills. The coding of the transcripts permitted the clarification of quantitative questions such as education or work with more details on the impact of those experiences on the businesses. It also allowed the categorization of each case into groups: those who had experience in the same sector before, and those who did not; those who sold to mainstream markets, and those who sold to ethnic markets; and those with an education to at least the end of secondary level, and those without.

Participants usually owned small businesses, with one or two employees (64%). Transnational and domestic entrepreneurs have rather similar profiles. The main difference is that the sample of domestic entrepreneurs is composed of more respondents in the mainstream market.

Table 1: Characteristics of the 70 interviews

	<i>Entire group</i>	<i>Transnational entrepreneurs</i>	<i>Domestic entrepreneurs</i>
Amsterdam	30	15	15
Milan	40	20	20
Men	54	26	28
Age (median)	43	39	44
Higher level of education (finished secondary school or higher)	51	27	24
Mainstream business	43	17	26
Ethnic business	27	18	9
Number of employees (median)	2	1	2
Founding year (median)	2008	2009	2007
Total (N)	70	35	35

4 Results

In this section, we present the emerging patterns concerning the entrepreneurial trajectories of the respondents. We focus on three episodes that marked the development of entrepreneurial skills for our respondents: education, previous work experience and family background. With those episodes in mind, the nature of their businesses is shown as well as the choices to identify and seize business opportunities. We then conclude by adding extra information that illustrates the peculiarities of the transnational nature of businesses for this group of migrant entrepreneurs.

5 Entrepreneurial path based on work and education

Four main patterns emerge when considering work and education as previous experiences for migrant entrepreneurs. We call them entrepreneurial paths, and these can combine the presence, or absence, of work and/or education experience (see Table 2).

#1 Job-based: *'I owe it all to my work experience'* (N=39)

This path comprises those entrepreneurs who heavily relied on their work experience, so they could exploit their hands-on knowledge and skills acquired while doing a job. This same group has a low level of education and

Table 2: Entrepreneurial paths according to education and family

Path	Educ. qualification		Entrepr. family background	
	Low	High	No	Yes
#1 Job-based (n=39)	14	25	17	22
#2 Education-driven (n=7)	0	7	7	0
#3 Job+edu merger (n=19)	1	18	5	14
#4 By chance (n=5)	4	1	5	0

expresses that training is less important for them. They usually acquired the skills they need for their business on the job, and therefore needed to attend training courses only occasionally (12/39). One characteristic for some of this group is the existence of supportive family members who train them in a job which they themselves are already involved in.

Two stories can illustrate the path of entrepreneurs in this group. First, N. (M14), a transnational entrepreneur who imports herbs and other products such as foods to sell to ethnic shops in Italy, started working in the food sector as an employee, and later on decided to try on his own. *"As soon as I arrived in Italy, I started working in the food sector as an employee with some of my co-nationals, and then, when I got my visa, I decided to start my own business"*. Since he started a business in the same industry, he knew both the people and the products. *"When I began, I already had all the right contacts; I knew how it worked and where to go for the products"*. In other words, due to his past jobs, he was aware of which business opportunities were available in this economic sector.

The second story is about H. (M38), who owns a café. He had previously worked in other cafés, and this job experience was very useful because it allowed him to become a proficient barman. He was later able to start his own business thanks to the skills he acquired previously. In addition, customers knew him in the same neighbourhood from his previous job: *"I was already known here, so I already had some clients"*.

#2 Education-driven: *'My studies allowed me to ...'* (N=7)

These entrepreneurs went through formal education and acquired a degree that proves their set of skills. They stated that they were driven on a career path related to business and economics. One noticeable feature is their willingness to attend more training and courses in order to acquire the additional skills needed for their career path. On the other hand, they have less work experience in their business sector than entrepreneurs on other paths.

An interesting case is R. (A17), who graduated in business, and then attended a course on commercial and organisational skills in order to develop his consultancy agency. Compared to other paths, the education-driven path is largely characterised by a pro-active attitude. Indeed, since those on this path often cannot rely on direct past work experience in the sector, they need to invest more in individual research and initiatives.

Another case in point is S. (A26), who owns an import/export business that deals in fresh flowers and decorations, as well as argan oil for luxury hotels and restaurants in the Netherlands, the UAE and Belgium. His studies in international business had a big influence on the way he manages his business: *“I took International Business at the Europort Business School; it is a very dynamic school and I learned a lot. It was fundamental for this business”*.

#3 Job–education merger: *‘Work experience or education? Actually, a mix of both’* (N=19)

Entrepreneurs combining work experience and a formal higher education degree rely heavily on family businesses to acquire skills while doing the job, but also show interest in attending courses and training related to their business.

Two sub-paths were identified: those who got formal business skills from school and then specialised in a given sector as employees; and those who got acquainted with a given sector, then worked as employees and later decided to become entrepreneurs.

From the first sub-path, B. (A14), who is now a consultant for companies who want to buy trucks and other vehicles from Germany and the Netherlands, combined the knowledge acquired through working in the international sales department of two companies with a business education. While his previous work experience allowed him to develop *“the knowledge and the portfolio of clients”* to start his own consultancy agency in the same field, his education helps him manage his business: *“I have a professional degree in business; my degree has been very useful since that’s where I learned how to run a business”*.

From the second sub-path, W. (A29) has a nursing business in mental and social care, and works in several hospital wards and other healthcare settings. She studied nursing and then took a post-graduate master’s in Health Sciences. While at university, she did two internships, and then she started working as an employee for a private company in the field. Thanks to her education background and her past experience, she was able to start her own business.

#4 By chance: *‘I simply decided to ...’* (N=5)

Some entrepreneurs decided to set up a business without much preparation, and without a formal education or experience in the sector. They were usually advised by their networks about profitable niches, and they learned the necessary skills of the sector and of business while doing it. Thus, their level of education is low and their work experience is unrelated to the sector of the business.

A good case of this pattern is T. (M23), who is an itinerant retailer of textiles. As soon as he arrived in Italy, he found employment as a manual worker in a marble company. He decided to start his own business in order to have a more profitable and less demanding job. To do that, a friend apprised him of certain opportunities: *“He told me that I could make good money with this kind of business”*. So, he helped him with all the information about *“how to do the job and how to behave”*.

6 Adding the geographic layer

Taking the analysis further, we connect the four entrepreneurial paths with the nature of the business activities: transnational and domestic. In both groups, the strong links that respondents make between their past jobs and work experience and their current entrepreneurial story stand out. Accordingly, the most relevant path for both seems to be the first (#1), followed by #3 (i.e. a mix of education and past work experience). In table 3 there is the distribution of this division.

Table 3: Nature of business for each entrepreneurial path

Path	Transnational entrepreneurs	Domestic entrepreneurs
#1 Job-based (n=39)	19	20
#2 Education-driven (n=7)	7	0
#3 Job–edu merger (n=19)	9	10
#4 By chance (n=5)	0	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>35</i>

The group of transnational entrepreneurs also present cases relying solely on their education (Path #2), while a small group of domestic entrepreneurs do not take advantage of either education or work experience (Path #4). These ‘outlier’ patterns perfectly point to one key difference between entrepreneurs conducting transnational activities and entrepreneurs conducting domestic activities: education seems to be very important for the former.

For example C. (A25) studied engineering in the Netherlands and then, due to his expertise in the field, he started a very successful and innovative solar energy company.

7 Differences between transnational and domestic entrepreneurs

Given that paths #1 and #3 clearly stand out in the entrepreneurial stories of Moroccan migrants, it is worth taking a closer look to explain the cumulative effect of these paths on their lives, and pointing at the differences between transnational and domestic entrepreneurs.

7.1 Work episodes to accumulate experience

As emerging from the previous section, both transnational and domestic entrepreneurs rely on their previous work experience, albeit with some differences.

Transnational entrepreneurs have more international work experience (e.g. in the international area of a company), or they have local work experience but use this to make their business international. The aforementioned case of B. (A14) is a case in point for the former. He *“worked for six years as an account manager in two trucking companies, both times in a department dealing with the Middle East and North Africa”* and thanks to his past work experience he developed the knowledge of the sector and *“the portfolio of clients”* needed to start his consultancy business. Another case is R. (M09) who exports Italian machinery abroad. She worked for several years at an airport and this allowed her to improve and become fluent in several languages. This proved to be fundamental to her business.

By contrast, domestic entrepreneurs started as employees and then decided to set up a business in the same sector/market focused on domestic activities at the local level, and relying heavily on their accumulated work experience. B. (M30) explains: *“After various jobs, I worked in two cafés. There, I learned the job and so I decided to start my own café. My past work experience was fundamental”*.

7.2 Educational credentials

Overall, respondents do not differ very much in their level of education, with many highly educated respondents. The subject of the degree (e.g. economics, management) creates a permanent link to the business and an open door to expand across borders. In particular, entrepre-

neurs use their degrees to learn managerial skills to run their business and, consequently, to seize available business opportunities. For example, R. (A17), who owns a consultancy business for companies wishing to expand their activities into Morocco, studied Management at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Thanks to his education he acquired the right skills to run a business: *“I focused on retail management, and learned a lot about how to develop as an entrepreneur”*. Therefore, when he decided to start his own business he took advantage of his degree: *“I applied that knowledge when I started my business”*. Another example is A. (A11), who helps people and companies set up new businesses or new branches of existing companies. He studied business, and in order to further increase his skills, he attended many courses in consultancy skills (e.g. mediation).

By contrast, while domestic entrepreneurs seem to benefit from having a degree, this degree is not related to developing skills to run their business. Domestic activities do not come out of a particular educational pattern. In other words, their educational experience provides entrepreneurs with a way of thinking but it does not enlarge the set of business skills needed for starting and managing a business. Entrepreneur S., who owns an itinerant retail business selling various household and edible products, clarifies: *“My studies were not related to the business. But it has been useful for calculating and deciding the prices. If you haven’t studied, how can you understand how things work? People want to fool you. You have to be aware and to have the mind to make the right decisions”* (M21).

7.3 Long-lasting experience: family background

An entrepreneurial family background is important for all, with approximately half of the respondents having an entrepreneurial background in their family. There are two profiles that match the nature of the activities.

Entrepreneurs in the domestic market seem more likely to follow the family experience. They sometimes continue the family business or start a new one in exactly the same sector. One example is again S. (M21), with the itinerant retail business. Fruit and vegetables are part of the products being traded. His father has a farm in Morocco, and so S. knows *“how fruit and vegetables grow, and what the seasonal ones are. I can recognise the good ones, because my father is in the same business there. So I decided to run this business”*.

Entrepreneurs in transnational markets start from the family path but usually go beyond it. They often remain

in the same sector as their relatives, but they also try to expand their business. This expansion is often connected to an internationalisation of their business. Entrepreneurs can benefit from transnational activities by using the in-depth knowledge of the sector and, sometimes, of the country of origin, to identify and seize available opportunities abroad. For example, F. (M18) imports household products and sells them to other shops. His parents started the business in itinerant form, but then F. decided to go one step further and started importing the products directly from abroad and selling them to other businesses: *“My parents used to have a stand, an itinerant retail stand. It was the same thing but without the warehouse. I am carrying on their business, but when I started managing it, I decided to develop this by adding a warehouse, and to import the products from abroad. I just improved my parents’ business”* (M18).

8 Differences among transnationally oriented entrepreneurs

Having analysed the paths and the nature of the activities, this section now focuses on the peculiarities of the transnational activities. Previous studies have often treated entrepreneurs with a transnational business as a homogeneous group (e.g. Patel & Conklin, 2009; Portes et al., 2002; Terjesen & Elam, 2009). Our analysis shows that there are differences among this category of migrant entrepreneurs and that transnational entrepreneurs are not a fully homogenous group. The main differences emerge with regard to import/export and consultancy businesses and, to a lesser extent, between businesses in the mainstream and ethnic markets.

8.1 Import/export businesses vs. consultancy businesses

Among the group, these two sectors were the main ways to do business at a transnational level, but each of them demands a different set of skills. In both cases, entrepreneurs’ past life experiences have resulted in skills that lead to the transnational activities of their businesses, where gaps are being opened in the market. A high level of education in the life of an entrepreneur results in the choice for an international consultancy agency, where that knowledge can be applied. The educational level that is needed for the consultancy group is higher, which also mirrors the situation that consultants need to be experts

in a certain area, ideally with certificates and degrees proving that expertise. The entrepreneurs’ degrees are always connected to the business, so they usually have a degree in business or economics (or other related fields).

To carry out transnational activities in the import/export sector, the key factors seem to be family support and the family business. The advice of relatives is highly appreciated and contributes to cultivating skills in this sector (e.g. knowing the market). M (M05) and H. (M06) both own wholesale fruit and vegetable businesses, and they both followed their parents’ example: *“My father has an itinerant fruit and vegetables stand. Being familiar with the field was very useful”* (M05).

8.2 Transnationality in ethnic vs. mainstream markets

Entrepreneurs in ethnic (N=20) and mainstream (N=15) markets display similar differences as those described when comparing the type of businesses, i.e. import/export and consultancy. In particular, the level of education seems to affect the decision to either venture into markets that they feel comfortable with (ethnic) or new (mainstream) markets with customers that are different. Those targeting mainstream markets have a higher educational background than those selling to ethnic markets, who appear to be more connected to their entrepreneurial family background.

An entrepreneurial family background seems very important for transnational ethnic activities. Entrepreneurs need to know Moroccan products and the Moroccan market, thus relatives are effective and fast resources for advice, and also provide footsteps in which the entrepreneurs can follow. The story of L. (M11) is a good example: she owns a shop selling dresses to Arab women and she already knew the sector because her mother is a tailor in Morocco. The fact that she already had a certain degree of experience in the field allowed her to seize the opportunities offered by women requiring this kind of apparel in Milan. N. (A08), who sells Arabic dresses and clothes internationally, is continuing in his father’s footsteps. He says that his father *“was in the business for many years and helped me a lot”*.

9 Discussion and Conclusion

Work and education have clearly influenced the geographical choice of migrant entrepreneurs, as was expected. The variety of paths found shows the diversity within the group of migrant entrepreneurs from Morocco, and potentially for a larger group of migrant entrepreneurs as well. The spotlight in this article is on the spatiality of their business activities: doing business in the country of destination and, for some, also in the country of origin or in other countries. The choice to go for transnational or domestic business activities seems to be heavily influenced by a set of skills, related to risking new opportunities when it comes to transnational activities, and to market dependence with domestic activities. Migrants make active use of the lessons learned in previous stages and places of their life, and their choices are aligned with the capacities and skills built through those experiences.

The research question about the way that transnational or domestic activities of Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands and Italy are influenced by skills acquired in earlier experiences is answered with the results that migrant entrepreneurs in our sample are mainly located on the following two paths: #1 Job-based and #3 Job-education merger. On those paths, there are profound differences in the way that skills for businesses are acquired.

Overall, the role of work experience seems to be valid for any type of business activity carried out by Moroccans in both cities. It is crucial to know the Dutch or Italian markets, to link the product with the customer, and to have the know-how of the market. In line with earlier findings, jobs can prepare and train potential entrepreneurs to develop skills, spot opportunities and be aligned with what is needed in the same sector (Asheim & Gertler, 2006; Hunt, 2011; Jensen, 2014).

The role of education is also important, but with special attention for transnational activities where the degree obtained becomes a mirror of the service provided. This finding has been identified from studies on the social networks of migrants (Alvarado Valenzuela, 2018; Ambrosini, 2012; Phillimore, 2015) where entrepreneurs' qualifications are reflected to their networks as clues of what they are capable of providing in their businesses. For our group of respondents, the transnational nature of the business activities is flourishing thanks to educational credentials that show knowledge, expertise and also prestige.

Entrepreneurs in transnational business activities seem to have a more business-focused education and the skills they learned at school are beneficial for transnational economic activities. Moroccan entrepreneurs with higher education and more work experience actively use

their skills to start cross-border businesses that have a cosmopolitan character, collaborate with other companies and have the prospect of (international) growth. By contrast, entrepreneurs with domestic activities rely less on educational qualifications and therefore their entrepreneurial skills are less developed to break or upscale existing practices of doing business with those sharing the same ethnic and cultural background at a domestic level.

On top of the main research question, we posed a supporting question: what experiences are crucial to triggering transnational business opportunities? This group in particular profits from the combination of academic credentials in business and previous jobs in the same sector. Transnational entrepreneurs in this group of respondents get closer to descriptions of innovators who create strong ties to the society, with a strong position as opinion leaders who are usually consulted by others for advice (Rogers, 2003). Their business activities set precedents for the rest of their co-nationals and they pave the way for expanding the business activities of migrant entrepreneurs. Examples have been found in the Wenzhou migrants interacting with Italian textile manufacturing (Zhang & Zhang, 2016). They were able to innovate in the production chain of garments, shoes, bags and furniture with unique designs matched with the branding "Made in Italy" while maintaining ethnic barriers to keep their position against competitors.

Furthermore, some differences also emerge within the category of transnational entrepreneurs when looking at different sectors (import/export business vs. consultancy). Consultancy owners appear to use their education more actively and translate it to business skills to expand. This group moves away from previous findings that immigrants often have to deal with scarce resources when doing businesses in the countries of destination (Ambrosini, 2013; Kloosterman, 2010; Schutjens & Völker, 2010).

Domestic-oriented entrepreneurs seem to follow entrepreneurial trends by necessity and through replication, by relying strongly on their work experience built over time, and being knowledgeable of the type of consumers of their products or services. By focusing on local markets in the cities, these migrants also work as bridges among migrant communities. Following the trend of this example is the transnational shipping-transportation business between Eastern Europe and northern Italy (Ambrosini, 2012). Entrepreneurs import ethnic goods to satisfy the needs of the migrant community and export products from the receiving country intended for the migrant community's families in the sending country.

Future research should further explore the differences between transnational and domestic entrepreneurs, especially concerning two points. The first point

is to check whether this division of transnational and domestic businesses also applies to non-migrant entrepreneurs. After all, people without a migratory background can make less use of existing networks to do business in countries abroad and may not be granted access to the target markets (Bilecen et al., 2018). In this way, one can clarify whether the underlined differences are typical for migrants as entrepreneurs or whether it can also be transferred to other groups. The second point is to further investigate the role of psychological characteristics that are the driving forces behind the decision to move across spatial locations for business purposes. Many of the respondents in this study mentioned that their passion was a major trigger for their business, and it can be further analysed if that passion canalizes into one of the three major groups of competences needed for entrepreneurship according to the EntreComp framework (Bacigalupo et al., 2016).

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