

The Differentiation of Performances among Immigrant Entrepreneurs: A Biographical Approach

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Abstract : This paper aims to contribute to the field of immigrants' entrepreneurial performance. The debate on immigrant entrepreneurship has been dominated by cultural explanations, which argue that immigrants' entrepreneurial results are linked to groups' characteristics. However, this approach does not consider important dimensions that influence entrepreneurial performances. Furthermore, cultural theories do not take into account the huge differences in performances also within the same ethnic group. For these reason, this study adopts a biographical approach, both at theoretical and at methodological level, which can allow to understand the main aspects that make the difference in immigrants' entrepreneurial performances, by exploring the narratives of immigrant entrepreneurs, who operate in the restaurant sector in two different Italian metropolitan areas: Milan and Rome. Through the qualitative method of biographical interviews, this study analyses four main dimensions and their combinations: a) individuals' entrepreneurial and migratory path: this aspect is particularly relevant to understand the biographical resources of immigrant entrepreneurs and their change and evolution during time; b) entrepreneurs' social capital, with a particular focus on their networks, through the adoption of a transnational perspective, that takes into account both the local level and the transnational connections. This study highlights that, though entrepreneurs' connections are significant, especially as far as those with family members are concerned, often their entrepreneurial path assumes an individualised trajectory. c) Entrepreneurs' human capital, including both formal education and skills acquired through informal channels. The latter are particularly relevant since in the interviews and data collected the role of informal transmission emerges. d) Embeddedness within the social, political and economic context, to understand the main constraints and opportunities both at local and national level. The comparison between two different metropolitan areas within the same country helps to understand this dimension.

Keywords : biographies, immigrant entrepreneurs, life stories, performance

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