
The making of a transnational marketplace. Naples and the impact of Mediterranean cross-border trade on regional economies

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This paper aims to discuss the relationship between migration, transnational entrepreneurship and regional development by analyzing the case of Naples. In recent years, Naples has emerged as an important destination for North African traders. The transformation of this city into a transnational marketplace urges us to rethink some of the assumptions made in the literature dealing with local development in Italy and immigrant entrepreneurship and the extent to which these studies have paid scant attention to the impact of transnational networks on the evolution of spaces of localized production and consumption. I propose a modified framework for studying immigrant transnational economic activities by taking into account both the multilocal embeddedness of immigrant strategies and the cosmopolitanization of Mediterranean marketplaces.

Keywords: Italy, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, entrepreneurship, local development, Mediterranean

JEL Classifications: R1, R23, Z1, Z13

Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, Italy has become a key destination country for immigrants originating from different regions of the world. This phenomenon has generated a considerable amount of research within the field of migration studies. In particular, migration scholars have shown how the structure of Italian labour markets—mainly characterized by fragmentation and considerable regional variations—coupled with the weak social status of foreigners, have given rise to specific patterns of immigrant socio-economic integration (Ambrosini, 2001; Calavita, 2005; Mingione and Quassoli, 1999; Reyneri, 2004). In this context, research dealing with immigrant entrepreneurship has focused on the key figure of the small entrepreneur—

most notably the small business owner or the street vendor, the growth in whose numbers has been encouraged by the Italian tolerance towards the underground economy (Dines, 2002; Harney, 2007; Quassoli, 1999). Although these approaches to immigrant economic activities have contributed to increasing knowledge about migration processes, they have focused excessively on a national scale of analysis, thus neglecting the role of transnational processes¹ and their corollaries from the perspectives of place and space. Moreover, in the literature on immigration and the labour market in Italy, immigrants are mostly depicted as disempowered actors, hardly capable of developing their own strategies and mobilizing resources or of somehow influencing the organization of local economies and specific places.

This article aims to shed light on how immigrants' transnational activities are able to reshape the social organization of local spaces by analyzing the development of Naples (southern Italy) as a transnational marketplace and its connections with the economic development of the Campania region. In recent years, Naples has become an important marketplace for North African traders. Although the circulation of traders in the Mediterranean has ancient origins, it has considerably increased during the last 20 years, thus creating a new geography of cross-border trade (the so-called suitcase trade) that embraces a variety of routes and marketplaces in the Mediterranean (see Figure 1). This trade, which is partly supported by informal exchanges, is based on the exploitation of the differentials (in prices, taxation, etc.) between northern and southern Mediterranean countries (Péraldi, 2001, 2005; Tarrius, 1992). North African traders buy various kinds of commodities in Naples in order to sell them in different parts of the Euro-

Mediterranean region. In doing so, they contribute to feeding the North African hunger for Western products that has been encouraged both by the emergence of an expanding lower middle class in the Maghreb countries and the taxes and restrictions imposed on product importation.

The marketplaces that compose the geography of cross-border trade can be considered, following Smith's definition, as translocalities (Smith, 2001). On the one hand, these translocalities are connected by the circulation of traders and their networks with other marketplaces in the Euro-Mediterranean area. On the other hand, they can be seen as crossroads between various networks that interact with each other and reshape the city's identity and economic organization. In studying the social organization of Naples as a marketplace, both these aspects have to be taken into consideration: Naples is at the same time both a node in a set of connected places and an intersection of social and logistic networks.

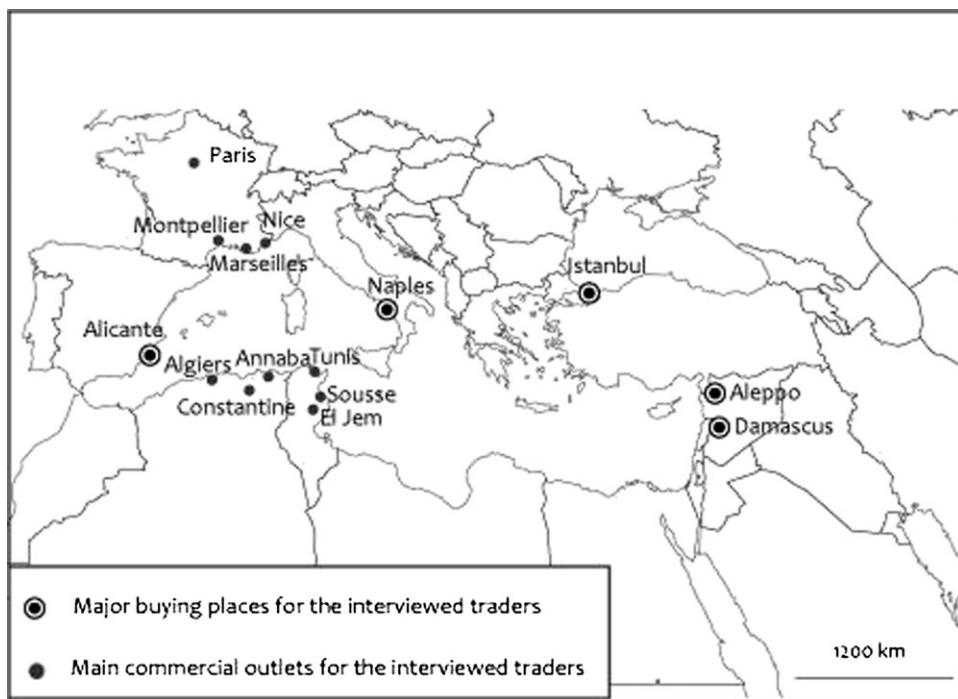


Figure 1. Geographies of cross-border trade.

A research method that enables us to grasp this two-fold dimension of translocalities is multisite ethnography. This paper is therefore based on mobile ethnographic work that I carried out over 5 years, from 2001 to 2006. There are different 'tracking strategies' for studying transnational economic circuits, the most common being following people or commodity chains (Crang et al., 2003; Marcus, 1995). Most of my time was thus spent following and observing North African traders in the urban area of Naples. I also accompanied them along the routes of commerce and to various sales places in the Euro-Mediterranean area (Marseilles, Paris and Nice in France; Tunis, Sousse and El Jem in Tunisia). This multisited approach enabled me to map and to observe the main commercial outlets of the goods that traders bought in Naples and to reconstruct their networks and also the commodity chains connecting Naples to other places. As Herbert (2000) argued, ethnography is a particularly useful tool when trying to capture the interactions between structure and agency on multiple scales. In our specific case, multisite research facilitates our understanding of the dispersed set of constraints and opportunities (what I refer to below as multi-local embeddedness) that shapes transnational trader strategies and practices. Moreover, ethnography is also useful when analyzing informal practices and circuits that cannot be reached/displayed by using official statistical data.

In this paper, I want to establish the connection between the making of Naples into a transnational marketplace and the creation of new spaces of local development, in particular new productive and commercial spaces in the Campania region. First, in the next section, I argue that the literature on regional development has completely neglected the role of immigrants in Italian local development in recent years, thus ignoring such phenomena as the emergence of economic circuits based on the transnational circulation of immigrants. Next, I claim that the literature on immigrant businesses often suffers from the same shortcomings: an excessive focus on the local dimension of economic activities. Following this, I propose a reworked framework for studying immigrant transnational economic activities and the

structuring of Naples as a marketplace. I then use this framework to describe the making of the Neapolitan marketplace, with a focus on the whole range of places and actors involved and the impact of transnational circulation on the social and spatial organization of the marketplace. Finally, I show that transnational circulation is connected with the increasing cosmopolitanization of economic spaces in southern Italy. In the conclusion, I show how this case study of the Neapolitan marketplace urges us to reconsider the literature on local development and ethnic entrepreneurship. Furthermore, I argue that it enables us to make a contribution to the literature on transnational economies.

The literature on regional development in Italy: find the foreigner

The literature on regional development and industrial districts in Italy has developed from the mid-1970s as a well-known field of research, starting with Bagnasco's famous essay on the 'Third Italy' and Becattini's re-interpretation of the concept of Marshallian districts (Bagnasco, 1977; Becattini, 1979). Contrary to the normal dualistic approach to Italian economic geography, the literature on industrial districts acknowledges the existence within specific regions of a Third Italy,² which differs in many respects both from poor southern Italy, where industrialization processes have remained limited, and from the north-western regions in which the Fordist production model was dominant (Bagnasco, 1977).

The Third Italy model of regional development, popularized in the English language literature by Piore and Sabel (1984) as paradigmatic of post-Fordism and flexible specialization, has become one of the pillars of the literature on regional development in capitalist economies (Storper, 1997). In the Italian industrial district model, the productive process is separated into different stages, which are distributed between specialized firms. Production is subject to high variability, both at the quantitative and qualitative levels. According to scholars of the Italian industrial district, its exceptional capacity to flexibly respond to transformations in the market is based on the specific horizontal links that

exist between the small and medium firms, which are based on equilibrium between competition and collaboration. Moreover, the dynamism and success of Italian industrial districts have been connected to the specificity of local conditions and more particularly to the sedimentation of a community as a resource. In doing this, scholars of Italian industrial districts tackle the issue of territorial diversity and social capital (Conti and Sforzi, 1997; Storper, 1997), thus moving beyond the mainstream economic literature which traditionally considered that such specificities could not influence localization preferences and economic growth.

The definition of 'territory' that is proposed in these studies is very thick. Territory is, first of all, understood as a condition of proximity that structures and enhances economic relations and exchanges. Industrial districts are based on dense networks of small- and medium-sized towns, well-connected and sharing a well-balanced distribution over the territory of urban functions (banks, schools, malls, insurance companies, other services, etc.) (Bagnasco, 1999). The capacity to innovate and improve the quality of goods is sustained by the existence of external economies (specialized collaborators, the externalization of services, collective infrastructures) that are located in the same area as small- and medium-sized firms. Such a dense network of firms, towns and services enables the diffusion of information and innovation and was defined by Alfred Marshall as a kind of 'industrial atmosphere' (Marshall, 1920). Territory is also, however, considered as the product of a historical sedimentation process that gives rise to a community sharing a common culture. The trust and confidence that lie at the basis of the development of Italian productive systems are made possible because of a common identity and background that can be based on religious, political or ethnic belonging (Bagnasco, 1999).

In recent years, scholars have found evidence for the diffusion of patterns of development comparable to the Third Italy model both within Italy and in other regions in the global South. In particular, a new strand of literature—the so-called New Mezzogiorno literature—has explored the emergence in specific areas of southern Italy of industrial districts

experiencing similar, though more fragile, paths of endogenous growth (Aniello, 2001; Aniello and Meldolesi, 1998; Viesti, 2000; for a critical review of this literature, see Rossi, 2004). In the Naples metropolitan area, two local productive systems have developed and specialized in the fashion industry: the Grumo Nevano–Aversa–Trentola Ducenta footwear and leather district and the San Giuseppe Vesuviano textile district. The growth of these two local productive systems during the 1990s was accompanied and encouraged by two other events: the building of a huge wholesale centre—the biggest in Italy for non-alimentary products—the Centro Ingrosso Sviluppo (CIS) of Nola in 1986 and the recent development of Naples harbour. The harbour—which is located in Naples city centre—the CIS and the industrial districts are very well connected by a dense network of highways. The encouragement of proximity to the local institutions has enabled the promotion of the commercialization and export of local products made in the Neapolitan industrial districts. In the view of the local institutions and in the scholarly literature, these different places are considered Campania region symbols of the modernization and internationalization of the New Mezzogiorno (Aniello, 2001; Aniello and Meldolesi, 1998; Schmoll, 2010).

Apart from the arguments that may be raised specifically against the New Mezzogiorno literature's enthusiastic stance on local development in southern Italy (Rossi, 2004), three criticisms may be directed at the literature on regional development in Italy in general and thus may be applied to the Neapolitan situation. These shortcomings may explain why the literature on new regionalism has not been able to see the development of transnational trade by migrants and its impact on local economies. First of all, both the Third Italy and New Mezzogiorno literatures consider the territory as a bounded endogenous system rather than a dynamic construction that is affected by important changes of exogenous origin. The question of the relationship between globalization and industrial districts, for instance, has been tackled only through the perspective of the district's internationalization of production and its capacity to compete in international markets. Little has been said on the

local effects of global transformations, such as the increasing importance of human mobility, thus supporting a somewhat static vision of the notions of territory and local development. In the following sections, I will show that both the increasing importance of economic exchanges with China and the emergence of a new clientele may explain patterns of local development in the Naples area. This leads us to a second critique: this literature has completely ignored the fact that Italy has become an important country of immigration, despite the strong correlation that data show between the distribution of foreigners across the Italian territory and the location of industrial districts. The role of migrant labour in local development, sometimes representing an alternative to delocalization, is practically forgotten in this literature, as pointed out by Hadjimichalis (2006). Third, because it has insisted on the virtues of the specific production process of the industrial district, this literature has rarely focused on the issues of distribution and retailing within the global system of price relations (Hadjimichalis, 2006). I will show later that the issue of consumption, and in particular the emergence of a global clientele, partly informal, has been central to the development of the two Neapolitan districts.

Thus, because it has mainly focused on the role of local resources and structures, the literature on Italian regional development has failed to address the importance of specific phenomena such as the increase in transnational migration and the role of districts in a global distribution market. To a certain extent, a similar criticism can be addressed to the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship. In the next section, I critically review this literature and propose an interpretative framework that takes into account the growing importance of transnational processes in immigrants' businesses and the increasing cosmopolitanization of local development.

The ethnic business literature: find the transnational

At the same moment in which scholars of industrial districts acknowledged the dynamism of small- and medium-sized local enterprises, those

analyzing immigrant activities discovered that businesses owned by immigrants or ethnic minorities were certainly not going to disappear in the new post-Fordist era. The development of immigrant enterprises and independent activities, as well as the increasing specialization of these activities in specific commodities/products or services, made such notions as 'ethnic niche' or 'ethnic enclave' popular (see for example Gold and Light, 2000; Portes and Wilson, 1980; Waldinger, 1994). Hence, the main questions addressed by the literature on immigrant-run businesses were: why and how do immigrants choose and manage to set up a business and how is it possible to explain the making of an ethnic niche?

In order to answer these questions, the ethnic business literature proposed a new interpretative framework for immigrant business development: the so-called interactive framework, which was developed by Aldrich, Ward and Waldinger in 1990 (Aldrich et al., 1990). This framework—which was inspired by the supply/demand law of the labour market—was based on a two-fold explanation. On the one hand, immigrants' capacities to set up a business depended strongly on structural matters—the so-called constraint and opportunity structures side. Structures were connected to the local labour market, the demand for specific products or services, the regulation of immigration and businesses and the characteristics of the specific area in which immigrants settled (composition of the neighbourhood, local prices, demand, etc.). On the other hand, some groups were able to gather specific resources and skills, such as financial resources, cultural knowledge and ethnic networks, in order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the local context. Interestingly some research on immigrant businesses, just like research on industrial districts, was influenced by the concept of social capital. Social capital, as Fine (2002) pointed out, has the capacity to incorporate and explain economic performances that cannot be explained using the individual-based scheme of explanation of mainstream economics. In the specific case of the ethnic business literature, social capital seems able to explain various phenomena as the mobilization of credit, trust and ethnic solidarity.

Finally, in the interactive framework, the interaction of constraint and opportunity structures with ethnic or cultural resources was able to provide explanations of such phenomena as the location, the success or failure of an ethnic business, the creation of an ethnic entrepreneurial neighbourhood, the specialization of entrepreneurs in a specific good/service and so on (Aldrich et al., 1990; Gold and Light, 2000). This framework, which was explicitly influenced by Giddens' structuration theory (Aldrich et al., 1990; Giddens, 1984), fitted particularly well with a spatial approach to ethnic entrepreneurship since it was able to grasp the various elements contributing to the characteristics of a specific place, such as an ethnic neighbourhood. For this reason, although it has been abandoned by many scholars of transnational entrepreneurship, this framework is still useful as an analytical tool for understanding the creation of transnational marketplaces. It does, however, need to be reframed and rescaled to properly analyze transnational activities and their impact on specific places. The two main shortcomings to be observed in this framework are as follows: (i) it focuses too much on local processes, thus ignoring the impact of transnational processes on local changes and (ii) it overvalues the role of ethnic resources, thus neglecting the role of other kinds of resources and networks in shaping the strategies and practices of immigrant entrepreneurs. In the next section, I therefore propose a reframed version of the interactive approach.

The ethnic business framework revisited

The literature on ethnic entrepreneurship mainly focuses on the local circumstances encouraging businesses development and thus ignores the role of transnational processes in encouraging and shaping immigrant businesses. To overcome this limit, Rath and Kloosterman have proposed a revised interpretation of the interactive framework in which they attempt to take into account the multiscalar nature of structures (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Kloosterman et al., 1999). In what they call a 'mixed embeddedness' approach, Rath and Kloosterman showed

how the setting-up of an immigrant business is embedded in economic and politico-institutional processes taking place on different scales, such as the neighbourhood level, the regional/urban level and the national (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001).

Although this framework has contributed to sophisticated research on ethnic businesses, the approach is still not sufficient to grasp the whole set of constraint and opportunity structures contributing to the making of a transnational marketplace. Not only is the mixed embeddedness of transnational business important but also the capacity of immigrants to take advantage—through circulation—of a dispersed set of opportunities and constraints and also to grasp the differentials between them. In the case of North African entrepreneurs in Naples, cross-border trade is based on the exploitation of the differentials between the country of origin (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco), the buying country (Italy) and sometimes even a third country (France or Libya for instance); these differentials may be generated by taxation gaps, by legal limitations on imports, by the lack of a commodity in a specific place or by innovation introducing a new consumption good into a local market.

Hence, taking into consideration the multiscalar nature of structures exactly as proposed by Rath and Kloosterman is not enough: structures are multilocal and relationally constructed. In other words, not just one specific place is embedded in the various scales of opportunity and constraint, as suggested by the mixed embeddedness approach. Different places, rather, are embedded on different scales and are related to each other through the circulation of immigrants and their trade: what could be called, drawing on Rath and Kloosterman, 'multilocal embeddedness'.

The same transnational perspective needs to be applied to the analysis of immigrant resources. In order to be able to exploit specific opportunities both 'here' and 'there', transnational circulation and trade have to rely on specific group resources. Traders have to be capable of taking advantage of ethnic resources both in the country of origin and in that of destination (and possibly also in a third country). In other words, the dispersion—as well as the concentration—of a specific ethnic group is

to be considered as a transnational resource in business (Ma Mung, 2004). Moreover, many scholars of transnational migration have shown how the increasing mobility of people is able to unbind them, at least partly, from local or ethnic allegiances and to encourage the shaping of new social ties—what has been referred to in the literature as an ‘everyday’ or ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitan attitude (Hiebert, 2002; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). For many authors, cosmopolitanism is not a prerogative of the elite, but rather a kind of resource that is complementary to ethnic or cultural resources for immigrants in the global era (Pécoud, 2004; Werbner, 1999). Similarly, Vertovec and Cohen (2002, 2) argued that ‘many individuals now seem to be, more than ever, prone to articulate complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-states. This holds especially for migrants, ethnic diasporas and transnational communities’.

These multiple affiliations have been overlooked in the interactive framework, which has only focused on the use of ethnic or cultural resources by immigrant entrepreneurs, even though the use of cosmopolitanism as a resource is particularly evident in the case of trade activities (Pécoud, 2004). In fact, the correlation between trade and cosmopolitanism was already observed by Simmel (1908–1950) in his famous essay on the *Stranger*. Trade, more than other economic activities, encourages the diversification of social relations, face-to-face interaction and—particularly in the case of informal trade—mutual trust. Thus, with the intensification of transnational circulation, ‘cosmopolitanism as a resource’ within entrepreneurial practices and strategies urgently needs to be taken into consideration (Pécoud, 2004).

In this section, I have proposed a modified framework for studying immigrant transnational economic activities. This framework takes into account the mixed and multilocal embeddedness of immigrant strategies, the importance of transnational networks and the use, especially at a local level, of cosmopolitanism as a resource within entrepreneurial practices and strategies. In the next section, I will show how

this revised interactive framework enables us to describe the making of Naples as a marketplace, thus leading us to a new understanding of the city’s local development dynamics.

The making of Naples as a transnational marketplace: structures

The making of Naples as a transnational marketplace can be understood as the result of the interaction between, on the one hand, a dispersed set of constraints and opportunities that encompass different scales (‘mixed’ and ‘multilocal embeddedness’) and, on the other hand, various social resources of which entrepreneurs take advantage. With regard to the structural dimension, there are various reasons for the development of Naples as a transnational marketplace. The emergence of Naples as a destination should first of all be connected with the long-lasting relationship between southern Italy and the eastern part of the Maghreb countries (eastern Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). During the colonial period, this relationship, which was encouraged by spatial proximity, was embodied by an important immigration flow from southern Italy to the eastern Maghreb countries. Then, after the North African states achieved independence during the 1960s, human flows took the opposite direction and most of the Italians living in North Africa had to leave for Europe (in particular for France and Italy). However, a strong relationship remained between the eastern Maghreb and southern Italy, especially through economic exchanges. Starting from the late 1970s, Italy became an important destination country for people from the Maghreb. This was essentially due to the evolution of immigration regulation in European countries: during the 1970s, traditional immigration countries, such as France, imposed restrictions on immigration, thus provoking a reorientation of the flows towards southern Europe. Italy and Spain were still easy countries to reach and to live in since controls—both at the borders and internal—were less frequent prior to its entry into the Schengen Area. Moreover, Italy became a relatively easy place in which to obtain a residence permit compared to other states in Europe: from the

mid-1980s onwards, massive regularization processes took place very often, thus allowing irregular migrants to legalize their situation. In this context, Naples appeared as a particularly interesting transit destination for immigrants since the importance of the local informal sector provided them with opportunities while they waited for a regular permit.

The human circulation between the eastern Maghreb and southern Italy is sustained by several boat connexions. About three times a week, there is a boat leaving Naples (or neighbouring Salerno) for Tunisia and, until 1995, one boat a week left Naples for Annaba (eastern Algeria). This proximity with Algeria partly explains why, at the beginning of the 1990s, Naples became an important destination for people escaping from the Algerian civil conflict, although this boat connection was interrupted due to a refusal by the European shipping and airline companies to continue to maintain travel links with Algeria during the civil war (what historian Benjamin Stora calls 'the huge embargo' imposed on Algeria; Stora, 2001). Thus, the long-standing relationship between Naples and the eastern Maghreb, the evolution of institutional factors at the national level and the existence of strong connections all explain why the city attracted immigrants originating from the Maghreb countries.

It does not, however, explain why the city became an important marketplace. The growth of Naples as a buying destination must first be connected with the decline of other marketplaces, such as Marseilles in France. During the 1980s, Marseilles was the leading buying place in Western Europe for North African traders. During the Algerian socialist period, Algerian suitcase traders, the so-called *trabendistes*³, used to buy various kinds of consumption goods in Marseilles and sell them on the parallel Algerian market. Marseilles was also an important buying place for North African immigrants on their way back home. For immigrants, trade in commodities bought in Europe during their annual return became a widespread practice and a complementary income, particularly in times of economic crisis: at the end of the 1980s, pioneering research on informal trade estimated the clientele of the suitcase traders at about 700,000 in a single area of Marseille, the Belsunce

area, and valued the benefits coming from suitcase trade in this area at about 3 billion francs (around 457,000,000€) (Tarrius, 1992, 2002). However, in 1986, with the imposition of a visa requirement on Algerians, which drastically restricted their possibility of access to France, a complete reorganization of commerce trajectories in the Mediterranean was provoked. Traders had to change their buying destinations and Damascus, Aleppo, Naples, Alicante and Istanbul developed as important marketplaces for North African traders (Péraldi, 2001, 2005).

Why did traders then choose Naples as a destination? The presence of immigrants from the Maghreb countries who had settled in the region since the 1970s certainly enhanced the attractiveness of the city of Naples. However, the making of the Neapolitan marketplace is mainly due to the patterns of economic growth that have been partly described in the previous section on regional development in southern Italy: the emergence of the Grumo Nevano and the Vesuvius industrial districts, the development of Naples harbour and the creation in 1986 of a huge wholesale centre, the CIS of Nola, certainly contributed to attracting transnational traders.

Nonetheless, the patterns of local development that Naples has experienced differ from that described in the usual endogenous development narrative. First of all, at the same time that the industrial districts appeared, other forms of commercial and productive development appeared in the Naples metropolitan area. An increase in Chinese immigration and a simultaneous growing involvement of Chinese companies in the development of Naples harbour⁴ encouraged the emergence of numerous Chinese productive and commercial enterprises during the 1990s. Meanwhile, a completely illegal district, specialized in the production of imitation sportswear clothes, developed in central Naples, in the railway station area. What is particularly interesting is that all these experiences of legal or illegal local growth are connected with each other. For example, imitation sportswear clothes are made with components that are imported from China and then assembled in Naples with brands produced by Italian entrepreneurs. A second example concerns the CIS wholesale centre: although at the time of its creation it was conceived as the shop window of local

‘made in Italy’ products, in reality its stores mostly sell imported goods, such as the Chinese ones that arrive in Naples harbour. However, the most striking example is probably that of the Vesuvius district. Since the beginning of the development of the district during the 1990s, local entrepreneurs have sub-contracted such a large part of their production to Chinese entrepreneurs that it can be considered that part of the local development of the district is due to the presence of Chinese subcontracting enterprises (Schmoll, 2001). What is interesting to observe in this respect is that Vesuvius entrepreneurs started to complain of unfair Chinese competition only when Chinese entrepreneurs began to set up their own wholesale shops in direct competition with local traders.

Thus, while it is usually considered that the informal and formal economies or the local and foreign economies compete against each other, evidence in the case of Naples shows that the official industrial districts, the Chinese new entrepreneurs and the local underground economy of imitation goods industrial districts partly complement each other. These complementarities run opposite to the usual discourse on local endogenous development, which focuses too narrowly on local resources and social capital. Moreover, they enable us to understand the dynamism and attractiveness of Naples as a marketplace for transnational traders.

In particular, these complementarities enable the diversity of the supply side (see Figure 2). Indeed, although it is normally assumed that suitcase traders are mainly interested in low-quality goods, ethnographic research provides evidence that, on the contrary, the traders that come to Naples take advantage of the huge variety of the local commodity supply. This diversity can be observed by following the paths of the traders in Naples: they buy in a diversity of places (the city centre informal market, the CIS wholesale centre, the industrial districts and also the counterfeit goods central district and the Chinese wholesale centres that developed during the 1990s), using a diversity of channels (retail/wholesale; informal/formal and all the intermediate possibilities between the two). This diversity of buying practices that mixes the origins of the commodities, the channels through which they are

obtained and their quantities is described by traders as the most important reason explaining Naples’ attractiveness. Let us take the single example of L, a Tunisian woman trading between Naples and the city of Sousse (Tunisia). When L returns from her buying trips to Naples, she trades high-quality ‘made in Italy’ clothes that she has bought both in the CIS and in the Vesuvius district in her own boutique. L also provides her husband, who owns a men’s store, with clothes. In addition, the lower quality products that L brings from Naples—which are usually bought in the Chinese wholesale centre—are sold to female merchants working on the weekly market. L also owns an import-export licence, which is the official part of her business that enables her to easily obtain a visa. Through this channel, she frequently imports chairs and glasses that are destined to the Tunisian hotel industry.

This example brings us to the last reason why Naples developed as a destination. During the 1990s, North African demand for Western commodities grew, while taxation on European products remained high. This can be connected to the expansion of the lower middle class, which broadened the potential clientele from the Maghreb countries and also to the intensification of the cultural and human connections existing between Italy and North Africa (mostly through migration and the media), which led to a situation of consumption interdependency. In North African countries, the product that comes from Europe (the so-called importation product) is always considered better than the local one and its consumption is likely to define one’s social status.

Take the example of the evolution of the bride trousseau⁵ in Maghreb societies. The trousseau has always had a central role in young women’s consumption practices: to own an abundant and high-quality trousseau was one of the necessary guarantees of arranging a good marriage. However, traditional trousseaus were often made up of local sometimes home-made handicraft. Now, the favourite trousseau is instead the one that is branded ‘made in Italy’, just like the ones that are made and sold in the Vesuvius district. Thus, the internationalization of consumption practices is one of the determinants that have encouraged the development of cross-

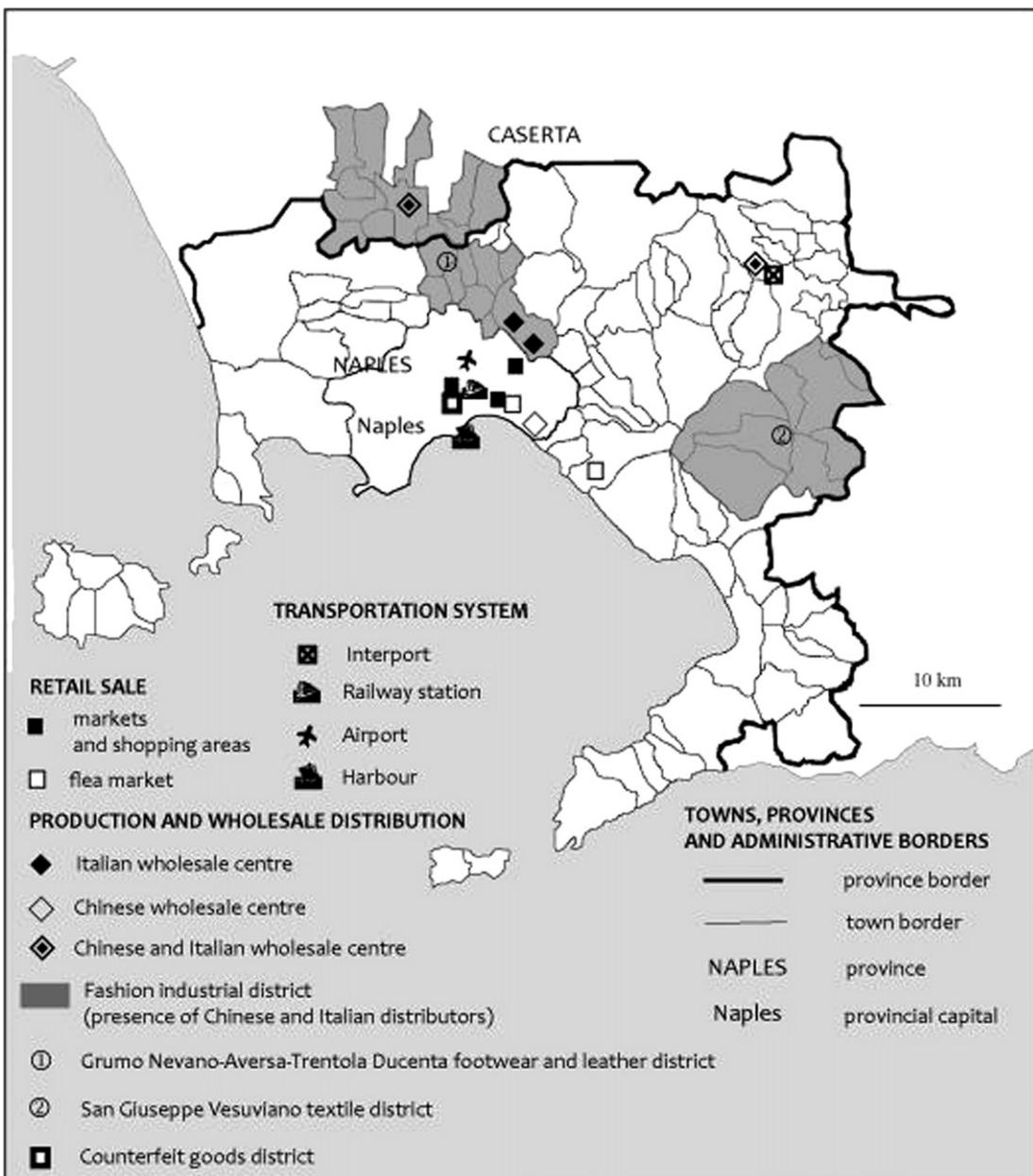


Figure 2. *The spatial organization of the Neapolitan marketplace.*

border trade. Besides, producers from the Vesuvius district have adapted their products to this new clientele, creating special collections for women from the Maghreb.

In this section, I have demonstrated how the development of cross-border trade and the emergence of Naples as a transnational marketplace are connected to a diversity of opportunities and constraints. These

opportunities and constraints are located in different places that are connected one to the other and cover various spatial and temporal scales. In the next section, focusing on the resources of the different actors of the marketplace will help us to show how the development of Naples as a marketplace is profoundly linked with the development of a local cosmopolitanism.

Resources: the social organization of the marketplace

The social and spatial organization of the Neapolitan marketplace is based on a diversity of actors structured around their 'ethnic' origins and their roles in the marketplace. Ethnographic observations enable us to distinguish three types of entrepreneurs. According to their mobility practices, the hierarchy of the places they are rooted in and the social resources they take advantage of, these three groups are: the transnational traders, the sedentary group and the intermediaries.

Transnational traders

The transnational traders, who are the clientele of the marketplace, form a heterogeneous population: they are from various origins and backgrounds (urban/rural, lower class/upper middle class, married/single). They also have different legal statuses: some of them benefit from a trade licence, others own an import-export company, some have a residence permit in Italy but no trade licence and others simply possess a tourist visa. However, even when they have their own company, at least part of their activity is illegal. Transnational traders do not usually live in Naples, but rather in the places in which they sell the commodities bought in Naples, which often correspond with their places of origin. Thus, it can be said that the transnational traders are the group that is the least rooted in Naples.

What kind of resources do transnational traders mobilize? During my ethnography, I followed three different trading networks⁶. The structure of traders' networks is based on a shared knowledge of routes, people and places. These networks make possible the existence of circumstantial solidarities that are only moderately binding. Moreover, ethnic belonging is not the only criteria for the structure of

a specific network. Belonging to a specific network usually depends on three criteria: place of origin (city, village, etc.), sex and social class.

The first network I followed was a group of male traders originating from eastern Algeria that buy clothes and footwear in Naples and sell them in France (mostly in Marseilles but also in Nice, Montpellier and Paris). They travel to Naples from one to four times a month, mostly by train or by bus, and stay in the city for 3–4 days. The second network I followed was composed of women travelling from the city of Sousse, Tunisia. Women from Sousse usually come to Naples by boat once a month. Unlike their male counterparts, female traders generally travel collectively: each time they go to Italy, they form small groups of three or four persons who share the costs and the organization of the trip. In the case of female traders, collective travel is perceived both as a way of sharing the costs and of travelling more safely and as a tool of social control by the members of their families that remain in Tunisia. In Italy, female traders essentially buy women's clothes and household linen. Both of the above networks are made up of people from the lower middle class. On the contrary, the third group I followed was made up of men and women originating from the Tunisian upper middle class. This group, because of its political and economic advantages and privileges (people in this network are mostly civil servants, employees of airline and shipping companies or relatives of people from the government), has the opportunity to easily obtain a visa. In this specific case, suitcase trade is a means of supplementing income rather than a full time activity (Schmoll, 2005).

Sedentary entrepreneurs

The second category in our typology is the group of sedentary people, which includes the retail and wholesale traders and the owners of the hotels that are frequented by the transnational traders. This group includes both Italian entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs from other countries (the Maghreb countries, sub-Saharan Africa countries, China). Sedentary entrepreneurs live permanently in Naples, although they may have strong connections with some other places. The

Chinese wholesale traders, for example, have family relations and economic partnerships with other Chinese people from the Zhejiang district living in Italy or elsewhere in Europe (Paris, Madrid, Lisbon). Sedentary entrepreneurs exploit various social resources in their entrepreneurial strategies. However, they have to invent some specific business strategies in order to attract the transnational traders. It is important to look at these strategies for two reasons. First, it testifies to the importance of cosmopolitanism as a resource on the marketplace. This cosmopolitanization of commercial strategies is two-fold. It is based both on the diversification of networks (by using intermediaries and assistants) and on the use of language or cultural codes that belong to their transnational clientele. Second, looking at traders' strategies shows that, although it is impossible to estimate precisely the impact of transnational trade on their sales proceeds, this impact is relevant.

Wholesale traders' strategies are an interesting example in this regard. During my ethnography in the industrial districts and in the wholesale centres, I observed that Chinese and Italian wholesale traders often employ a shop assistant from the Maghreb countries in order to facilitate communication with transnational traders. Another indication of the importance of the transnational clientele for wholesale traders is that they often translate their brand and visiting cards into Arabic. Some traders even place advertisements in the ethnic press. Most of all, the sedentary people are in contact with 'intermediaries', who help them to attract this specific clientele.

Intermediaries

'Intermediaries' are the third category of the typology. They are central to the organization and the structuring of the marketplace. Intermediaries—who label themselves as such or as 'mediators'—are usually immigrants who have been living in Naples for a period that is long enough for them to have a profound knowledge of the marketplace—that is, to know the actors and the places to go. They have acquired this knowledge through experience: some of them used to trade before becoming intermediaries, and others used to work as employees in

shops or hotels. They mostly come from the Maghreb countries, although some of them are sub-Saharan Africans or Italians. Their role in the marketplace is at the same time commercial, logistic and cultural. First of all, they put traders in touch with sedentary actors such as wholesale traders, hotel owners or foreign exchange brokers and help them to negotiate prices and deadlines: in this regard, both their experience of the marketplace and their linguistic competences are of importance. Second, they arrange the circulation of people in the marketplace: they welcome them when they arrive in Naples, and in some situations, even organize their travel from the Maghreb. They arrange traders' itineraries and accompany them to the buying places, usually by car or by van. Moreover, intermediaries are useful because they have specific cultural competencies in organizing the exchanges between sedentary actors and transnational traders. In a context that is mostly characterized by informal exchanges, they know the norms and the conventions on both sides. In other words, they make the economic exchange culturally possible. This is particularly relevant in the case of female traders who, despite the fact that they are abroad, have to conform to specific gendered norms⁷. In this specific case, intermediaries have a role of cultural guarantor to ensure that norms are not transgressed. For all these reasons, intermediaries are absolutely central to the structure of the marketplace.

Ordinary cosmopolitanism as a resource

In the previous section, I have shown that cosmopolitanism as a resource is central to the existence of the marketplace. Far from the Kantian political project of harmonious cohabitation, cosmopolitanism in the marketplace is instead a pragmatic and ordinary 'openness towards otherness' (Hiebert, 2002, 211). It implies a curiosity towards the different and the usage of a diversity of social networks in the organization of the enterprise and in the choice of the clientele. It is also observable, in a micro-interactionist fashion, through the strategic use of symbols and languages referring to different

cultures. For instance, it can be observed in the spatial organization of shops, where symbols referring to the cultural origins of the clientele—such as verses from the Koran—are often put in a prominent place, sometimes in proximity with Christian symbols such as pictures of Padre Pio. Another example of ordinary cosmopolitanism can be observed in the use of languages when entrepreneurs engage creatively with their interlocutors by using their language—giving nicknames, exchanging pleasantries or translating their shop sign (see picture on Figure 3)—thus, fostering a climate of proximity and trust.

The Neapolitan marketplace brings together people of different origins who make use of their proximity and diversity as a resource. Moreover, entrepreneurs are able to take advantage of both transnational networks and cosmopolitan resources: it can thus be said that there is no necessary contradiction between cosmopolitanism and transnationalism⁸ in this specific context.



Figure 3. A Chinese shop sign translated in Arabic ('Jewellery')

Conclusions⁹

This paper has shown that the ethnic business and endogenous development literatures cannot fully explain the making of the Neapolitan marketplace. The first part of the paper showed that both literatures suffer from the same shortcomings: a too narrow perspective on local economic changes and an excessive focus on 'endogenous social resources', that is, on the social capital of 'ethnic' or 'local communities'. In my empirical approach to immigrant entrepreneurship and regional development, I have developed two alternative ways of studying these processes.

First, as several studies on transnationalism and globalization point out, scholars need to emancipate themselves from 'methodological nationalism' and to develop a cosmopolitan perspective on processes of local change (Beck, 2002a, 2002b; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002, 2003). Such a cosmopolitan perspective requires a two-fold approach: on the one hand, it implies taking into account the fact that many individuals, far from being rooted in a unique and single place, live and circulate between different places that are interconnected on a transnational scale. It implies developing creative research strategies such as multisite ethnography. On the other hand, it means looking at individuals not only as part of an 'ethnic group', be it transnational or not, but also as involved in complex everyday interactions and being capable of 'engaging with cultural multiplicity' (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002, 1). A cosmopolitan perspective on local economic change enables us to comprehend how the making of a marketplace is embedded in complementarities between different groups. The Neapolitan marketplace involves a multiplicity of actors—sellers, producers and clientele; immigrants and local populations and sedentary and mobile entrepreneurs—that constantly interact with each other. Sedentary entrepreneurs, for instance, have to develop cosmopolitan resources or appeal to cosmopolitan intermediaries in order to communicate with their clientele. Yet, as pointed out by Ulrich Beck, not everybody is a cosmopolitan or is cosmopolitan to the same extent (Beck, 2002a). Intermediaries, because they act as both cultural and economic mediators, are probably

the most cosmopolitan of all the actors involved. My claim is, nevertheless, that the use of cosmopolitanism as a resource is shared by all the actors in the market-place. Indeed, cosmopolitanism is particularly widespread in the case of trade, especially when informal.

Second, the making of the Neapolitan market-place is the result of an interaction between, on the one hand, entrepreneurial practices and strategies and, on the other hand, a dispersed set of constraint and opportunity structures that have a strong impact on the direction and composition of flows. Adopting a transnational perspective shows that these economic and institutional structures are embedded in different scales and connected to each other ('multilocal embeddedness'). Moreover, structures are subject to circumstantial changes—as when a new regulation on immigrant flows is adopted or when a new commodity appears on a market-place. Structures are also constructed over time, as the long-standing relationship between southern Italy and the eastern Maghreb illustrates. Thus, transnational connections are not only embedded in multiple and dispersed places but they are also path dependent and have to be analyzed from a long-term perspective, as argued by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, 2003).

Finally, one more issue needs to be addressed concerning structures: in looking at constraint and opportunity structures, this paper has shown the complex overlapping between spaces of production, spaces of trade and spaces of consumption, which has been scarcely addressed in the literature on local development (Hadjimichalis, 2006). The emergence of local industrial districts needs to be connected with the development of wholesale stores and also with the increase in international exchanges, in particular with China, through Naples harbour. The role of policies in these developments is determinant since all these features of local development have been actively promoted by local and regional institutions. Moreover, the emergence of a consuming middle class in the Maghreb countries acts as a driving force in the local development of Naples, encouraging the production and sale of specific commodities, as shown by the example of the bridal trousseau.

The arguments presented here also aim to contribute to the body of work on transnationalism and transnational economies. First of all, by introducing the role of local constraint and opportunity structures, my paper draws attention to the role of place in the literature on transnationalism and migration (Glick-Schiller and Çaglar, 2011). The role of place, especially in 'destination countries', has been generally ignored by this literature, which has mainly focused on the structuring of flows and networks and on the impact of transnational migration on the immigrants' places of origin. Place, though, can be considered as a shaping force of transnational flows and networks. Conversely, transnational activities also have a structuring effect on places, by reshaping local economies and labour markets. Furthermore, the case study of the Neapolitan marketplace challenges the commonly held binary paradigms of transnationalism from below versus transnationalism from above and of formal versus informal economies. In doing this, it follows the path promoted by Smith (2005) and Conradson and Latham (2005) in their pleas for a 'middling' of transnational approaches.

'Middling transnationalism' has different meanings: first of all, it refers to the fact that we need to take into account the growing importance of economic actors originating from a large middle class, which encourages the development of transnational marketplaces in the Mediterranean. Local entrepreneurs, transnational traders and intermediaries all originate from the middle class. Above all, the increase in transnational trade is connected with the emergence of a large clientele of consumers that live in the Maghreb countries. It is worth noting in this regard that, although my research has focused on informal trade originating from the Maghreb countries, transnational commerce in the Mediterranean is also widely practised by Sub-Saharan African as well as by Eastern European traders. Thus, the emergence of a consuming middle class in the global South has a relevant impact on the increase in cross-border trade.

Second, 'transnationalism from the middle' refers to the intermediary actors that make possible the existence of transnational connections. I have

shown in the last section of the paper that the role of intermediaries as cultural, economic and logistic mediators is absolutely central to the social and spatial organization of the marketplace.

Finally, the making of the Neapolitan marketplace cannot be simply considered the result of a process of 'transnationalization from below', as described by Portes (1998). The importance of institutions and policies in orienting transnational traders' flows and in promoting paths of local development, and the complex interactions existing between informal and formal economies in the marketplace, shows that the distinction that is commonly proposed between, on the one hand, international, wholesale and formal commerce organized by 'transnational actors from above' and, on the other hand, retail, small-scale, informal commerce that is oriented towards a clientele of 'small transnational entrepreneurs' is actually a fiction.

Endnotes

¹ With the notable exception of Riccio (2001) and Semi (2006).

² The regions forming the so-called Third Italy are: Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, The Marches and Veneto.

³ The word 'trabendo' comes from the Spanish word 'contrabando'. It refers to the form of commercial circulation that was practised by Algerians during the socialist period, which was oriented towards the parallel market. Trabendo is still the most frequent informal activity in Algeria, although its forms have evolved with the liberalization of the economy (Colombo, 1998; Dris, 2002).

⁴ The development of Naples harbour is largely due to an economic cooperation policy between Chinese companies and the Campania region. The most important Chinese shipping company (COSCO) took in concession the Darsena di Levante area, which represents about one third of the harbour area. This company invested directly in most of the logistical transformations in Naples harbour. Today, Naples has become the principal hub for Chinese companies in the Mediterranean basin.

⁵ The bridal trousseau is the set of clothes and household linen that is given to a young woman—it is usually prepared by the women of the family—at the time she gets married. The tradition of the trousseau is still strong in Tunisia.

⁶ I talk about networks because, although they do not necessarily travel together, the people who are part of the network usually know each other (even only by name or reputation), follow the same trajectories, spend time in the same places (hotels, restaurants, stores) and meet the same interlocutors in Naples (wholesale traders, intermediaries, etc.).

⁷ They do not eat in public spaces; they do not go to the same hotels as men etc. (see Schmoll, 2005).

⁸ Similar conclusions on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and transnationalism may be found in Beck, (2002a,200b) and Mau et al. (2008).

⁹ This paper has been written before the recent revolution in Tunisia and the start of the war in Libya. Following these events, important changes are to be expected - and researched - regarding the situation of transnational trade in the Mediterranean. In particular, the monopole on trade owned by specific populations which I refer to in this paper as the privileged (see 'Transnational traders' section.) will probably experience drastic changes.

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