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The role of facilitators in the legitimization of foreign entrepreneurs

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Zusammenfassung

Im Zuge der Globalisierung hat die Zahl der Menschen, die sich entschließen, eine unternehmerische Tätigkeit im Ausland aufzunehmen, in den letzten Jahren stetig zugenommen. Doch während die Auswanderung in ein anderes Land und die Gründung eines Unternehmens deutlich einfacher geworden sind, ist die Sicherung des Erfolgs dieser Unternehmen ein äußerst komplizierter Prozess. In der Forschung über Legitimität und "mixed Embeddedness" wird argumentiert, dass der Erfolg ausländischer Unternehmer in hohem Maße davon abhängt, inwieweit es ihnen gelingt, sich in das soziale, kulturelle und institutionelle Umfeld des Gastlandes zu integrieren. Die vorliegende Studie leistet einen Beitrag zu diesem Thema, indem sie das Konzept der "Facilitators" einführt, d. h. der Akteure, die ausländische Unternehmer während ihrer unternehmerischen Tätigkeit im Gastland unterstützen. Mittels qualitativer Forschung auf der Grundlage von Experteninterviews werden die Rolle und der Einfluss von Vermittlern auf den Legitimationsprozess ausländischer Unternehmer untersucht. Darüber hinaus werden die Identität der Vermittler sowie die Verbindungen zwischen den beiden Parteien dargestellt.

Abstract

Following the trend of globalization, in recent years the number of people that decide to start an entrepreneurial activity in a foreign country is steadily increasing. However, while migrating to a different country and starting a business has become significantly easier, ensuring the success of these businesses is an extremely complicated process. Research on legitimacy and mixed embeddedness argues that the success of foreign entrepreneurs is highly influenced by the extent to which they are able to become integrated into the host country's social, cultural, and institutional environment. This study contributes to the topic by introducing the concept of facilitators, defined as actors that support foreign entrepreneurs throughout their entrepreneurial journey in the host country. By employing qualitative research based on expert interviews, the roles, and influence that facilitators have on the legitimacy attainment process of foreign entrepreneurs are explored. Moreover, the identity of facilitators, as well as the ties that connect the two parties are presented.

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List of Abbreviations

EE	Entrepreneurial ecosystem
SME	Small & medium enterprise
3L	Three-dimensional construct of legitimacy
IHDI	Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index
HDI	Human Development Index
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
FEE	Former entrepreneurial experience
EU	European Union
LOF	Liability of foreignness
RQ	Research question

1. Introduction

The current global trend of significant international migration and the consequent increase in the number of people starting businesses in foreign countries make the subject of foreign entrepreneurs a pertinent and important phenomenon (Kulchina, 2016). Furthermore, over the past few years, immigrant entrepreneurship has undergone some significant changes, such as the shift from locally focused, labor-intensive, and service-oriented businesses to global, knowledge-intensive, and professional service-oriented ones (Nazareno et al., 2019). These are just some of the many reasons that explain why the amount of literature on immigrant entrepreneurship is expanding within the field of migration (Storti, 2014).

The theories of mixed embeddedness (e.g., Kloosterman et al., 1999; Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Kloosterman, 2010) and legitimacy (e.g., Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Delmar & Shane, 2004; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999) support the idea that starting a business in an unfamiliar environment and achieving legitimacy as a foreigner is an extremely difficult process. Considering the importance attributed to legitimacy in determining the success of entrepreneurial activities (Delmar & Shane, 2004), the aim of this research is to understand whether the legitimization process of foreign entrepreneurs is influenced by external enablers. Specifically, building on the concepts expressed in network theories (e.g., (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Klyver & Hindle, 2007) of *network centrality* and the role of “*brokers*” in social networks (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986), the figure of “*facilitators*” is introduced.

Facilitators are defined in this research as actors that occupy roles of high-network centrality and support foreign entrepreneurs in several aspects of host-country integration and venture development. The analysis of facilitators is built upon the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do facilitators influence the legitimacy attainment process of foreign entrepreneurs?
- RQ2: Who are these figures and what kind of ties exist between them and the foreign entrepreneurs?

To answer these research questions, this study implements a qualitative research design consisting of thirteen expert interviews with foreign entrepreneurs that started a venture in a developed country. The findings are analyzed following the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) and discussed against a previously built theoretical background, consisting of a combination of legitimacy, mixed-embeddedness, and network theories. Moreover, the sample is divided into two based on the economic development of the interviewees' country of origin, enabling a comparison to be made between the two groups.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following sections provide a review of some of the relevant literature on the topic of foreign entrepreneurship, in order to construct a theoretical framework against which the findings of the empirical analysis can be discussed.

2.1 The importance of legitimacy

Previous research has identified three distinct viewpoints regarding the impact of a firm's organizational efforts on the success of new ventures: According to the *institutional* branch of evolutionary theory (e.g., Meyer and Rowan, 1977), improving the reliability and accountability of new ventures through organizational activities can increase their legitimacy, enhancing their survival; The *social relationship* branch of evolutionary theory (e.g., Stinchcombe, 1965) suggests that establishing connections with external stakeholders can help offset the disadvantage of limited social ties for new ventures and increase their survival; The *Schumpeterian* branch of evolutionary theory (e.g., Schumpeter, 1934) argues that survival is enhanced by achieving a more efficient and effective way to acquire and recombine resources, compared to incumbent players (Delmar & Shane, 2004).

According to Delmar and Shane (2004), the initial phase of a firm's organizational process should prioritize legitimizing activities as it is an essential precondition for establishing social relationships with stakeholders and acquiring and utilizing resources effectively (Delmar & Shane, 2004). The legitimacy of a new venture is defined as the level of perception among individuals regarding the conformance of the venture to established principles, norms, standards, and practices; this includes alignment with laws, regulations, and institutions, as well as the interests of internal and external stakeholders (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999)

Obtaining legitimacy is a socially mediated process that is not initiated on neutral grounds or pre-granted. Instead, it serves as a mechanism for differentiating appropriate from inappropriate actors in a given social context; the evaluation and conferral of legitimacy are determined by actors within a community or society (Lechner et al., 2022).

In the context of new ventures, a focus on establishing legitimacy should enhance survival chances. Legitimacy is particularly crucial during the early stage of a new venture's life, as it is during this period that perceptions of external stakeholders play a more significant role in determining the venture's fate compared to its financial performance. New organizations lack the established legitimacy of incumbents, making

it necessary for them to create an external perception of legitimacy to gain resources and compete with established firms. The lack of established credibility and proof of value associated with new ventures can create resistance from stakeholders to allocate resources (Delmar & Shane, 2004). To address this challenge, new venture founders must effectively communicate the worth of their ideas and secure legitimacy; moreover, given that social ties play a key role in all economic transactions (e.g., Arrow, 1974), establishing legitimacy also leads to more favorable terms for transactions with other actors and helps in establishing social ties with external stakeholders, which are essential in garnering resources and grant a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Delmar & Shane, 2004; Granovetter, 1985).

2.1.1 A three-dimensional construct of legitimacy

An interesting perspective on the importance of legitimacy is given by Lechner et Al., which analyze the legitimacy topic through the lens of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Going back to the definition, according to Brown and Mason (2017) an entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) is a network of interrelated entrepreneurial actors and processes aimed at promoting entrepreneurship within a specific local environment. Members of an EE work towards common goals and collaborate by sharing knowledge to achieve these objectives, resulting in the overall improvement of entrepreneurship in the region. This involves identifying, pursuing and growing entrepreneurial opportunities across various sectors. The composition and relationships between actors in an EE make each one unique and influence its level and type of entrepreneurship (Lechner et al., 2022).

Through the EEs theory, a three-dimensional concept is proposed, which comprises three facets of legitimacy.

Institutional legitimacy in EE is defined as the community's recognition of the actors as established institutions in the field of entrepreneurship. This legitimacy requires specialization and is key to reaching visibility and accountability. To achieve this, there must be a specific object of legitimization of the institution that can be evaluated by external entities (Schoon, 2022). *Cultural legitimacy* in EE refers to the recognition of an actor by the entrepreneurial community as possessing and promoting values and outcomes that are deemed desirable. This involves both external evaluation by the community and internal alignment with these values and outcomes. Finally, *relational legitimacy* in EE refers to the recognition of an actor as a legitimate institution with which the entrepreneurial community engages in interactions. This leads to the crea-

tion of opportunities for building relationships (Lechner & Dowling, 2003) and ultimately results in the accumulation of social capital (Adams, 2021; Lechner et al., 2022).

Lechner et. al (2022) therefore suggest that, for an actor in an entrepreneurial ecosystem to achieve complete legitimacy, all three components (3L) must be attained: institutional, cultural, and relational. Only through the concurrent combination of these three components generalized legitimacy can be obtained (Deepphouse et al., 2016; Lechner et al., 2022).

2.1.2 Legitimacy as an enactment of entrepreneurial habitus

A study by De Clercq and Voronov (2009) suggests that, despite recognition of the crucial role that legitimacy plays in the success of new ventures and their founders, little research has been conducted on the relationship between newcomers' daily practices and their ability to attain legitimacy. To analyze this, Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977, 1986, 1990, 1998) is applied to the theory of legitimacy.

The work of Bourdieu on the theory of practice is well-suited for understanding the connection between newcomers' daily practices and their ability to attain legitimacy in entrepreneurship. This perspective suggests that the legitimacy of newcomers in a field is not a result of deliberate planning or intentions, but rather from the interplay between their daily practices and the social context. Thus, the existing literature on entrepreneurship can be enhanced by defining legitimacy as the manifestation of newcomers' entrepreneurial habitus, which has two main aspects: the requirement for newcomers to both 'fit in' and 'stand out' (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

Bourdieu's work is closely tied to the theory of structuration proposed by Giddens (1987), which recognizes the strong connection between individual actions and the societal structure in which they exist. To grasp the relationship between newcomers gaining legitimacy and the theory of practice, the concepts of *field*, *capital*, and *habitus* must be introduced (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

Fields are social microcosms that are constantly changing and based on relationships. To understand them, they must be described in terms of relationships and the dynamic interplay between various actors. This idea is put forth by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). *Capital* is a concept that encompasses all goods, material and symbolic, that are considered rare and valuable in a specific social context. It is a source of power and, being inherently social, cannot be separated from the field in

which it exists (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Both economic and non-economic forms of capital are important and play a role in a person's power and influence within a social context (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009). *Cultural capital* is valuable because it enables access to and utilization of cultural institutions and products within a society. It takes three forms: objectified, institutionalized, and embodied (e.g., Allan, 2006). *Symbolic capital* refers to the capability to employ and control symbolic assets such as language, writing, and myths (e.g., Everett, 2002). Finally, *Habitus* is the third component of Bourdieu's theory, which refers to the cognitive and somatic structures that actors use to understand and perform their roles in a field. It is field-specific and essential for the existence of a field, as fields depend on actors which embody the appropriate habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 as cited in De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

The concept of habitus is therefore important in explaining the complex process of newcomers' legitimacy attainment in a field, as it encompasses both the internalized dispositions and externalized practices that they must perform in order to be recognized and accepted as legitimate actors. To achieve this, newcomers often must succeed in conforming to the existing rules and norms while also producing innovative results, which satisfy the socially constructed notions of novelty and worthiness. The delicate balance between fitting in and standing out is at the base of entrepreneurial legitimacy (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; Suchman, 1995)

A newcomer's ability to fit in and be accepted as a legitimate entrepreneur is closely linked to their cultural capital, which, as previously mentioned, assumes three different forms: objectified, institutionalized, and embodied (Allan, 2006). *Objectified* cultural capital refers to physical attributes, an example of which could be an appropriate dress code; *institutionalized* cultural capital may be associated with previous work experience at a well-respected corporation; and finally *embodied* cultural capital refers to the ability to communicate in the local language and follow and respect the dominant cultural norms of the field. High levels of cultural capital are often associated with a strong understanding and hands-on experience with the dominant practices in the field and the appropriate way to implement them (Cliff et al., 2006; De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

According to De Clercq and Voronov (2009), there is a direct connection between a newcomer's cultural capital and their ability to be accepted as a field's norms-compliant actor. The first important factor is that newcomers can showcase visible resources, such as accreditations or endorsements, that could have a positive impact

on field incumbents (Suchman, 1995). Secondly, the impact of cultural capital on fitting in with institutional norms is tied to the idea that entrepreneurs' careers are integrated into social systems (e.g., Baum and Dutton, 1996; Dacin et al., 1999), as this is recognized as the main factor that influences organizational strategies and structures to reflect and incorporate broader social conditions (Boeker, 1988).

On the contrary, the ability of an entrepreneur to stand out and be recognized as unique is linked to their symbolic capital. This type of capital can cause established members of the field to acknowledge the validity and value of the newcomer's innovative practices and ideas, to the extent that it becomes an implicit, assumed justification for understanding how the newcomer is changing the field's structure and operations (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

The concepts of field, capital, and habitus provide a comprehensive framework for examining the complexities and contradictions involved in the process of legitimacy attainment. The interplay between these 3 factors creates the conditions for newcomers to navigate the institutional context and be successful in the pursuit of legitimacy (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009).

This ties in with the idea proposed by Scott (1983), according to whom the connections and relationships between organizations within a population and their institutional environment provide benefits such as resources and legitimacy and enhance survival possibilities (Baum & Oliver, 1992).

The theory of legitimacy in fact arises from the theory of institutional embeddedness, whereby organizations tend to conform to their institutional environment, either because the very same environment selects those that fit it best, or due to the isomorphism of actors, who imitate the procedures and structures that grant legitimacy (Baum & Oliver, 1992; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

However, as suggested by Lechner et. al (2022), the institutional dimension is just one of the 3 components that need to be considered when trying to achieve generalized legitimacy. The cultural and relational dimensions play an equally key role in the equation (Lechner et al., 2022).

The following section will explore the theory of mixed embeddedness, as it perfectly captures the importance that the different dimensions play in the success of ventures of immigrant entrepreneurs in foreign countries.

2.2 Mixed embeddedness

The embeddedness theory introduced by Polanyi (1944), and further expanded by Granovetter (1985), has become one of the dominant literature streams to explain the success of foreign entrepreneurs (Kloosterman et al., 1999).

The embeddedness argument focuses on the importance of personal relationships and social networks in creating trust and reducing unethical behavior. This perspective suggests that people prefer to do business with individuals they know and trust, rather than relying solely on institutional mechanisms or general moral principles. The argument highlights the crucial role of social connections in shaping economic behavior (Granovetter, 1985).

Embeddedness has a key role in the studies of immigration's socio-economic aspects due to its relation to social capital and its impact on informal economic activities among immigrants. However, focusing solely on this aspect of embeddedness can overlook other important aspects, such as the fact that immigrants' economic activities always exist within a larger institutional context, which plays a major role in shaping the opportunity structure. Businesses are not just influenced by these macro-economic structures, but also by sets of rules, regulations, local communities, associations, and business customs. To fully understand the socio-economic status of immigrant entrepreneurs, including their involvement in informal economic activities, it is necessary to consider this wider aspect of embeddedness. This goes hand in hand with the legitimacy theories proposed earlier, which stress the importance of focusing on cultural and relational dimensions, as well as on the wider institutional context that entrepreneurs have to become embedded into (Kloosterman et al., 1999).

Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness and social network theories were put in relation with place-bounded institutions described by Polanyi (1957), and this construct was used by Kloosterman et al. (1999) as a basis for their theory of mixed embeddedness. This was done to prove that migrants' businesses are impacted by their connections both to the laws, rules, and other structural features of the places where they operate, and to their social networks. In this sense, migrant entrepreneurs are dually embedded, which is the meaning of the term "mixed embeddedness". The embeddedness in structures is defined as institutional embeddedness and the embeddedness in social networks as social embeddedness (Kloosterman, 2010).

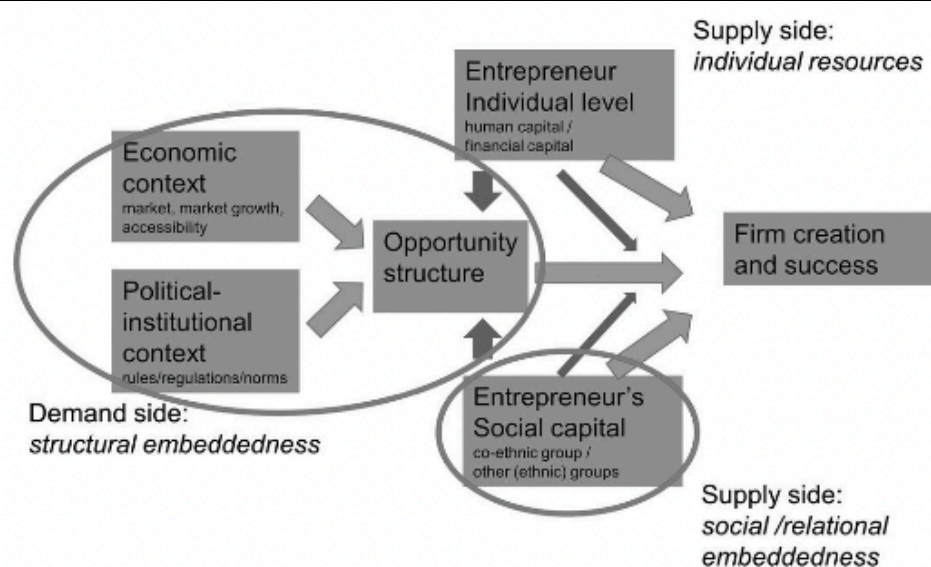
Mixed embeddedness has become extremely popular as time went by and is now recognized as one of the main references for studies centered on migrant entrepreneurship (Barberis & Solano, 2018).

However, most studies primarily concentrate on the supply aspect of the imagined entrepreneurial market and often overlook the two other important components: the demand side and the process of connecting entrepreneurs with potential business openings (Figure 1). For successful entrepreneurship, there must be viable business opportunities on the demand side, and these opportunities must be accessible to aspiring entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, even if economically viable opportunities exist, entry to these markets may still be restricted due to high capital requirements, regulations and rules from public or semi-public sources, or the lack of perception or understanding of these opportunities by the entrepreneurs themselves. In order for these opportunities to be realized, they must be perceived and actively pursued by starting a business (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

For this reason, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) propose a method that depicts the interaction between entrepreneur's individual and group resources (i.e., resources arising from their ethnic or national group), and the opportunities and conditions in their environment, which define the opportunity structure. This interaction has an impact on the entrepreneurial journey and experiences of foreign entrepreneurs (Solano et al., 2022).

Figure 1: Schutjens' mixed embeddedness model

Source: Schutjens, 2014, in Solano et al., 2022, p. 4



2.2.1 A look into the opportunity structure

The idea of mixed embeddedness is further expanded by Kloosterman (2010) with a model that includes three interconnected levels for analyzing the opportunity structures for immigrant entrepreneurs. The macro level refers to the host country's economic, socio-cultural, and legal framework, with special emphasis on regulations affecting business activities. These regulations can either facilitate or obstruct entrepreneurial pursuits by immigrants. The meso level refers to the markets available to immigrant businesses. The dilemma here is given by the fact that, on the one hand accessing a co-ethnic market or declining sectors may be easy in the beginning but can limit potential for future business growth. On the other hand, accessing flourishing markets is far more complicated, due to high competition. Lastly, the micro level encompasses the individual resources that the immigrant entrepreneur can leverage upon, such as personal human, cultural, financial, and social capital (Kloosterman, 2010; Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018).

Several factors, such as the state of technology, the costs of production, the demand for products, and the institutional framework, influence the availability of opportunities for foreign entrepreneurs. The combination of these factors is referred to as the opportunity structure and determines when, where, and the extent to which new business opportunities will arise (Kloosterman et al., 1999). It can be thought of as a strategic entrance window to understanding differences in entrepreneurial activity through a lens of mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman, 2010).

The political and institutional context (Figure 1) encompasses the formal actions taken by government entities and non-government organizations (e.g., national governments, regional and local authorities, associations, chambers of commerce, etc.) that take the form of laws, regulations, and policies that either encourage or hinder entrepreneurship and business dealings (Solano et al., 2022). The mixed embeddedness concept not only connects the market accessibility (meso level) to the personal resources (micro level) of the entrepreneur but also recognizes the impact the broader socio-economic and institutional context have on the shaping of the opportunity structure (Kloosterman, 2010).

The economic context instead encompasses various factors associated with the conditions that affect specific markets, as well as the general economy of the host country. This includes the country's state of the economy (such as growth or recession), the industrial makeup, the level of market concentration, and the demand for specific

goods or services (Solano et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial opportunities in capitalist societies are tied to markets, as there must be sufficient demand for a particular set of products in order for entrepreneurs to succeed. The markets are therefore seen as the key component of the opportunity structure. In order to start a business in a market where there is demand, endeavoring entrepreneurs must have the necessary individual resources to access it (Kloosterman, 2010).

Kloosterman and Rath (2001, p. 192), define markets as: “*the concrete economic locus where entrepreneurs, combining different resources in a specific way (adding value), have to sell their products to clients*”. For an entrepreneur to be successful, they must therefore find or create opportunities in markets for consumers, other businesses, or government organizations. It is worth noting that scholars such as Scott (1998) and Storper (1997) attribute an intrinsically social nature to markets; for this reason, when talking about opportunity creation and existence, it must be mentioned that these very same opportunities are heavily embedded and influenced by surrounding social contexts, and highly dependent on the variables of time period and location. Entrepreneurs and especially foreign entrepreneurs, need to have the capacity to identify these opportunities and be in the right place at the right time (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

Whilst in the recent past the general opinion was that advanced economies were shifting toward a direction in which large corporations that benefitted from economies of scale would completely overtake the markets, the fragmentation of markets due to high demand for individual and group-specific products, and the rapid expansion of demand for services started favoring again smaller businesses that can leverage on flexibility and innovation. This resulted in the re-opening of opportunities for many small manufacturing firms, and the creation of a whole new set of opportunities in the service industry, where economies of scale are difficult to be exploited. For this reason, even advanced economies that seemed saturated have kept their status of good destinations for foreign entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs in general (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

2.2.2 The spatial levels of opportunity

After defining the two main components of the opportunity structure, it has been observed that the openness and growth potential of the latter is defined by the interaction of three spatial levels, in descending order: *the national, the regional/urban, and the neighborhood level* (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Barberis & Solano, 2018).

The national level

Globalization has undoubtedly redefined the structure of geopolitics and facilitated immigration and foreign entrepreneurship by a great deal; however, national institutions can still exert a lot of power through regulatory regimes (Barberis & Solano, 2018). These institutions have the power to determine market and non-market supply, as well as regulate the starting of new ventures through laws and regulations. Examples of how this happens are the extent to which permits to start a new business are conceded, the minimum educational and non-educational qualifications required to start a specific activity, which often can only be acquired in the host country and in the local language, and in general the bureaucratic processes. At the same time venture creation and the settlement of foreign entrepreneurs can be hampered by national level non-state related phenomena, such as widespread practices and traditions, business attitudes, and a lack of entrepreneurial culture (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

The regional/urban level

By zooming into a country's institutional framework, many different realities and opportunity structures can be identified in relation to regional clusters and cities, which can assume their own identity and become specialized in specific activities and industries. Many advanced urban regions are in fact following the globalization trajectory and becoming actual industrial hubs, donating increasingly more power to city-regional forces in re-defining markets. Global cities (e.g., Sassen, 1991) are a product of these advanced urban regions and, having a high number of international headquarters and workforce, present very unique opportunity structures for foreigners, which might differ from other areas of the same country.

These sub-national dimensions, therefore, need therefore to be taken seriously into account by foreign entrepreneurs when choosing where to relocate: the mixed embeddedness concept is even more important when considering that there can be many different realities within the same national borders, with very unique socio-economic layouts (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

Furthermore, foreign entrepreneurs must be aware of urban policies that might exist in these regional clusters, which represent an additional source of variation to the opportunity structure, as they often differ from national policies in their contents or application (Ambrosini & Boccagni, 2015).

Urban policies can facilitate the settlement of foreigners, such as regeneration policies aimed at revitalizing urban regions by increasing the number of immigrant (and non-immigrant) entrepreneurs, as well as more general policies aimed at expanding the

opportunity structures for SMEs. At the same time, urban policies can hamper the activity of foreign entrepreneurs, such as the local policies presented in a study by Ambrosini (2013), that was aimed at excluding migrants in certain areas of Italy (Ambrosini, 2013; Barberis & Solano, 2018).

For some of the above-mentioned reasons, Kloosterman and Rath (2001), have stressed the importance of the awareness of foreign entrepreneurs towards local policies, and not only national ones.

The neighborhood level

Lastly, opportunity structures and growth potential can differ even in different neighbourhoods within the same city. The geographical distribution of immigrants within different neighborhoods creates diversity, and it might result easier for foreigners to set up shop in neighborhoods that present a higher diversity and concentration (Barberis & Solano, 2018).

The reason for this is that the proximity offered by neighborhoods fosters social networking and the development of social capital for foreign entrepreneurs. Neighborhoods are the perfect example for mixed embeddedness, as they establish a point of connection between the social embeddedness of entrepreneurs in their networks and the structure of the markets in which they operate. At the same time, there might be a closure of more promising neighborhoods towards the activities of foreign entrepreneurs, which can be effectuated, for example, by preventing them from renting or acquiring premises in a specific location (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

2.2.3 Classification of foreign entrepreneurial ventures

As stated in the previous section, the concentration of opportunities in regional clusters and especially neighborhoods can lead to a higher concentration of immigrants in a specific area. To define these migrant ethnic enclaves, some scholars (e.g., Light et al. 1994) specify that a host-countries economy is composed by a general economy and the economy of minority businesses, or ethnic enclave economy (Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018). Foreigners can therefore potentially exploit a share of the economy which is unavailable to host-country nationals, which can help them advance in the host-countries socio-economic structure and which facilitates self-employment thanks to the network of developed co-ethnic ties (Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2015).

Foreign entrepreneurs, therefore, are faced with a choice among two alternative paths: take advantage of the competitive advantage given by the ethnic enclave economy, despite the drawbacks in terms of growth potential, or compete in the general economy against host country native entrepreneurs (Achidi Ndofo & Priem, 2011).

Mainstream entrepreneurship literature suggests that the ethnic enclave economy plays a very important role in the early stages of venture creation, however entrepreneurs who aim at higher market shares and growth for their businesses should move into general economy as the business scales up (Beckers & Blumberg, 2013). Few research however is focused on understanding how foreign entrepreneurs behave and succeed in setting up their business in situations in which they can't leverage the resources and network of ethnic enclaves (Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018).

The Immigrant Business Enterprises Classification Framework proposed by Curci and Mackoy (2010), is a great tool to understand the extent to which immigrant-owned businesses are integrated in a host country's mainstream economy. This 2x2 framework is built on 2 variables, market served (ethnic vs. nonethnic) and products/services offered (ethnic vs. nonethnic), and it allows us to sort foreign entrepreneur's businesses into 4 different categories which represent alternative levels of integration.

Table 1: The Immigrant Business Enterprises Classification Framework

Source: Curci & Mackoy, 2010, p. 109

	Ethnic Customers	Nonethnic Customers
Ethnic Products or Services	<p>1 Highly Segmented</p> <p>(e.g., ethnic food market, bakery, retail store)</p>	<p>3 Market-Integrated</p> <p>(e.g., ethnic restaurants, consulting, media firms)</p>
Nonethnic Products or Services	<p>2 Product-Integrated</p> <p>(e.g., real estate, medical firms, auto repair)</p>	<p>4 Highly Integrated</p> <p>(e.g., convenience stores, construction firms, dry cleaners)</p>

Immigrant-owned businesses targeting ethnic customers

The businesses in the *highly segmented* category primarily serve customers from their own ethnic backgrounds, offering products and services tied to their cultural heritage. These businesses, therefore, operate within the ethnic enclave, and in many cases, their owners adopt informal practices as they don't have knowledge of the business practices and networks of the host country. The entry barriers and capital requirements are low, and the competition is mainly composed of other immigrant-owned businesses appertaining to the same ethnic enclave. Whilst this represents an advantage in the short run and foundation phase, it also entails generally low growth

potential, as it will always be tied to the size of the ethnic community (Curci & Mackoy, 2010).

This limitation is shared with second category, the *product-integrated* immigrant-owned businesses, which offer mainstream products and services to the members of their ethnic enclave. However, differently from the previous category, the barriers of entry are higher, as it is necessary for the owners to be acquainted with the host country's business practices and networks and consequently with the host country's language. This places these businesses at a middle level on the integration scale.

The competition will be fiercer, as they have to face both immigrant-owned and non-immigrant-owned businesses that target the ethnic enclave, however, they have a competitive advantage over the latter, as it is common practice for immigrants to prefer interactions with other immigrant entrepreneurs. The capital requirements are higher compared to the previous category, both from a human and financial perspective (Curci & Mackoy, 2010).

Immigrant-owned businesses targeting nonethnic customers

Given the limitations of the previous approaches, it isn't uncommon for immigrants to set up entrepreneurial ventures that allow them to overcome the boundaries of the ethnic enclave (Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018).

It is the case for the *market-integrated* category, in which the businesses are immigrant-owned and provide products/services related to their ethnic background, however, the target customers are nonethnic and host-country nationals. As the goal is to sell to the mainstream market, being accustomed to the local business practices and fluency in the host country's language are prerequisites for the business owners of this category, which makes their business fairly integrated. The majority of the competition is against other businesses that offer ethnic products in the mainstream market, with a minimum quality that must at least match that of similar products/services on the mainstream market. This can result in higher barriers of entry for many entrepreneurs that don't have high-quality resources, however, allows them to achieve a larger share of the market as growth is related to the consumption of ethnic-related products or services by nonethnic customers, rather than to the sole ethnic enclave (Curci & Mackoy, 2010).

Finally, we find *highly integrated* migrant businesses, selling mainstream products and services to nonethnic customers in the general economy. This represents the highest level of integration and if achieved, is the category that has the highest growth

potential for immigrant-owned businesses. Of course, these businesses have to overcome and compete with extremely fierce competition, composed of both native entrepreneurs and international organizations; founders, in order to be seen as legitimate and achieve reliability, must become extremely comfortable in expressing themselves in the host country's language, as well as significantly knowledgeable of local business practices and become highly embedded in local networks. These can almost be considered as the minimum requirements to overcome the high entry barriers and compete at the same level as local firms, together with product quality that must be equal to or even higher than that of local firms. This type of approach can therefore be defined as "high risk – high reward", as overcoming all these difficulties gives access to a market that has virtually unlimited growth potential, depending on the level of international and domestic competition (Curci & Mackoy, 2010).

Foreign entrepreneurial ventures, consequently, are presented with a very diverse array of opportunities and obstacles for integration, based on their approaches and the framework's category in which they classify. This implies that governments and business development organizations should focus on tailoring an immigrant business support structure that addresses in a different way all 4 categories, based on their opportunities and needs (Curci & Mackoy, 2010).

Concurrently, this framework demonstrates that foreign entrepreneurs don't need to necessarily rely on ethnic enclaves and their economies, which in many cases are not even developed enough to offer shelter in the initial phases of the business. This is where mixed embeddedness comes into play. Becoming socially and institutionally embedded is crucial in shaping the opportunity structure and transcending ethnic enclave economies and heavy reliance on co-ethnic social networks and capital to achieve economic sustainability (Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018).

2.3 Entrepreneurship and social networks

The mixed embeddedness literature has underlined how social embeddedness is not the only relevant factor in the success of foreign entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is important to point out that only focusing on the social aspect of embeddedness is not enough to paint a clear picture of how immigrant entrepreneurs are able to establish themselves in a host country and create a prosperous living for themselves through business creation or self-employment.

However, as it happens in the case of ethnic enclaves, there is a considerable amount of literature on social embeddedness (e.g., Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993; Panayiot-

opoulos 2006) that proves how social capital in many cases can be enough for immigrant entrepreneurs to overcome the considerable paucity of resources and financial capital and start a venture in a foreign country (Kloosterman, 2010).

The goal of this study is to find if and how the success of foreign entrepreneurial ventures is influenced by individuals or institutions that are part of the entrepreneur's network. For this reason, a brief overview of social networks and their effects on entrepreneurship is necessary.

As described in the previous sections, the process of business creation for foreign (and non-foreign) entrepreneurs is a function of the opportunity structure, containing environmental resources that the entrepreneur aims to acquire, and the resources available to the entrepreneur, whether they present themselves under the form of social, human, or financial capital.

By analyzing this equation, it becomes clear that entrepreneurship should be understood as a dynamic process, that involves interconnections or relationships between its key components. Entrepreneurs must find a way to exploit the resources that they own, in order to attain resources and market possibilities offered by the opportunity structure; however, the relationships that these entrepreneurs have with socializing agents present in the framework will have an effect on the outcome of this process (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986)

Mainstream approaches view entrepreneurs as autonomous, atomized decision-makers whose predisposition to entrepreneurship is a consequence of the cultural environment in which they are located. Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) instead propose an alternative to all the under and over-socialized views of entrepreneurship, by proposing a perspective that posits the entrepreneur as a socially embedded individual. The position of the entrepreneur in their social network, as well as the individuals with whom entrepreneurs interact, can either facilitate or constrain the success of their ventures, by providing linkages to resources and opportunities.

The value generated by social networks is defined as social capital and offers entrepreneurs access to a wealth of valuable resources which can support them in achieving their objectives in multiple ways. However, there is no exact way to determine the impact and amount of social capital for an entrepreneur (see Burt, 1992; Jenssen 2001; Jenssen & Koenig 2002). Examples of resources that can be provided by social networks are information, access to finance, access to skills and knowledge, and enhanced legitimacy, amongst many others (Klyver & Hindle, 2007).

2.3.1 Basic features of social networks

The focal point that combines entrepreneurship and social networks is the relationships and transactions that exist between two people, also known as *ties*. Such ties can be weak or strong, based on different factors such as the frequency and level of contact, and the reciprocity of the relationship. The content of these ties can vary between (1) the transfer of information between them (communication content), (2) the exchange of goods and services (exchange content), and (3) the expectations they have of each other due to some special attribute or characteristic (normative content).

The relationships between pairs of individuals, including entrepreneurs, customers, suppliers, creditors, inventors, etc., regardless of the type of relationship and each person's social role, can be expanded to include more individuals, effectively making the unit of analysis limitless. The concepts of role-set, action-set, and network are useful in setting boundaries (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

A *role-set* refers to all the individuals with whom a particular person has direct relationships. These relationships typically involve single-step connections, but indirect links can also be considered by determining the maximum number of steps away from the central focal person that a person can be and still be considered part of the set (Merton, 1957).

An *Action-set* is defined by Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) as a temporary alliance of individuals who have come together for a specific purpose. These groups may have their own division of labor, norms for interaction with others, or established criteria for adding new members. The action-set may be centered around the actions of one person, but this is a matter that can only be determined through empirical research.

Finally, a *network* is defined as the complete set of individuals connected by a specific type of relationship. This network is created by identifying the connections between all the individuals in a given population, regardless of how they are organized into role-sets and action-sets. When the system being studied is clearly defined, it is possible to identify the links between actors within the given system. Network analysis takes into account the fact that a network can either limit or support the actions of individuals and action-sets, and therefore it is more than just the sum of its individual components (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

2.3.2 Dimensions of social networks

Social networks are complex and multi-dimensional phenomena that can be tackled from many different perspectives depending on the dimensions that are taken into consideration (Klyver & Hindle, 2007).

Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) provide us with an overview of 3 of these relevant dimensions of social networks: density, reachability, and centrality.

The *density* of a network is a measure of the degree of interconnectedness between individuals in the network. It is calculated by comparing the actual number of ties between people to the maximum number of ties that would be possible if every person in the network was connected to one another. It can be measured in a simplistic way by considering the mere existence of ties, or in more sophisticated ways that also consider the strength of the existing ties (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). The *reachability* dimension refers to the ability to connect with another person through a chain of relationships. It is determined by the existence of a path between two people, no matter how long the path may be. Individuals can be ranked based on the number of intermediaries that are required to connect them to another person (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

Always according to Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), the third dimension is *centrality*, which is a function of the overall distance between the focal person and all other people in the network, and the number of new individuals that the focal person can connect with. A person that can reach a high number of people through a short aggregate distance is defined as central in a network, and it is likely to have accessibility to more than one action-set or group within the same network.

Actors that occupy central roles are extremely relevant for the topic of this thesis, as they can serve as facilitators for foreign entrepreneurs; not only they have the means to become communication channels between persons that appear very distant from each other but can also serve as brokers and transfer resources between third parties. Furthermore, if these actors have a high-status, they are often considered as role models for others and can exert their influence on action-sets or other individuals within the network (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

Granovetter (1992), introduced other 2 dimensions that are useful in analyzing social networks. The *relational* dimension concerns the type of relationships that are formed between people that have multiple interactions over a span of time. The *structural* dimension concerns the overall arrangement of ties between individuals, which includes the network configuration and morphology (Granovetter, 1992 as cited in Klyver & Hindle, 2007).

The latter dimension is particularly interesting as it gives birth to the concept of structural diversity. According to Cummings (2004) structural diversity is non-other than the degree of heterogeneity that exists between the people that belong to a specific network. Heterogeneity is based on the features (e.g., gender, profession, age, knowledge etc.) of the range of people taken into consideration, and there is no general parameter to establish an ideal network diversity, as it is extremely case-specific. The reasons why structural diversity is so relevant in entrepreneurship, are tied to the fact that, generally speaking, people that have highly diversified networks are less likely to receive redundant information and advice for the success of their ventures. Having industry and business relations that allow them to navigate in multiple social networks, can grant entrepreneurs an access to a wider plethora of resources (Klyver & Hindle, 2007).

2.3.3 Network concepts applied to entrepreneurship

The concepts of network theories can be found in many dimensions of foreign entrepreneurship and general entrepreneurship.

Ethnic enclaves and communities have been discussed in the previous sections and are archetypes of highly dense networks. These communities are groups with high-self organization, that include individuals usually bonded by strong ties, mainly due to their shared cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Many foreign entrepreneurs rely on these strong connections and ethnic resources to move their first steps into a host country and are facilitated in the creation of new businesses. The reason for this is that the ethnic community's internal organizational capacity given by their strong ties, raises the chances of foreign entrepreneurs to identify and exploit business opportunities, and the community's support allows for independence from the host country's local community (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

Strong ties usually are usually established through a history of past interactions and can therefore establish and convey trust. Aspiring entrepreneurs, especially immigrants, may not have a credit history or reputation that banks or other formal institutions require for the allocation of capital and resources. However, the presence of strong ties is often enough for resource holders in ethnic groups to trust aspiring entrepreneurs (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). Similarly, this concept can be carried out also outside of ethnic groups in certain cases. According to Granovetter (1985), when evaluating an individual, generalized information through reliability statements (either formal or informal), is never as valuable as information coming from a trusted source that has a history of past interactions with the individual. Information from trusted sources is usually more detailed and authentic, cheaper, and less complex to obtain;

at the same time, it is less likely that a trusted informant will engage in opportunistic behavior when giving any kind of information. Therefore, in some cases, a recommendation from a trustworthy source might prove to be very valuable for aspiring entrepreneurs.

This leads directly to another aspect of social networks that proves to be important for entrepreneurship, which is broker roles. "Brokers" are individuals that occupy a position of centrality in networks and facilitate the connection of people that have complementary interests; in doing so, they contribute to increase the network's reachability and the flow of resources and information. In many cases, entrepreneurs themselves enjoy covering this type of position in a network; however, broker roles are often occupied by non-entrepreneurial figures and entities, such as trade associations or public institutions and agencies. The services of brokers are highly demanded as both entrepreneurs and resource holders benefit from reducing the number of required links and reducing transaction costs (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

So far only the importance of strong ties has been the main argument of analysis. However, it has also been discussed that entrepreneurs are likely to occupy central roles in networks, which allows them to diversify their connections and access different sources of information. According to Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) having a network that comprises both strong and weak ties is key to achieving what we defined as structural diversity. Entrepreneurs that have a broad role-set of diversified ties are more likely to be aware of business information (e.g., market information, potential investors, rising innovations, business practices), compared to those that rely on a small role-set of strong ties. Additionally, activating both strong and weak ties is the most efficient way for an entrepreneur to reach a broad pool of customers; furthermore, weak ties can provide unbiased business advice that isn't affected by emotional involvement.

Structural diversity is therefore the most efficient way for entrepreneurs to obtain non-redundant business information, access a wider span of resources, and receive unbiased business advice, while simultaneously have the emotional support that is often needed during the entrepreneurial journey (Klyver & Hindle, 2007).

Klyver and Hindle (2007) conducted a study in which they test the hypothesis that the structure of social networks varies based on the stage of the entrepreneurial process in which the entrepreneurs find themselves.

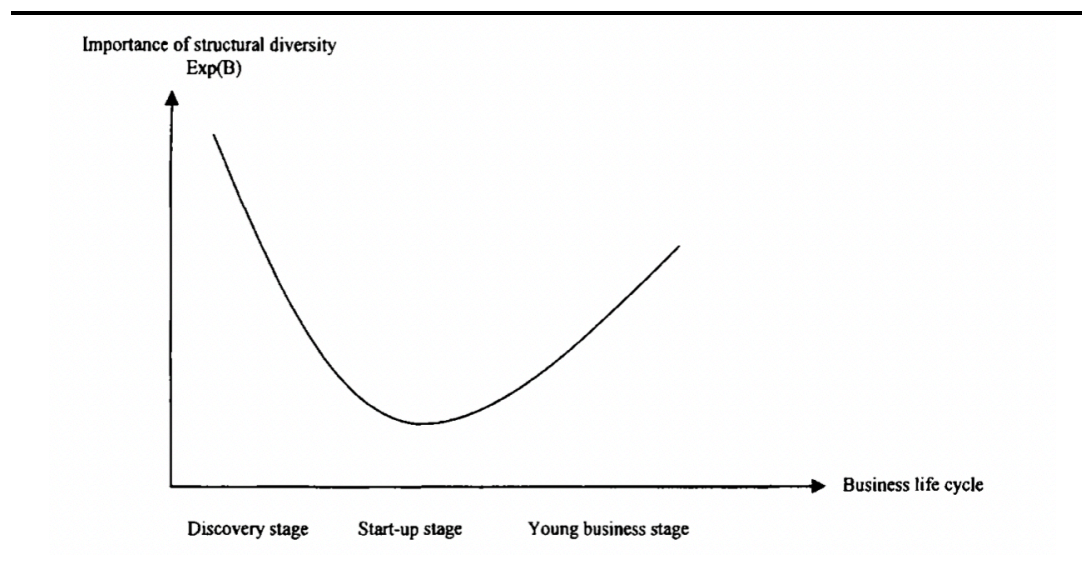
The first stage considered is the discovery stage, in which aspiring entrepreneurs are actively seeking for business opportunities. In this stage, the network on which they

rely is composed mainly of weak ties and is less dense. Simultaneously, the presence of other entrepreneurs in this stage is beneficial, as they provide valuable first-hand business development and startup advice that can influence the rest of the process. In the second stage, the startup stage, after evaluating the available opportunities entrepreneurs need to decide whether or not to go forward with the start of the new venture or are already looking for financing possibilities. In this stage, they will rely mostly on a dense network of strong ties, as they seek for emotional support from their close ones (Larson & Starr, 1993).

Lastly, the third and last stage, the young business stage, is when the entrepreneur has successfully created the venture, and needs to take steps towards sustainability and survival on the market, such as expanding the business and the customer base. In this phase, the density of the network decreases again and the number of weak ties increases. Consequently, the entrepreneur will become more embedded into the business context again, rather than relying on close friends and family as done during the second stage (Klyver & Hindle, 2007; Larson & Starr, 1993).

Figure 2: The changing importance of structural diversity

Source: Klyver & Hindle, 2007, p. 26



To summarize, the structural diversity of social networks follows a U-shaped curve (Figure 2), as it varies based on the stage of the entrepreneurial process. During the startup stage entrepreneurs look for strong ties that construct a high-density network, therefore decreasing structural diversity. In the earlier discovery stage, and later young business stage, structural diversity is high as entrepreneurs can take advantage of both strong and weak ties, and specifically of the presence of figures that are embedded into the business ecosystem, such as other entrepreneurs (Klyver &

Hindle, 2007). Successful entrepreneurs are found in central positions in social networks, where they can rely on strong ties, while simultaneously being connected to multiple weak ties that provide them valuable information, resources and investment opportunities. This is yet another proof of how entrepreneurship is a social phenomenon, and entrepreneurs are socially embedded figures (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and method

The primary aim of this research project is to understand whether the success of immigrant entrepreneurs in achieving legitimacy in a foreign country and creating a business venture is influenced by the presence of actors that occupy high-centrality roles in their networks (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986), which will be defined as “facilitators”. Moreover, building upon the response to the primary research question, the objective is to gain insights into the identity of these figures and the mode of facilitation.

When designing the research, some boundaries had to be set to the extent to which an actor is to be considered a facilitator. First of all, actors include both physical persons and institutions that have a developed network and knowledge of the host country or market. Secondly, for an actor to be considered a facilitator, they can't be primarily motivated by economic remuneration. The relationship between the entrepreneur and the facilitator therefore can't be transactional and involve payment. As presented in Chapter 4.3, some exceptions have been made to this rule after the data collection process was concluded, as some interesting patterns and ideas emerged from the findings.

To answer the primary and secondary research questions, a qualitative research design was employed, with primary data gathered through expert interviews with foreign entrepreneurs. In qualitative research, intertwined past, present, and future data (such as facts and actors' actions, decisions, and representations) are described, decoded, and explored (Hindle, 2004; Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014). After collection, the data analysis procedure was divided into three steps. First of all, the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) was applied to structure the data in an organized way and identify correlations and emerging concepts. Secondly, a theoretical framework was developed, by finding streams of literature that fit with the findings. Lastly, the findings were expressed in theoretically relevant terms, by discussing them again against the previously built theoretical framework, in order to derive practical and policy implications and make suggestions for future research.

The most common approach to achieve qualitative rigor in research is to rely on the traditional deductive scientific method, through which new knowledge is expanded on existing theoretical frameworks. However, according to Gioia et al. (2013), this approach focuses too much on existing constructs and poses some constraints to the originality of research, precluding to some extent the discovery of unexplored theoretical facets. For these reasons, a systematic method of developing ideas through inductive reasoning is suggested, which draws its foundations from the robust social scientific practice of utilizing qualitative data to inductively establish "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Entrepreneurship normally initiates with a spontaneous, erratic, and non-linear occurrence and involves complex processes that connect many different actors and parties; this makes it a peculiar field of research, that can be better understood by applying an inductive logic (Bygrave, 2007; Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014).

3.1.1 Data collection through expert Interviews

As previously specified, the data for this research was gathered by conducting expert interviews with foreign entrepreneurs, with the goal of understanding their journey both from the personal and the entrepreneurial perspective. The interview approach was chosen as it is particularly effective in understanding the perspective of individuals and how they arrived to them, and it gives the researcher the possibility to engage in an open conversation with individuals that have first-hand experience in the research topic (King, 2004).

Apart from the fundamental premise that the organizational world is built on social processes, another critical and actionable assumption was relied upon, namely, that the individuals responsible for constructing their organizational realities are "knowledgeable agents". This implies that people within organizations possess an understanding of their objectives and can articulate their thoughts, intentions, and behaviors. Therefore, it was important to provide ample opportunities for the informants to express their views and ideas during the initial stages of data collection and analysis. Additionally, the representation of their perspectives and experiences was prioritized throughout the research reporting process. By doing so, we create an environment that fosters the emergence of novel concepts and insights, rather than simply reinforcing existing ones. This approach can lead to richer and more nuanced findings that better capture the complexity of the phenomena being studied (Gioia et al., 2013).

In order to allow interviewees to freely express their ideas and gain extensive insights from expert interviews, these were held in a semi-structured manner. The main concept behind this interview style is to keep the design flexible and allow for new knowledge to arise based on the course of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2015), which is ideal to facilitate the inductive design of this research. Gioia et al. (2013), put semi-structured interviews at the heart of their method, as it allows to “obtain both retrospective and real-time accounts by those people experiencing the phenomenon of theoretical interest” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 19).

3.1.2 Interview structure

The first step of the preparation process for the expert interviews was to draft a carefully thought list of questions that would serve as a guideline to hold the conversation and ensure that all research questions were tackled. This guide was developed by broadly taking into account some of the relevant literature on foreign entrepreneurship and legitimacy, purposely without going into specific streams to maintain a level of ignorance and allow the conversations to be as unbiased as possible. The guest was allowed to talk freely, and the list of questions was adapted based on the flow of the conversation, in order to expand on aspects mentioned by the respondents that were considered to be particularly intriguing.

The interview guide was composed of two main parts; the first part was identical for every interview, whilst the second one varied between two different ramifications based on the answer to the pivotal question of the research.

The first couple of questions were kept very broad, with the interviewees being asked to provide some background information, such as demographics, professional and academic background, and some details about their businesses and eventual previous entrepreneurial experiences. Due to the broad nature of these questions, the answers given by interviewees varied greatly in the degree of specificity and length; this, as well as the time constraints posed by the interviewees, are the main reasons for the differences in the duration of the interviews, as reported in Table 2.

After the first interview, the guide underwent some slight iterations as the conversation was flowing mostly towards the challenges of being a foreign entrepreneur, rather than towards the subject of the primary research question.

The focus of the conversation then shifted to the details of their entrepreneurial journey, by asking questions regarding the entrepreneurial motivation that pushed the interviewees to start a business, and the reasons behind the choice of the host country. The question about previous experience in the country was omitted in case it had

already been answered indirectly while talking about their background. However, it was interesting to understand their access to the local ecosystem and society, both from a personal and an entrepreneurial point of view.

This led to the pivotal question of the interview, which summarized the primary research question: understanding whether they could identify key figures that facilitated in any way the development of their business and achievement of legitimacy in the host country. This question was slightly modified after the first couple of interviews, as interviewees had the tendency to also classify as facilitators figures that helped them in aspects of their personal life and host country integration, which in most cases also yielded positive effects on the legitimization process. The scope of the question was therefore broadened to include facilitators that weren't strictly related to their entrepreneurial journey, but to their whole immigration path.

This point marked the conclusion of the first part of the guideline, and from here on the interview took a different direction based on the answer to the previous question. In case the interviewees were able to identify facilitators, the following questions were aimed at understanding the way these figures affected the legitimization process, their identity, and the relationship existing between the two parties. Furthermore, the objective was to identify whether these facilitators changed over time, and what were the trigger points that led to the change. If the interviewees instead did not identify any facilitating figure in their journey, the follow-up questions were aimed at understanding the reasons behind this and if they at all felt like they lacked a similar figure in their journey.

In both cases, the interviews were concluded with some questions regarding the perceived impact of their foreignness in legitimacy attainment and host-country integration, and the perceived strengths and weaknesses arising from it. Lastly, a question regarding the existing ties with their home country was raised.

Overall, two major adaptations were made, which were the results of conversations with earlier interviewees. This of course not considering the changes arising from the semi-structured nature of the process (Gioia et al., 2013) that made every conversation fairly unique, adapting to the answers given by the interviewees.

The full interview guide can be found in Appendix 2.

3.1.3 Sample selection criteria

To meet the research objective and ensure that the qualitative analysis would yield significant results, it was important to identify appropriate interview partners that could

provide meaningful data about the targeted phenomenon. This is in line with the definition formulated by Gläser and Laudel (2009, p. 117) according to whom experts are “people who possess special knowledge of a social phenomenon which the interviewer is interested in”.

For this specific research, the targeted experts were individuals that started an entrepreneurial activity in a country different from their country of origin. This included any type of entrepreneurial activity, as well as self-employment, with no constraint on the industry or type of product or service provided. However, some specific criteria were set when searching for interview candidates, in order to ensure the comparability of data.

The first selection criterion was related to the composition of the founding team of the business. Specifically, the decision was to exclude any foreign entrepreneur that had started a business in a host country together with one or more host-country native co-founders. The reason behind this criterion was the assumption that the presence of a facilitating figure would have been much less necessary with a local co-founder, as the latter would have brought to the table a developed network, a deep knowledge of the local culture and language, and a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of many potential external stakeholders. However, this exclusion principle was not applied in case host-country native business partners had joined the ventures after the founding stage, when the business had already started generating revenue and achieved some degree of legitimacy.

The second criterion was related to the host country. The sample included only foreign entrepreneurs that have started their business in developed economies. The framework developed by Scheu and Kuckertz (2023), was used to determine which economies to be included in the analysis. The framework initially considered two parameters: the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), according to which “very high human development nations” have an IHDI equal to or higher than 0.8 (United Nations, 2020), the high-income-nations list provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022). However, as some highly developed IHDI countries are not part of the OECD’s list, the United Nations Human Development Index (United Nations, 2020) was also considered.

The combination of these three indexes provides a fairly accurate measurement of the economic development of countries. According to this, the countries meeting the following criteria (IHDI \geq 0.8 AND HDI \geq 0.85) OR (IHDI \geq 0.8 AND OECD Member) OR (HDI \geq 0.85 AND OECD Member), are considered developed (Scheu &

Kuckertz, 2023) and therefore, were included in this analysis. The table developed by the authors, showing the full list of developed countries is included in Appendix 3.

When first developing the research, the idea was to implement a third criterion, namely, to consider only foreign entrepreneurs coming from developed countries; however, this was subject to iteration, and entrepreneurs from non-developed countries were also included in the sample. The reason behind this was to use the latter category to create a small comparison group, in order to test whether the needs, type of facilitators, and legitimization activities changed based on the state of the economy of the country of origin.

3.2 Data collection

The following section illustrates the methods employed for data collection and presents the sample used for the qualitative analysis.

3.2.1 Approach, contact, and collection method

The main channels used to identify and select interview partners were the LinkedIn platform and personal network. Through LinkedIn, the approach method was the following. Firstly, the “Premium” version of the platform was purchased to access unlimited profile research and the “InMail” functionality, which allows sending a predetermined monthly number of messages to users outside of your network of connections. By making use of the advanced search filters available, the list of users was skimmed according to the “developed host country” selection criteria, by selecting users based on the primary location indicated on their profile. The biggest challenge of course was to identify foreigners residing in a set country. The preferred method to narrow down the list was to use the “profile language” filter and select users who set up their profile in a language different from the national language of the host country. Furthermore, through the “talks about” filter a set of hashtags revolving around the macro topic of entrepreneurship and startups was selected. Lastly, the keywords “entrepreneur” and “founder” were used alternatively as the primary input for the search bar.

Different rounds of research were conducted, also through the usage of a VPN for some rounds, as the platform showed different results based on the geo-location of the device and IP address. A total of 29 profiles that met all the selection criteria were identified, and the details of the users were listed on an interviewee pool Excel sheet, containing the personal details made available on the platform.

Another set of potential interview partners was approached through personal network connections. The strategy was to rely on direct ties, mainly entrepreneurs, venture

capital employees, and university students and professors that could serve as facilitators for social connections with entrepreneurs belonging to their network. A total of 8 potential candidates were found through personal networks.

A first contact with all potential candidates was made through a message, where a short introduction, the scope of the research, and the selection criteria were listed. This was done to obtain confirmation from potential participants that their profile was in line with the selection criteria, and to assess their availability to take part in the project. In the case of some of the personal network potential interviewees, some were contacted directly via a phone call, and the same information as in the message was discussed. In case of positive feedback from the respondents, an interview date was set based on their availability. The text of the message sent for first contact can be found in Appendix 1.

The main communication channels used to conduct the interviews were telephone calls and videoconferencing software, with only one interview conducted face-to-face. All interviewees were informed beforehand that the interview would have been audio-recorded and that anonymity would have been granted, through the omission of all personal and company details from the final body of work. Audio recording is an effective data-collection method that prevents the loss of significant information, as fast-paced conversations often make data collection quite challenging (Saunders et al., 2015). In addition to audio recording, notes were taken by the interviewer to ensure a qualitative comprehension in case of service disruption system outage. A total of 8 hours and 55 minutes of interviews was recorded. Table 2 summarizes the details of the interviews.

Table 2: Interview details

Source: *Own illustration*

Interviewee	Contact channel	Interview style	Duration	Language
I1	Personal network	Telephone	00:43:33	Italian
I2	LinkedIn	Videoconferencing	00:48:27	Italian
I3	Personal network	Videoconferencing	00:25:09	English
I4	Personal network	Telephone	01:04:25	Italian
I5	LinkedIn	Videoconferencing	00:27:40	English
I6	LinkedIn	Videoconferencing	00:35:25	Italian
I7	LinkedIn	Videoconferencing	00:52:29	English
I8	LinkedIn	Telephone	00:32:06	English
I9	Personal network	Face-to-face	00:24:52	Italian
I10	Personal network	Telephone	00:21:37	Italian
I11	Personal network	Telephone	00:32:52	Italian
I12	Personal network	Telephone	00:46:52	Italian
I13	Personal network	Telephone	01:19:16	Italian

After the interviews, eleven recordings were transcribed into written form through a professional transcription platform (Trint), and subsequently corrected in case of mistakes. Two recordings were manually transcribed, as the audio quality was poor due to some background noises, which made the transcription software inefficient.

The interviews were conducted in the Italian or English language, depending on the interviewees' preferences. The average duration of an interview was approximately 41 minutes. As previously specified, the duration of interviews varied due to speech rates, the extensiveness of answers, and time constraints set by the interviewees.

The English versions of the transcripts are provided in Appendix 4 to 16.

3.2.2 Sample Description

Given the aim of the research – to comprehend how facilitators help foreign entrepreneurs in obtaining legitimacy – and recognizing the absence of established theories on this subject, the study takes an interpretivist approach. This methodology is particularly effective in gaining new insights and emphasizes the researcher's interpretations as central to the outcome and is a central pillar of the Gioia methodology for data analysis, which was employed in this research (Gioia et al., 2013; Saunders et al., 2015).

Given the typically detailed and narrow focus of inductive interpretivist research and taking into consideration the limited time available for this study and the time required for the analysis of qualitative interviews (Cassell & Symon, 2004), the goal was to reach a representative group of 10 to 15 foreign entrepreneurs.

Table 3 presents the details of the final sample on which this research is based on.

Table 3: Sample details

Source: *Own illustration*

Interviewee	Age	Country of origin	Country of residency	Sector	FEE	Education
I1	50-60	Romania	Italy	Construction	No	Secondary school
I2	20-30	Italy	United Kingdom	Fashion	No	Bachelor's degree
I3	30-40	Spain	Germany	Software & IT services	Yes	Master's degree
I4	20-30	Italy	United Kingdom	Hospitality	No	Secondary school
I5	30-40	France	Germany	Biotechnology	Yes	Master's degree
I6	20-30	Italy	Spain	Education	No	Bachelor's degree
I7	30-40	Lithuania/France	Germany	Manufacturing	No	Master's degree
I8	30-40	USA	Austria	Writing & editing	No	Master's degree
I9	40-50	Greece	Italy	Design	No	Master's degree
I10	50-60	Italy	Spain	Textiles	Yes	Secondary school
I11	40-50	Albania	Italy	Construction	No	Compulsory education
I12	30-40	Bulgaria	Germany	Corporate services	No	Master's degree
I13	30-40	Moldova	Italy	Construction	No	Secondary school

The sample analyzed by this study is composed of foreign entrepreneurs that have quite diverse characteristics and backgrounds. The number of different industries and economic sectors included in the analysis is quite elevated, with interviewees being both high and low-skilled immigrants. The average level of education is tertiary, with the majority of participants (I2, I3, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I12) having completed a bachelor's or master's degree in university, and only one participant not completing secondary education. Understanding the exact age of participants wasn't particularly relevant for the purpose of this research, however, age intervals have been assigned to enrich the context of the analysis. An interesting detail however is the fact that most interviewees were first-time entrepreneurs, as only 3 out of 13 (I3, I5, I10) had former entrepreneurial experience (FEE) before engaging in their current ventures.

As specified in the earlier sections, in analyzing the data the sample was split into two groups: the experimental group (I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10), which included all interviewees coming from a developed country (9 out of 13), and a smaller comparison group (I1, I11, I12, I13), formed by the remaining interviewees (4 out of 13) whose home countries aren't included in the classification framework proposed by Scheu and Kuckertz (2023), and are therefore to be considered underdeveloped. Looking at the combination of the two groups, almost all interviewees come from EU member states, besides for I8, I11, and I13 which come from non-EU member countries. The host countries however are all part of the EU, which wasn't a requirement arising from the selection criteria, but more so a consequence of the researcher's location and network. However, this resulted to be a facilitating factor for data comparison.

3.3 Data analysis

3.3.1 The Gioia method for data analysis

When performing inductive qualitative analysis, it must be assumed that researchers possess a significant degree of knowledge and insight and can discern patterns in the data that may not be immediately apparent to the informants. These patterns and relationships must then be articulated in theoretically relevant terms, that enhance the understanding of the phenomena under investigation and contribute to the advancement of the respective fields. Over time, different systematic procedures for a coherent presentation and analysis of qualitative research findings have been developed (Gioia et al., 2013).

The procedure chosen for the data analysis of this research is the Gioia methodology. This choice was based on two critical considerations: first of all, it is a well-established

and appraised method that enables the achievement of qualitative rigor; secondly, the objective was to find a methodology that would facilitate the analysis of raw qualitative data, which wouldn't have negative consequences on quality and authenticity.

The main strength of the methodology proposed by Gioia et al. (2013), is in fact that of creating a solution for achieving qualitative rigor while retaining the originality and theoretical innovativeness of qualitative studies. At the same time, this structured approach should lead to credible interpretations that convince the reader about the plausibility of the research's conclusions, by demonstrating the connections between data, emerging concepts, and the resulting grounded theory.

The application of the Gioia methodology enables the systematic demonstration of both a "first-order" analysis (employing informant-centered terms and codes) and a "second-order" analysis (employing researcher-centered concepts, themes, and dimensions). From the themes arising from the second-order analysis, overarching aggregate dimensions are established. By presenting both the perspectives of the informant and researcher, a thorough and qualitative demonstration of the relationship between the data and the relevant literature can be achieved. This serves the double purpose of checking for existing theoretical precedents as well as for the discovery of new concepts (Gioia et al., 2013).

3.3.2 Execution of the gioia method

When it comes to this specific study, it is important to mention that the grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was not included, as the purpose was not to formulate a new theory through data analysis. The Gioia methodology was used to create a data structure and match the results of the research against a theoretical framework consisting of relevant literature streams, to check whether the collected data is consistent with existing concepts.

The MAXQDA 2022 (version 22.4.1) software was used to process and organize the data, and the coding process consisted of two rounds. During the first round, open coding was applied to retrieve relevant quotes from the text and organize them in a first draft of first-order concepts. Axial coding was then applied to generate possible second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013). Once these two steps were completed for every transcript, the code system was transferred to an Excel sheet, where through a second round of coding, necessary iterations were made to the existing structure and the data was organized into the final version of first-order concepts and second-order themes. Once this process was concluded, aggregate dimensions were established based on second-order themes, and the result was a data structure that could support the objective of providing an answer to the research questions.

4. Findings

The following analysis (Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3) includes the combined findings for interviewees belonging to both the experimental and comparison groups. The comparison between the two is presented in Section 4.4.

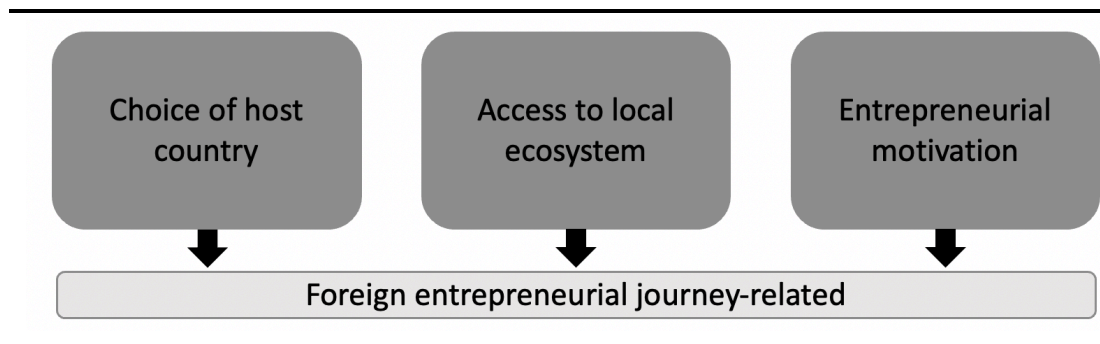
As illustrated by Figures 3 and 7, six total aggregate dimensions arose from the 13 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with foreign entrepreneurs. These dimensions served as building blocks for answering the research questions and were split into two groups, based on their relatedness to the following macro-topics: foreign entrepreneurial journey, and facilitators.

4.1 Foreign entrepreneurial journey-related dimensions

The first three dimensions presented are connected to the journey that brought the interviewees to become foreign entrepreneurs, starting from the reasons behind the choice of relocating to the host country, and culminating with the motivation that pushed them to start an entrepreneurial venture. These dimensions are shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Foreign entrepreneurial journey-related aggregate dimensions

Source: Own illustration



4.1.1 Choice of host country

The first aggregate dimension that emerged from the data, is related to the reasons behind the decision to immigrate to the host country, as well as the reasons that made them decide to start their venture in said country. Figure 4 presents the data structure that stemmed from the coding process.

The availability of opportunities and the potential of the market represented the predominant aspect considered when evaluating host country alternatives. From a personal and career perspective, job opportunities and higher salaries, as well as the

reputation of the education system were all factors that increased the attractiveness of a country. Furthermore, through statements such as *“and also in terms of attractiveness, it was quite attractive for us. We were seeing really a lot of entrepreneurs going to Berlin, and many businesses with success stories. So, it was kind of exciting for us”* (I5) or *“Financially, in so many areas, in universities, it's a place where you come and if you have an idea, you can make it a reality and you can meet people who can help you”* (I4), it is deductible that the perception of the country based on the experience of peers and co-ethnics had a significant influence on the decision-making process. The interviewed entrepreneurs also emphasized how market-related aspects were key in deciding to settle their business in the host country. In particular, factors related to market size, demand, and customer base were among the most popular answers (I2, I11, I12, I13). Infrastructure development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and the foreign potential of the area were also taken into consideration (I4, I5, I6, I7, I9).

Another set of first-order concepts is related to financial aspects. *“Vienna was also not that expensive compared to other European capitals”* (I8) or *“I initially wanted to go to Japan. It was just that the exchange rate was not favorable, and you needed a lot more budget. Whereas to live in Italy the cost was very similar to Greece, and it was much more affordable for me”* (I9) are examples of statements that show how the cost of living impacted decision-making (I5, I8, I9). At the same time, the availability of investments and local policies that lower operating expenses create startup favorable environments that attracted a portion of the interviewed entrepreneurs (I2, I3, I6, I7, I8) to relocate or settle in specific areas.

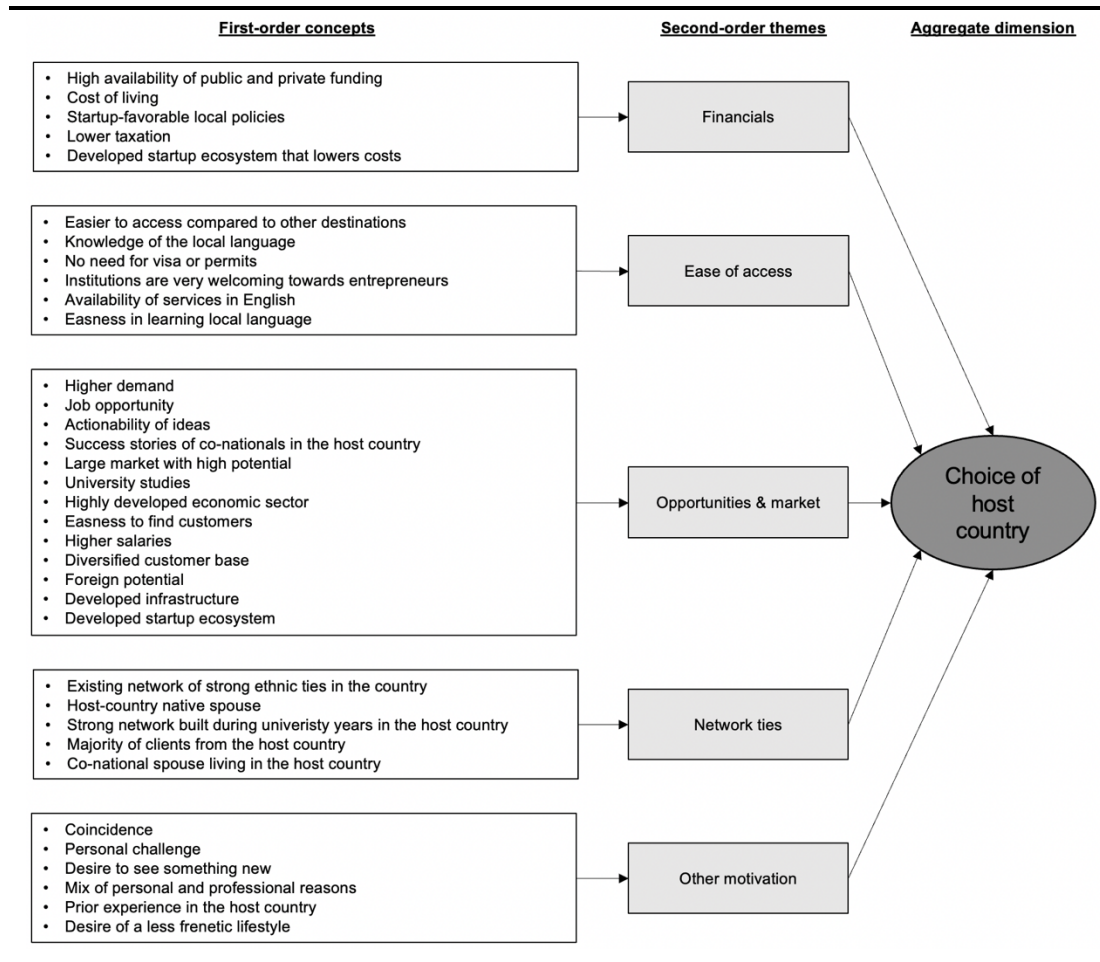
Some of the interviewed entrepreneurs (I1, I5, I9, I11, I12) also stated that the presence of existing ties in the host country was a decisive factor. These were predominantly consisting of co-nationals (I1, I11, I13) or other strong ties, such as spouses (I5, I12), which provided emotional support and advice in handling the transition and settlement. In the case of interviewees that had already relocated to the host country, a developed network represented the starting point for their venture development once they embarked on the entrepreneurial journey (I9, I12).

For part of the entrepreneurs (I1, I4, I5, I8, I12), ease of access was also part of the host-country selection process. From a bureaucratic point of view, the possibility to immigrate without a visa, as well as the support of designated institutional bodies and immigration services facilitated access to the host country (I1, I8). Concurrently, others (I4, I5, I13) made statements such as *“Well, first of all because I already knew the language. And that was one step to start”* (I4) or *“a strong point for Berlin is that you*

can get services in English” (15), which clearly underline the importance of language in choosing where to establish a venture.

Figure 4: Data structure for the first aggregate dimension

Source: *Own illustration*



4.1.2 Access to local ecosystem

Once the motives behind the choice of the host countries were understood, another aggregate dimension emerged from the data, which was related to the adaptation to the new environment and acceptance from the local ecosystem and society. The data structure for this second aggregate dimension is presented in Figure 5. The first-order concepts that surfaced from the data are tied to both the positive and negative experiences of the interviewed entrepreneurs.

Many of these first-order concepts were tied to the institutional and bureaucratic processes that the interviewees had to undergo to become embedded in the host country. This was especially the case for those that needed a visa or working permit to be considered legal immigrants and carry out economic activities, which were negatively

affected by the speed of bureaucratic processes (I1, I11). However, also entrepreneurs that didn't experience difficulties tied to the immigration process made statements such as *"it was one of the big difficulties, which was doing all of the paperwork and all of that signing up"* (I7), which highlights how bureaucratic practices represented a hurdle towards their integration. Only a minority of experts (I10, I12) were satisfied with the efficiency of bureaucracy and institutions. One common attribute shared by this minority was the previous knowledge of the host country's language, which was otherwise recurrently considered a barrier to institutional embeddedness.

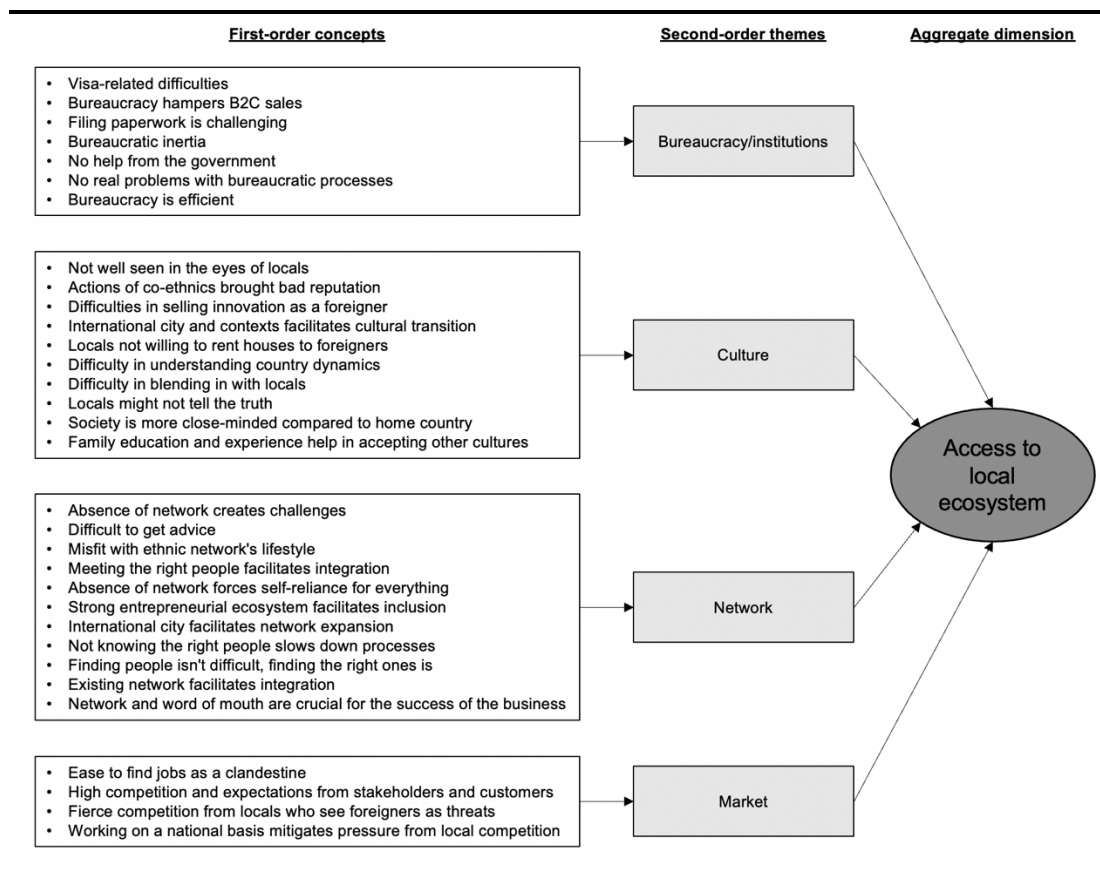
Another second-order theme stemming from the data was the perceived importance of networks in becoming embedded in the local ecosystem. I3, I4 and I6 were negatively affected by the absence of ties in the host country, especially in setting up their ventures. While weak ties were relatively easy to establish, the underlying problem was the lack of strong ties with individuals who could provide reliable advice and emotional support, which made the entrepreneurial journey significantly more challenging compared to that of host-country nationals. In spite of this, some entrepreneurs (I5, I7) were able to mitigate this absence by establishing themselves in locations with a well-developed entrepreneurial ecosystem and a high degree of internationality. This can be deduced from statements such as *"on the entrepreneurial side, it was easy because there are a lot of things going on. If you want to attend events you can do it almost every day. Everyone speaks English and you have a lot of experts also coming in the city to start a business"* (I5), and *"But the advantage of Berlin is that there is a quite easy access"* (I7).

Global cities also yield positive effects on cultural integration according to a portion of the interviewed foreign entrepreneurs (I5, I12). According to I1, I3, I9, I11, I12, I13 it was more difficult in ecosystems that didn't share the same level of cultural openness, both from a personal and a business perspective. I1 stated that the difficulties in finding jobs and integrating with locals were tied to stereotypes and negative perceptions tied to the misconduct of other immigrants of the same ethnicity. In other cases (I1, I3, I9, I11), locals associated foreignness with low reliability, which affected negatively both the everyday and business lives of some of the interviewed entrepreneurs. Examples can be found in statements such as *"they started to be a bit racist toward foreigners, such as not allowing us to rent houses, even though we were eventually students who brought money to the country"* and *"Actually, it was very tough at the beginning to sell new technology innovations to Germans, not being German"* (I9).

The last second-order theme that emerged from the data, was access to local ecosystems from a market perspective. According to part of the interviewed experts (I2, I9), the main issue was that in some environments locals perceived foreign entrepreneurs as a threat to their businesses, and engaged in harsher competition to protect their market share. Markets were also considered the only downside of global cities and well-developed entrepreneurial ecosystems (I2), as the competition and customers' expectations are much higher compared to those of other areas.

Figure 5: Data structure for the second aggregate dimension

Source: *Own illustration*



4.1.3 Entrepreneurial motivation

The last of the emerging entrepreneurial journey-related aggregate dimensions is related to the entrepreneurial motivation that convinced the interviewed foreign entrepreneurs to embark on the journey of autonomous work and become founders.

A recurrent second-order theme in the statements of half of the interviewed experts (I2, I3, I6, I7, I11, I12) was dissatisfaction with their previous employment. A multiplicity of factors was identified as the root cause of this dissatisfaction. First of all, many experts (I3, I6, I7, I12) had experiences in large companies, and described corporate jobs as too specialized and not challenging and stimulating enough. This fostered

their desire to explore a faster-paced lifestyle that would result in more variety and risk to their day-to-day activities. In other cases (I2, I11), the entrepreneurs had a hard time dealing with subordination, either because of their personalities or finding unstimulating the idea of not generating revenues for themselves.

The majority of interviewed entrepreneurs (I1, I3, I4, I7, I8, I9, I10) founded their businesses following the identification of an opportunity or market gap, which is another second-order theme emerging from the data. For I1, the opportunity came in the form of chances for professional growth, such as an offer to learn new skills: *“If you want, come with me. [...] If you are good at bricklaying I will surely have minor jobs to commission you. And if you'd like, in addition to your work I'll also teach you how to be a fitter”* (I1). In other cases, the entrepreneurs identified business opportunities in specific markets, such as shortage of supply (I9), increase in demand due to external shocks (I7), or market gaps for specific products and services (I10), which they were able to fill even without possessing all the necessary resources and skills. Lastly, for a portion of interviewees (I3, I4, I6, I8), the identification of opportunities happened after acquiring industry knowledge and specialization, mostly through previous experiences.

The second-order theme “intrinsic motivation” includes all the first-order concepts that hinted at an entrepreneurial motivation that went beyond opportunity or necessity, but rather underlined a natural propensity arising from factors such as personality traits or exposure to entrepreneurial contexts. In some cases (I1, I3, I7, I9), the entrepreneurs were moved by their constant willingness to take risks and seek diversity on a daily basis. For other interviewees (I8, I11), this motivation found expression in the desire of finding solutions to problems and seeing the outcomes of their ideas. I12 made the following statement *“So for me, it was also connected with personal development. I thought that combining projects and establishing a company and then being responsible, then it will help me grow as a professional and as a person as well. And I felt that you know, somehow for me, it was interesting to have to go into this process of growing”*, which hints at entrepreneurship as a way of personal development. Furthermore, a couple of entrepreneurs were motivated by the desire to help society and the environment (I2), or by following their parent's footsteps (I11).

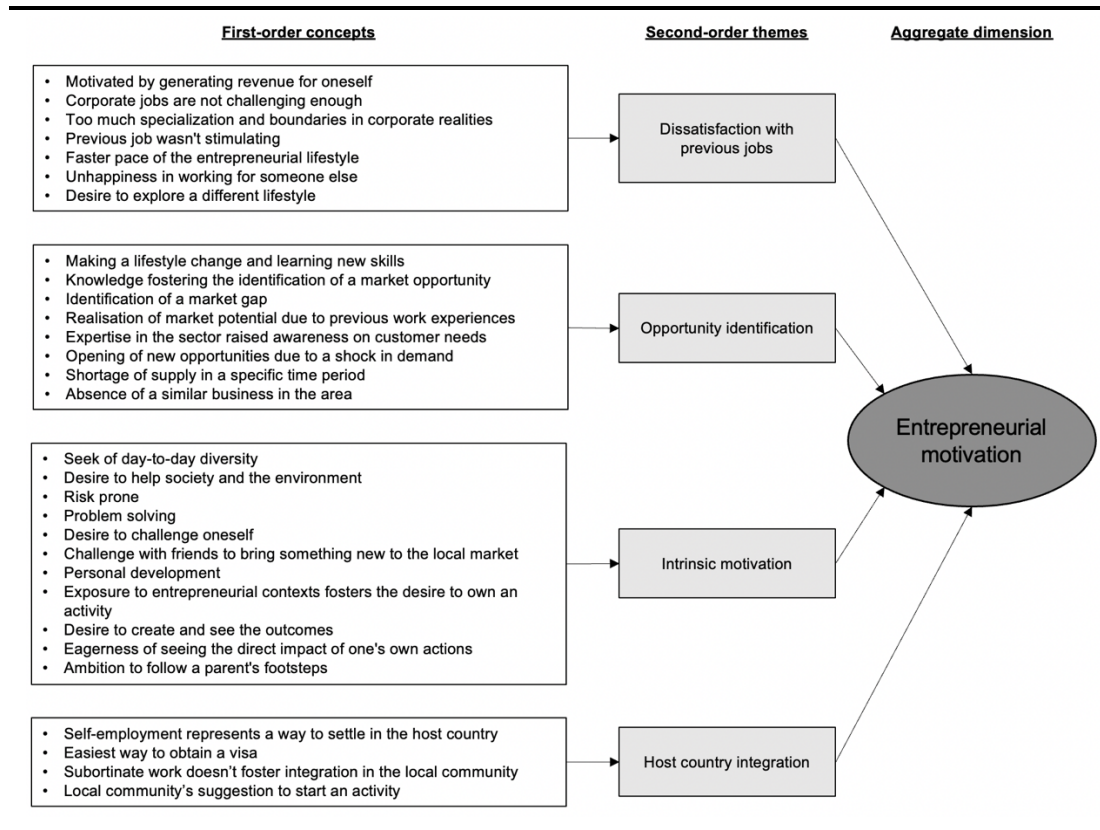
Lastly, it emerged that for some, entrepreneurship was seen as a path toward integration in the host country. This is especially true for two interviewees, which clearly stated how they decided to become founders because they saw it as the easiest way

to settle and become legitimate actors (I1), or because they perceived it as an opportunity to become more integrated and recognized by the local community in which they were operating (I10).

Figure 6 depicts the data structure for this third aggregate dimension.

Figure 6: Data structure for the third aggregate dimension

Source: *Own illustration*



4.2 Facilitator-related dimensions

While the first three dimensions didn't directly provide an answer to the research questions, they were crucial components for an outright understanding of the foreign entrepreneurial experiences of the interviewed experts. It is necessary to comprehend thoroughly the difficulties experienced in their journeys, in order to fully recognize the impact and role that facilitating figures might have had on their legitimacy attainment process.

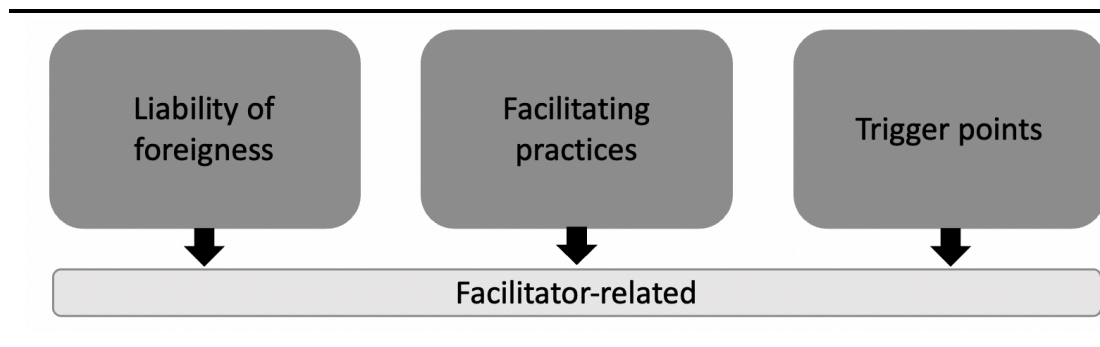
The last three aggregate dimensions are in fact those that first-handedly provide an answer to the main research questions, by fully focusing on the influence of facilitators in the success stories of the interviewed entrepreneurs. The starting point is the depiction of the liabilities arising from being an immigrant and foreign entrepreneur in the host country. The combination of these liabilities and the difficulties in accessing the local ecosystem were useful in identifying the key practices and help provided by

facilitators. Finally, the last dimension analyses the reasons that brought entrepreneurs to replace the existing facilitating figure with a new one (when applicable).

Figure 7 displays these last three aggregate dimensions.

Figure 7: Facilitator-related aggregate dimensions

Source: *Own illustration*



4.2.1 Liability of foreignness

In multinational enterprises literature, the liability of foreignness (LOF) refers to the additional expenses that a company operating in a foreign market may face, which a local company would not face. Generally, there are four possible sources of LOF, which may not be independent of each other. These sources include costs related to: (1) distance, (2) unfamiliarity with the local environment, (3) foreign country's environment (e.g., lack of legitimacy), and (4) home country's environment (e.g., restrictions in business) (Zaheer, 1995).

In short, LOF is the social cost of doing business in foreign countries, determined by the combination of unfamiliarity, discrimination, and relation. This disadvantage is a central taking point when it comes to immigrant entrepreneurship (Gurău et al., 2020).

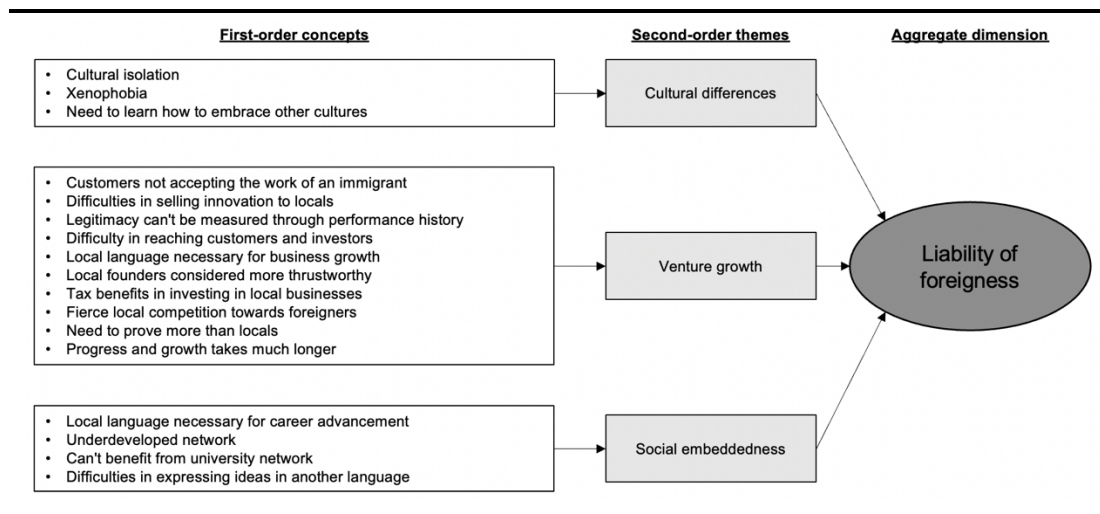
When analyzing the data gathered from the interviews, the aggregate dimensions related to LOF emerged from the combination of three main second-order themes (Figure 8).

Firstly, cultural differences were one of the main liabilities that some of the interviewed entrepreneurs (I5, I8, I11, I13) experienced when trying to blend into the society of the host country. These presented themselves in the form of cultural isolation or perceived xenophobia from the local population (I8, I11). However, even in cases where the impact was not so harsh (I5, I13), and locals showed more openness, the interviewed experts felt the importance of coping with these differences and understanding the local culture and way of working. The importance of this can be found in statements such as: *"I think. You need to be open because you know you're coming somewhere you don't know and you need to open your awareness, your mind to other*

people, to other ways or other cultures” (I5) and “For most people, it is a little more difficult. Because then I understood how the Italian people think, and I found it necessary to integrate myself completely into the nation to fully understand how things are, because otherwise then you can’t move forward” (I13).

Secondly, for I1, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I9, and I13, the liability of foreignness resulted in difficulties in the growth and development of their venture. From a cultural standpoint, the xenophobia of locals had an impact on perceived reliability (I1, I3, I4), openness to new methods and ideas (I3), and difficulties in obtaining legitimacy due to a lack of performance history in the country (I3). From a linguistic standpoint, an underdeveloped knowledge of the local language resulted in a significant barrier to venture growth for I3, I6, I7, which had to invest time and resources to overcome this deficiency. From an institutional standpoint, I5 stated that, through tax incentives, the host country indirectly pushes private investors to prefer local-owned businesses when deciding where to place their investments. The combination of all these reasons, together with a fiercer competition of local businesses towards foreign-owned ones (I9, I13), slowed down significantly the venture growth for most of the interviewed entrepreneurs and forced them to prove much more compared to local businesses. This clearly stems from quotes such as: *“It is very difficult because you have to prove so many more things than the locals” (I9) and “You used to have to prove a lot, especially in terms of quality. I always had to do perfect jobs, as I liked to do, but other Italian companies could afford not to do the job so well and still be accepted” (I13).*

Lastly, for I3, I5, I7, and I13, the low social embeddedness associated with moving to a new and unfamiliar environment was quite difficult to overcome. The linguistic barriers and cultural differences represented an important hurdle for the development of a personal and professional network (I3, I13). Especially in the case of some entrepreneurs (I5, I7), university and home country networks were considered a very important resource and not being able to leverage them was deemed as a drawback: *“You will have the starting point of your university network in that country. [...] I have a really good network in France. But I don’t take any advantage of it” (I7).*

Figure 8: Data structure for the fourth aggregate dimensionSource: *Own illustration*

4.2.2 Facilitating practices

The entrepreneurial journey and the many difficulties faced by the interviewed experts are necessary information to deeply understand the importance of facilitators in the process of legitimization of foreign entrepreneurs. The aggregate dimension “facilitating practices” de facto contains the answer to the first research question of this study. The first-order codes arising from the data were grouped into four second-order themes that summarize the areas in which the interviewees feel like they’ve received crucial help from facilitators.

It is noteworthy to mention that the codes included in this aggregate dimension arise only from the feedback of the entrepreneurs for which it was possible to identify at least one key figure that assisted them in different ways during their entrepreneurial journey. For two (I2, I10) out of the thirteen interviewed experts, no such figure was identified. This doesn’t however mean that said entrepreneurs didn’t receive help, but rather that the help received consists more of single pieces of advice rather than a facilitating practice. This concept is better explained in Section 4.3.1.

Firstly, four of the thirteen interviewed entrepreneurs (I4, I5, I11, I13) have received significant help with financing and costs. In all four cases, this happened at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career, when the scarcity of funds called for a significant need to minimize costs. This help came in different forms, varying between the access to working space for a very low monthly rent (I5), the possibility to access a fully equipped warehouse rent-free for the first 6 months (I4), availability of accounting services without paying account management expenses (I13) and the possibility to benefit from agency services without having to pay agency fees (I11).

Additionally, I11 and I13 were able to benefit from financial facilitation during other periods. One interviewee was offered free accommodation by a co-ethnic peer for the first few weeks after immigration: *“As soon as I arrived, I spent some time at his house in Formello, always around Rome”* (I11). I13 instead was financially aided during a low-profit period of the business, by a former local customer with whom he developed a strong tie.

A second group of codes emerging from the data proved that integration into the host country's environment and society is positively impacted by the actions of facilitators. This was verified for over 50% of this research's sample (I1, I5, I6, I7, I8, I11, I13). Regarding venture creation and business growth, the facilitators helped in many different ways: linguistic support in conducting business and talking with potential stakeholders (I6, I7), guidance in understanding local bureaucracy and regulations (I7, I11, I13), mediation with professional figures (I7) and in general knowledge sharing regarding the entrepreneurial ecosystem and state and regional funding and support (I6, I8). Furthermore, some entrepreneurs received support with crucial aspects for foreigners that aren't related to the venture creation and growth, such as housing (I5), and integration outside of the work environment (I1).

The importance of facilitators in helping foreign entrepreneurs with becoming integrated, and thus legitimized, in the host country is very well captured in the following statements: *“Definitely yes, if you're going to take an important step, you have to have a local, local person to go along with you. Because then you understand quickly and you understand things the right way”* (I1) and *“the lack of a guide that could also direct us to all these opportunities [...] was felt”* (I6).

Almost all the interview partners (I1, I3, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I11, I12, I13), when asked about the help received by facilitators, have almost immediately associated these figures with that of mentors. For this reason, the largest second-order theme tied to this aggregate dimension is “mentorship”.

Many different forms and facets of mentorship were identified in the experiences of the foreign entrepreneurs in question. I1, I3, and I9 were helped to learn the job and develop skills that proved to be necessary for their career advancement and entrepreneurial activity. I1, I5, I6, I7, and I12 benefitted from strategic mentorships, such as structuring the day-to-day of the business, support for decision-making, and expertise in what it means to be a successful entrepreneur. Other business mentoring included product development (I7) and help with costs and price benchmarking (I12 and I13). According to I5 and I8, the possibility to have experienced figures as advisors in business resulted in faster development for their ventures and a considerable

reduction of mistakes. I13 instead, before becoming a business owner, was given by their previous employer the chance to learn accountability and get a grasp of the entrepreneurial life without having to bear the financial risks associated with it.

In some cases, the role of facilitators went beyond that of consultancy and mentorship in practical and business-related aspects, as the entrepreneurs recognized the importance of having such figures in bringing a level of comfort during high-pressure periods and important life choices. This is well captured in statements such as:

- *“It wasn’t those expenses of 3,000€ a year. But it was really the gesture, which helped me a lot”* (I13)
- *“I think she made it a lot easier and having that contact made us feel a lot more comfortable”* (I8)
- *“being a solo founder it’s sometimes a little bit annoying to make all the decisions yourself, or think about how to solve brainstorming, how to solve frustration”* (I7)
- *“let’s say that he explained to me in a better way the pros and cons of taking such an important step”* (I1)

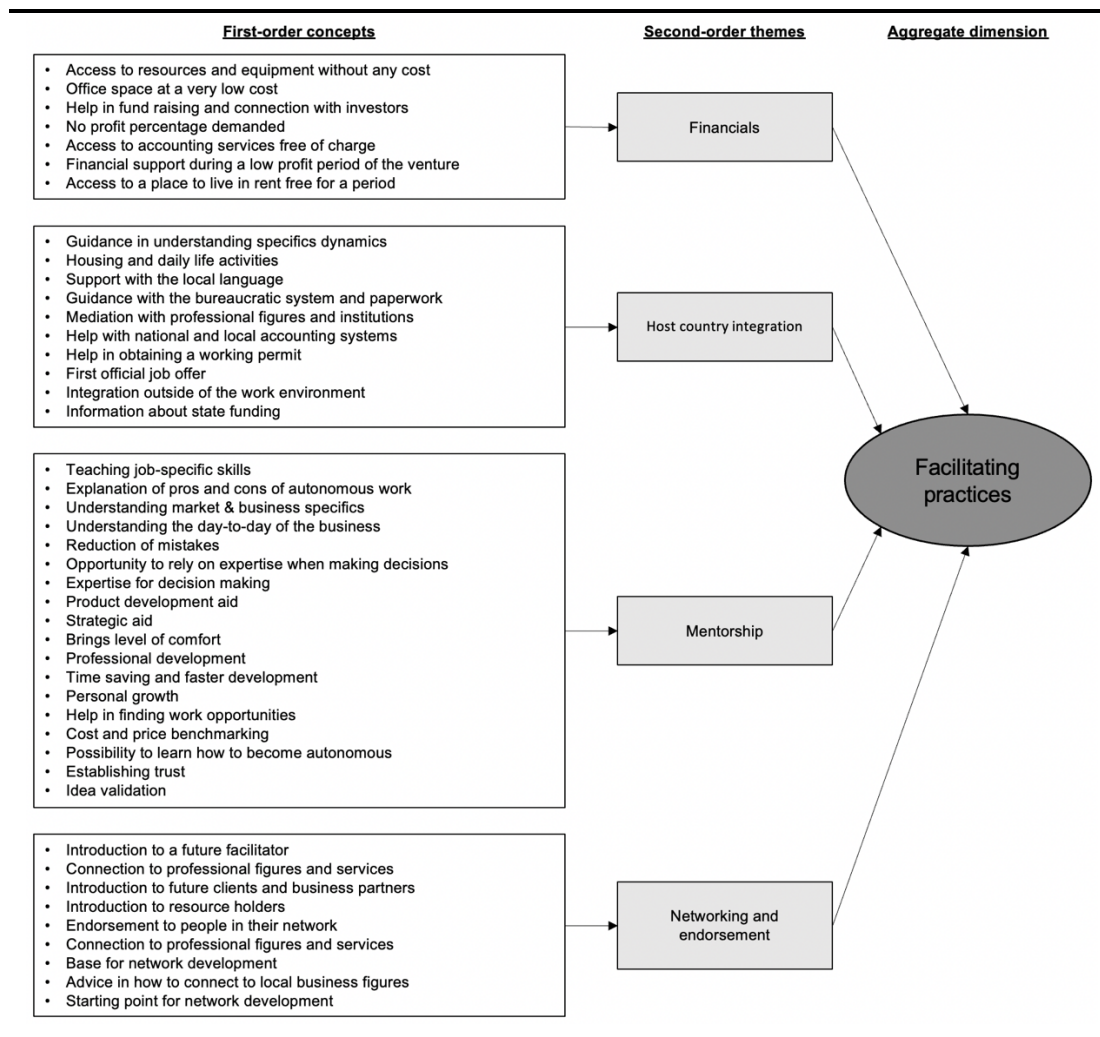
Last but not least, the efforts of facilitators in endorsing foreign entrepreneurs and helping them grow their networks have to be acknowledged. I1, I5, I8, I11, and I13 were all introduced by their facilitators to professional figures and services which were crucial in legitimizing their business. In the case of I3, the facilitator was able to connect the entrepreneur with the facility manager which allowed the installation and testing of the first prototype. A portion of interviewees (I3, I7, I11) also benefitted greatly from endorsement and support in approaching potential future stakeholders, and from advice in learning an efficient approach method themselves (I7).

I1, I5, I9, I11, I12, and I13 all explicitly mentioned how the extensive network connections of facilitators allowed them to develop many ties that formed the base for the creation of a network of their own. In some cases, facilitators either directly or indirectly became the middle-man that led the entrepreneurs to meet figures that would eventually become future facilitators themselves (I3, I13).

The following quotes all hint at the impact of facilitators in future network development:

- *“it was a base on which I then built my personal network”* (I9)
- *“However, it is true that even now there is an architect, actually a couple of architects, with whom I still collaborate, whom I met through him”* (I1)
- *“after the job he was impressed and introduced me to several other clients”* (I13)

The data structure for the fifth aggregate dimension is displayed in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Data structure for the fifth aggregate dimensionSource: *Own illustration*

4.2.3 Trigger points

The last aggregate dimension presented refers to the “trigger points” i.e., the moments or occurrences that led the interview entrepreneurs to part ways with their facilitators. This culminated in some cases with the reliance on new facilitators, and in other cases with the attainment of a sufficient level of legitimacy to become autonomous. As previously specified, this aggregate dimension is not applicable to all the interviewees as some of them were still relying on their only facilitator at the time of the interview (I7, I12).

A multiplicity of reasons are behind the trigger points discussed during the interviews, but only two main second-order themes emerged from the data, one related to the phase of the businesses, and the other to the personal or professional development of entrepreneurs into legitimized actors.

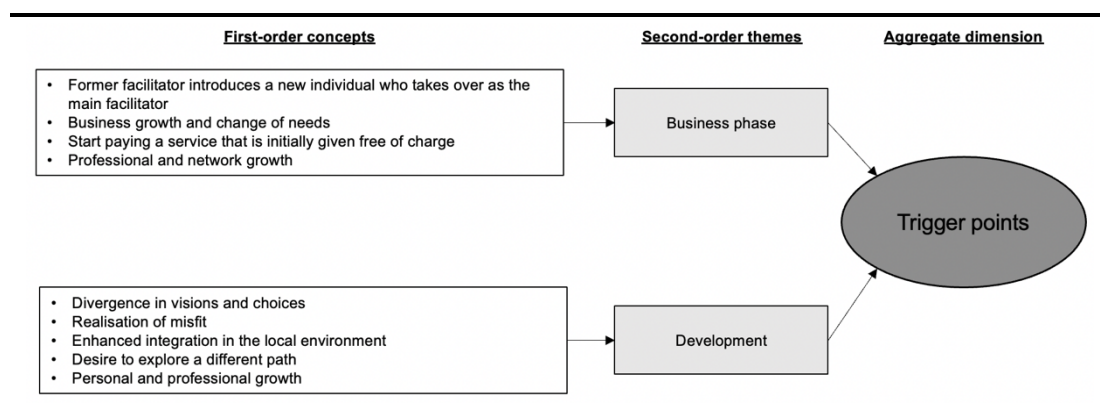
When it comes to the trigger points coinciding with the beginning of a new business phase, several first-order concepts emerged. For I3, the switch happened once they were able to test their first prototype and validate their idea, which brought the interest of new potential stakeholders: *“From the moment that we had to build the first prototype and we and we got to install it into the building, then we were able to present ourselves to competition and have some results”* (I3). In other cases instead (I4, I13) the entrepreneurs were benefiting from financial aid from the facilitator, and the trigger point happened as soon as the business started generating stable revenues and became financially independent. For I3 and I11, the change of business phase happened as a consequence of the switch between facilitators, while I9 parted ways with their facilitator after being recognized as a legitimate actor thanks to network development and the increasing quality of the product.

The second set of first-order concepts displays the trigger points related to the personal and professional development of the entrepreneur. I1 and I13 stated that they experienced separation from facilitators due to personal growth and misalignment of goals. The case of I6 is also quite similar, as they started collaborating with a facilitator, but time proved a misfit between the two parties. Lastly, I11 and I13 both separated from the facilitators that helped them in the period of settlement in the host country as soon as they started growing their networks and decided to explore different paths.

Figure 10 is the data structure for this aggregate dimension.

Figure 10: Data structure for the sixth aggregate dimension

Source: *Own illustration*



4.3 Categories of facilitators

The previous sections provided an extensive answer to the first research question, firstly by providing a background on the interviewed foreign entrepreneurs, and secondly by describing in detail (where applicable) how facilitators have helped them during their journeys and entrepreneurial careers.

The second research question is aimed at understanding who the facilitators are, the role they occupy in the lives of foreign entrepreneurs, and if they were already part of their social network before the founding of their entrepreneurial venture or if they met them because of it.

Table 4 summarizes the findings, by presenting the nine categories of facilitators, their archetypes, and representative quotes from the interviews for every category.

Colleagues and employers

I1, I11, and I13 found facilitators in colleagues and employers met during their previous work experiences. For all 3 interviewees, these facilitators helped them develop their skills and knowledge. In the case of I1, the facilitator was also a mentor for understanding how to become a successful freelancer and entrepreneur and is the person that convinced them to take the step. I11 had (and still has) a partnership with this facilitator, which helped them get contracts and acted mainly like an agent, by endorsing him to clients when he was at the beginning of their freelancing career. I13 had two facilitators of this kind: first a supervisor in their first occupation after immigration, which disregarded the linguistic barriers and decided to mentor him and help him develop his skills. At a later stage, they had an employer which not only granted them the possibility to obtain a working permit and become by all means legitimate in the host country but also helped them develop their entrepreneurial skills.

In all the mentioned cases, a strong tie and friendship bond was developed with these facilitators, which significantly helped the entrepreneurs to integrate and become legitimate actors in the host country's society.

Customers

For I4 and I13, some of their customers became facilitators. I4 found a customer that helped the business enter some of the most prestigious restaurants in the city and even gave them the chance to develop a product with a very prestigious Michelin-starred chef. I13 was significantly helped by two customers. The first one convinced them to start their business, helped them in understanding cost-related aspects, and allowed them to benefit from free accountancy services. The second one got really involved in the growth of the business through an endorsement to many potential

customers and also provided financial support in a low-profit period. Also in these cases, strong ties were developed that went beyond the business-related aspects.

Ethnic enclave members

I11 and I13 received support from some of their co-ethnic peers during the first period after immigration. Furthermore, their decision to immigrate to the host country was highly influenced by the presence of ethnic-enclave members. In particular, one co-ethnic friend facilitated the transition to the host country by giving the entrepreneur an accommodation for free for the first couple of weeks. The same happened for I13, which in addition was helped to find work and meet locals that would become their future facilitators. Even going beyond the two specific facilitators, the whole ethnic enclaves have significantly impacted and facilitated the integration into the host country for the interviewed entrepreneurs.

Startup accelerators and incubators

Two of the interviewees (I3, I6) stated that the mentors assigned to them after joining startup accelerators or incubators have been crucial in facilitating their legitimization in the host country.

As stated in chapter 3.1, transactional relationships that are purely established for economic and lucrative purposes were excluded from the scope of the research. Accelerators and incubator programs normally involve payment of some kind, whether it is through a fee or through equity, and therefore by respecting the inclusion criteria, should not be considered in this study. However, the interviewed experts who entered these kinds of programs stressed the importance of the mentorship received and the role that these entities played in the legitimization process. This empirical feedback, together with considerations of the nature of and motives that fuel startup accelerator and incubator programs, which, according to existing research (e.g., Brown et al., 2019; Regmi et al., 2015) go hand in hand with the concept of facilitators that this study aims to analyze, fostered the decision to include these entities.

The business of I6 has entered an accelerator program during the early stage of the company, and therefore the main help received involves idea validation, company growth, and product development. In the case of I3, they were recruited to join the accelerator program of a large industry leader corporation at a later stage, when they already had a well-developed product, therefore the main objective of the mentor was legitimizing the business to increase profitability and especially attract investors.

Governmental advisors and institutions

Some countries, regions, and cities that want to increase the attractiveness of their startup ecosystems, establish specific institutions that provide guidance to local and foreign entrepreneurs free of charge. I5 and I8 accessed the service of these institutions to found their business in the host country. I5 also benefitted from the help of other facilitators and therefore the help received from this type of institution was mainly related to understanding legal and bureaucratic procedures for the creation of the company. I8 and their co-founder instead were assigned to an administrator that served as their main reference point as facilitators for a variety of different aspects. This person was of critical importance to them, as they helped them with immigration, connected them with services, provided information about funding alternatives and state incentives, and helped them understand the taxation system and navigate through the bureaucracy of the country.

Investors

Investors in a certain sense are also to be considered part of the “grey area” of facilitators, as they are indeed motivated by economic interest. However, for similar motives as for startup accelerators and incubators, they have been included in this study. I5 was really clear in stating how, as soon as their company got investors, they became the main and only needed facilitator and reference points. They provide finances and use the power of their networks to help the development of the venture, and very knowledgeable individuals who act as mentoring figures for the founders.

Local entrepreneurs

I4, I5, and I12 had other entrepreneurs as facilitators for their businesses. According to I5, in entrepreneurial ecosystems, there is often a shared sense of solidarity between the involved actors. For this reason, after moving to the host country, some of their friends which owned a business in the same location allowed them to use a room in their premises as a workspace for very low rent. In addition, they helped them in understanding the EE and growing their network. The business of I4 received a similar type of financial support, as these rich entrepreneurs allowed them to access a newly built ad-hoc facility complete with equipment without having to pay rent during the initial months after foundation. Lastly, I12 found a facilitator in a co-ethnic entrepreneur that has a similar business in the host country and provided them with advice in understanding costs and the day-to-day of the business.

Host country native partner/spouse

Entrepreneurs that have a partner or spouse native of the host country, have recognized them as their number one facilitator for many different reasons. The spouse of I5 mainly occupied the role of facilitator during the first period after immigration, through help in finding accommodation, filing paperwork in the host country's language, choosing the best legal structure for the business, and becoming socially embedded in the host country. I7 is a solo founder, and their spouse is a well-experienced entrepreneur. While in the early stages of the venture, the help received was similar to the one mentioned for I5, nowadays their spouse helps with strategy development, investor relations, brainstorming, and in many other business-related topics that normally are discussed between co-founders.

Local university professor

The last category presented is professors at universities in the host country. Two of the interviewed experts identified such figures as facilitators. I9 moved to the host country for university studies, and after a period was approached by a professor that saw their potential and needed help with some projects outside of the university. This partnership developed in a mentorship that culminated with the entrepreneur starting their own freelancing activity in the same field. In the case of I3, they started their business and were looking for validation of their prototype. For this reason, they approached a local university professor expert in the field, which not only helped them with validation but also leveraged their network to help them install their first prototype. Furthermore, having such a high-status figure promoting the project legitimized the business in the eyes of other industry players.

Table 4: Archetypes of facilitators

Source: Own illustration inspired by Scheu, M. & Kuckertz, A. (2023)

Category	Archetype	Quotes from interviews
Colleagues and employers	A local person with whom the foreign entrepreneur shared work experiences before taking the decision to start their own business activity. Seeing the qualities and potential of the entrepreneurs, these people decided to help them develop their skills and help them make them understand their worth. The work relationship developed in a friendship and they helped their entrepreneurs in different way to achieve legitimacy through host country integration.	<p>"While working on a construction site, I met this person who taught me how to be an installer" (I1)</p> <p>"Basically everybody finished at 5.30 p.m. and I stayed there with the manager, even if I didn't even speak Italian. His name was G. and he taught me a lot" (I13)</p> <p>"Only one person helped me a lot, that was F. He helped me work but he didn't want a percentage or anything else in return, I started my freelancing activity and he helped me find work. Other people always wanted money" (I11)</p> <p>"I worked three years in this company as an undocumented immigrant. After which the owner, D., submitted our documentation to get a residence permit" (I13)</p>

Table 4: (continued)

Category	Archetype	Quotes from interviews
Customers	Satisfied customers that saw the potential of the business and the qualities of the foreign entrepreneurs. They endorsed the business to their networks, which significantly impacted growth and legitimization in the eyes of locals. In some cases they also helped with product development and host-country integration.	<p>"His former chef, a guy from Puglia, introduced the brand to the restaurant. [...] He also gave us a hand with recipes for when we did events, he would give us the perfect recipes and then sell the product at the event. He pushed us and introduced us to the chef. And we also developed a product with him, and he gave us the opportunity to have a product developed together with the chef at this well known restaurant" (I4)</p> <p>"An architect from Venice, with whom I had bonded since my first year with the company, when I was clandestine. She trusted me a lot and, even though I did not speak Italian well at the time, she saw that I always carried out well her demands" (I13)</p> <p>"The owner of this house, S., has also become an important figure in my life, he is truly a friend and, let's face it, more than a friend" (I13)</p>
Ethnic enclave members	Generally the first contacts of entrepreneurs in the host-country, the people that convinced them to immigrate and helped them settle in the first period. Ethnic enclave members represented strong-ties for the entrepreneurs, and helped them in finding accommodation and work, and in developing their first network. They occupied a crucial role at the beginning of the journey for some of the interview experts.	<p>"I came to Italy through a friend from my country that was already here" (I11)</p> <p>"But in the meantime I was working through another person, also Moldovan because there was a Moldovan community of immigrants" (I13)</p>
Startup accelerators and incubators	Startup accelerators & incubators that saw the potential of the project and decided to invest their resources on the foreign entrepreneurs. They assigned mentors to entrepreneurial team and helped them grow and develop their business. These granted the entrepreneurs high contracting power with potential investors, and being part of their programs made the entrepreneurs legitimate actors on all fronts.	<p>"And then from this moment, EON laid their eyes on us and we applied. So we started getting into the world of this energy company that is like a German tank basically. And then from this point on you start having network effects" (I3)</p> <p>"they provided us with a mentor who has experience in our field. And then we also have a figure who deals with the growth part of it, so they give us advice. We have weekly meetings to discuss how it's going, figure out how to move forward" (I6)</p> <p>"He was the mentor from the old accelerator. Because we had told him about our problems and so we wanted to get away from them. And he explained to us that there are various other realities and suggested us the current one" (I6)</p>
Governmental advisors and institutions	Some host-countries (or regions) decide to create institutions that incentivize foreign entrepreneurs to start or move their ventures there by providing various type of support. Some of the interviewed entrepreneurs were assigned administrators that facilitated their settlement in the host country. They connected the entrepreneurs to services, they helped them with bureaucracy and with getting acquainted with the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. They also provided information about different state grants and funding possibilities.	<p>"So, our main contact has been a woman called M. who's as I mentioned the head of North America. She's the North American outreach for the Austrian business agency. And what she primarily is trying to do is get either startup in the U.S. or businesses in the U.S. to create a branch or incorporate in Austria or get U.S. investors to invest in the Austrian ecosystem" (I8)</p> <p>"Berlin Partners which is a sort of promotion/economical agency of the city helped us also a bit in the beginning to get an idea of what we needed to do" (I5)</p>
Investors	These facilitators came at a later stage of business development compared to most of the others, once the entrepreneur had already achieved a level of legitimacy. However, they helped taking the business to the next step and becoming legitimate on a much larger scale, thanks to their resources and network centrality.	<p>"at some point our investors became the facilitators. So in 2016, we raised some money. And really, once we had investors, they started helping us a lot when we needed it. So, I would say that the change was at that point. As soon as we got investors" (I5)</p> <p>"And because they started to know the business quite well, they had access to the data and all, so it became a more privileged relationship and some part of the business belonged to them" (I5)</p>

Table 4: (continued)

Category	Archetype	Quotes from interviews
Local entrepreneurs	More experienced entrepreneurs (local and foreign) are often willing to offer their support as they understand what it means to be a novice founder. For the interviewed experts they acted as gatekeepers for entrepreneurial ecosystems, helping with network expansion, providing resources and in some cases financial support, and sharing their experiences and expertise.	"So I would say the first facilitators were other entrepreneurs. Right away we knew a few people because, as a media, we were sometimes interviewing also founders of startups in biotech. We knew some of them in Berlin and one, in particular, helped us from the beginning because they hosted us in their office" (I5) "a person from Bulgaria and who is offering the same services with his company" (I12) "they built a real laboratory on their land, next to their farm buildings. And so we took over that and we didn't have to start from scratch" (I4)
Host country native partner/spouse	Host country native partners/spouses provided an incredible support to foreign entrepreneurs. They helped with bureaucracy and paperwork, provided linguistic support, helped with integration and network development and most importantly provided emotional support during the most difficult times. Additionally, they also leveraged on their connections to help find the best professional services available.	"My girlfriend was German, from Stuttgart and now she's my wife, so it was a good choice. As a facilitator for, like, even finding an apartment and stuff like this, she helped a lot. And stuff like this makes your life so much easier when you're starting your business. To have someone that knows things well" (I5) "I had to ask a lot of support from my husband to do the submissions of the company, documentation, registrations, etc. [...] he is my sparring partner and my board of directors when I need support, but also because he is German, it is my number one support." (I7)
Local university professor	Local university professors are very knowledgeable and high-status individuals. They were genuinely interested in the projects and saw the potential of entrepreneurs. The endorsement of such figures resulted in quick legitimization and acknowledgment by industry peers. The network effects achieved by having them as facilitators were an incredible kick start for the foreign entrepreneurial ventures. Furthermore, they helped with formation and idea validation.	"there I actually presented our idea to a top-notch professor and he loved it. So that was one of the validations to start the project" (I3) "From a work perspective, there was the professor who chose me and gave me the opportunity to be his assistant and work with him on various projects" (I9)

4.3.1 The grey area of facilitating

As stated in Section 4.2.2, for two of the interviewed experts (I2, I10) no real facilitator figure has been identified. However, this doesn't mean that the entrepreneurs haven't experienced external facilitation in creating their venture, but rather that these helping figures have given precious advice but haven't gotten as involved in the journey and life of the entrepreneurs as those that this research has defined as facilitators. Furthermore, the situations of these two entrepreneurs are different compared to that of other interviewees.

Starting with I2, the interviewee stated that he has benefitted from the help of two experienced industry experts, which gave them advice on market-related aspects, business structure, and competition. However, this help should be considered more as a one-time piece of advice. To fully understand the reasons behind the absence of facilitators it is necessary to mention that the startup in question was still in the pre-launch phase at the time of the interview, and one of the co-founders is a well-known

industry expert himself, with a very well-developed network in the host country. Nonetheless, I2 stated that they could greatly benefit from a facilitating figure after launch, especially for entrepreneurial mentorship.

I10 instead was a successful business owner in their home country, who left the core business in the hands of their children and decided to move to the island of Formentera and open an independent subsidiary of the business. Also in this case, different forms of facilitation have been identified, mainly through locals or co-ethnics helping with networking and connection to services. However, for the same reasons presented above, these figures can't be considered facilitators.

There are several reasons that explain the absence of facilitators. First of all, I10 was already an experienced business owner with developed knowledge and connections in the industry and in the host country. Secondly, they created their business in a relatively small and low-populated area (an island of the host country) in which they already had prior experience. This resulted in ease of networking and reduced bureaucratic complications.

Lastly, it is worth noting that both I2 and I10 were fluent in the host country's language before immigrating.

4.4 Differences between the experimental and comparison groups

As stated in the methodology chapter, the first idea when designing the research was to exclude entrepreneurs who originated from countries outside of the developed countries classification framework proposed by Scheu and Kuckertz (2023). The main reason for this was to add one additional selection criterion to ensure the comparability of data, based on the assumption that foreign entrepreneurs from underdeveloped economies found out of necessity rather than out of opportunity. However, the final decision was to include a small number of these entrepreneurs (I1, I,11, I12, I13) to analyze and test whether the needs, type of facilitators, and legitimization activities changed based on the state of the economy of the country of origin.

After analyzing the data, it was clear that only one (I1) of the interviewed entrepreneurs coming from developed economies started their business out of necessity, specifically because it was the only way for them to buy a house in the host country without a permanent contract from a company. The assumption mentioned in the previous paragraph, therefore, does not hold for the sample of this interview. Furthermore, I12, while born in an underdeveloped country, lived in good economic conditions which allowed him to emigrate and obtain higher education in the host country. This set them

apart from the rest of the interviewees from the comparison group, as the needs and difficulties encountered were similar to those of the experimental group.

Nevertheless, some interesting differences were identified between the remaining entrepreneurs coming from underdeveloped economies (I1, I11, I13) and the rest of the interviewees.

First of all, I1, I11, and I13 mentioned that the main reason behind emigrating from their home country was to escape poor political and economic conditions, which wasn't the case for the other interviewees. Furthermore, in choosing the host country, two shared features that were not encountered in the experimental group stemmed from the data: firstly, a determinant factor for their choice was the presence of co-ethnic ties in the country; secondly, another determinant factor was the availability of work in the host-country prior to emigration, which was mainly a consequence of their co-ethnic ties.

When it came to host country integration, while they benefitted from being socially embedded in their ethnic enclave community, they also experienced more diffidence and prejudice from locals in both their social and business life. According to them, this was mainly attributable to stereotypes and past actions of their co-nationals, which negatively impacted the trust of locals. Furthermore, they were the only three interviewed entrepreneurs that necessitated a working permit to legally conduct business and work in the host country. The process of attainment of this documentation turned out to be extremely long and difficult, therefore for all of them, it took much longer to gain relational and institutional legitimacy.

Some differences were also identified among the type of facilitators that smoothed their legitimization process. As previously specified ethnic enclave members played an important role and were their main facilitators, at least during the settlement period in the host country. After settlement, the entrepreneurs shared two main needs: obtaining a work permit, which was easier to obtain if a local employer raised a request, and finding a job that could help them cover the costs of living in the host country, as they came from relatively poor economic conditions and didn't have many funds at their disposal.

For these reasons, all three interviewees found facilitators in local business owners, which became their employers and played a fundamental role in helping them achieve legitimacy. Furthermore, in all three cases, these employers and other colleagues fostered their professional growth by putting extra effort into teaching them job-specific skills.

The result of this comparison is that some noticeable differences exist between the two groups, mainly related to the reasons behind emigration, choice of the host country, and integration in the local ecosystems. The combination of these three factors resulted in diverse needs when it comes to facilitators during the first period after immigration, as the entrepreneurs had to face more difficulties to be recognized as legitimate actors. Moreover, a higher centrality of co-ethnic ties and ethnic enclaves was encountered.

When it came to the help received in starting and developing their businesses, the needs and facilitating figures were similar to those of the experimental group.

However, it must be specified that I12, who emigrated from an underdeveloped economy, didn't present significant differences from the experimental group. For this reason, it can't be concluded that the state of the economy alone had an impact on the role and identity of facilitators. In addition to the economic development of the country, also the political situation at the time of emigration, the entrepreneur's level of education, and their family's wealth were determining factors.

5. Discussion

The following chapter discusses the findings of the qualitative analysis against the existing literature presented in the theoretical framework. Additionally, some practical and policy implications are given, as well as a summary of the limitations of this study, which leaves the door open for future research on the topic.

5.1 Discussion of the findings

The findings of this research can, for the most part, be anchored to the theoretical framework built upon some of the extant literature on legitimacy, mixed-embeddedness, and network theories. At the same time, some loopholes and limitations to the theory were found, even in analyzing a relatively small sample like the one on which this qualitative research is based upon.

As seen in chapter 2.1, several scholars, such as Delmar and Shane (2004), underlined the importance of legitimacy for newly established business ventures, specifying how firms should prioritize legitimizing activities in the early stages of their lives, to be able to compete with incumbents and positively impact the perceptions of potential external stakeholders. The findings of this study confirm the knowledge expressed in the extant literature. By analyzing the entrepreneurial journey of the interviewees, it emerges that achieving legitimacy was considered an absolute priority to find resources and compete at the same level as other local businesses. Even beyond their

entrepreneurial endeavors, all interviewees felt the urge to become embedded in the institutional environment and learn how to blend in with the culture and traditions of the host country, as they desired to be seen as legitimate actors by the local society. This goes hand in hand with the three-dimensional construct of legitimacy developed by Lechner et. Al (2022) and extends its scope beyond entrepreneurial ecosystems. Following the results of this study, it can be argued that obtaining legitimacy is even more important for foreign entrepreneurs compared to host country natives, and the three dimensions (institutional, cultural, and relational) were all equally indispensable to becoming integrated with the local society and environment.

Furthermore, the fact that the endorsement of certain facilitators could heavily influence the legitimacy of interviewees in the eyes of locals and potential stakeholders, supports the vision of legitimization as a socially mediated process, determined by actors within a community or society (Lechner et al., 2022).

The dichotomy of fitting in and standing out, developed by De Clercq and Voronov (2009) by defining legitimacy as the manifestation of newcomers' entrepreneurial habitus, can also be encountered in the findings of this research. According to the interviewees, local stakeholders expect foreign businesses to integrate into the local economy by conforming to the rules, ways, and standards followed by local businesses. The ability to fit in however depends on cultural capital (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009), and in often cases the underdeveloped knowledge of the local language and the impossibility to be acknowledged for their previous performances were not easy hurdles to overcome. Furthermore, even in cases where their businesses could conform to the standards, potential stakeholders in the host country would nevertheless give priority to local businesses. Consequently, it stemmed from several interviews that to become successful, foreign entrepreneurs had to find a way to stand out from the competition, which in most cases happened either by providing higher quality products and services or by introducing innovation. At the same time, these efforts of immigrants to stand out were also not completely understood and appreciated by a certain portion of society.

Through the extremely complex experiences of the interviewed experts, it becomes clear that the fitting in and standing out paradox is very likely to be encountered by entrepreneurs that want to start a business in a foreign country, and becoming legitimized actors is not an easy task without having some kind of external support and endorsement.

The theoretical framework also included the theory of mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman et al., 1999) which argues that immigrant businesses are impacted by

their connections both to the laws, rules, and other structural features of the places where they operate and to their social networks (Kloosterman, 2010). This argument is confirmed by the findings of this research. The interviewees in the experimental group didn't necessitate of permits to immigrate to the host country, and therefore had a much easier path toward becoming institutionally embedded and legally conducting business. However, the majority of these interviewees immigrated without having social ties already present in the host country. On the contrary, the interviewees in the control group (excluding I12) had several difficulties in becoming embedded in the institutional environment, but all had co-ethnic ties in the host country which facilitated their initial integration and allowed them to start with a relatively developed network. Nonetheless, in all these cases being embedded in only one dimension wasn't enough, and their path toward entrepreneurial success started only after they were able to reach a sufficient level of embeddedness in both dimensions. This is also proven by the fact that the mentioned entrepreneurs in the control group mainly looked for facilitators that could help them obtain a working permit and therefore become institutionally embedded, while the ones in the experimental group found figures that positively impacted their network development and social embeddedness.

The model of mixed embeddedness proposed by Kloosterman & Rath (2001) focuses greatly on the opportunity structure available to foreign entrepreneurs. Specifically, three spatial levels of opportunities exist, and while all interconnected, they all present their unique characteristics. For this reason, entrepreneurs must be aware of all three levels to not miss out on opportunities. While the findings of this research don't go as deep as the neighborhood level, and the impact of the national level is very easily understandable, some interesting points of discussion can be extrapolated by the findings in regard to the regional and urban levels. In particular, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, and I8 mainly decided to relocate and start their business in urban advanced regions with highly developed entrepreneurial ecosystems, which revolve around the presence of a global city ((Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Sassen, 1991). According to them, this was a great advantage for many reasons. First of all, compared to other entrepreneurs, becoming embedded and achieving legitimacy was much easier due to a large number of networking opportunities and the diffused use of English as the main language of communication. Secondly, the businesses located in these areas can benefit from the much higher availability of funds because of the high concentration of investors, as well as the many startup-focused policies such as lower taxation and frequent public grants. Furthermore, the diversity of the customer base and the foreign potential were mentioned as determinant factors for the success of their businesses. While the cultural openness of these environments increases the amount of competition on an

overall level, compared to the rest of the sample, the entrepreneurs that started a business in these areas didn't experience episodes of xenophobia or difficulties in integration. Because of all these reasons, the needs and help received by facilitators are different for this group of entrepreneurs. In areas with such an abundance of opportunities, resources, and networking possibilities, taking directions that aren't beneficial for the business, in the long run, is extremely easy. Consequently, according to the interviewed experts, having an experienced mentor figure that could help identify the right people and make them aware of the right opportunities for their specific business was crucial to their success.

When it comes to the topic of ethnic enclaves and the exploitation of ethnic economies as an easier and more diffused way for immigrants to conduct business, this study supports the hypotheses made by Zubair and Brzozowski (2018) and contradicts mainstream entrepreneurship theory. Analyzing the findings, it stems that ethnic enclaves have played an important role in the entrepreneurial journey of only a small portion of interviewees, namely the adjusted comparison group I1, I11, and I13 (which excludes I12 for the reasons explained in Section 4.4). However, even in their cases, they only relied strongly on co-ethnic ties during the first period after immigration, when they had just escaped poverty and were trying to make a new living for themselves in the host country. When it came to the creation and development of entrepreneurial ventures, no interviewee relied on co-ethnic ties. When looking at the Immigrant Business Enterprises Classification Framework proposed by Curci & Mackoy (2010), the core businesses of all thirteen interviewed experts fall into the highly integrated category, which means that they decided to follow the most difficult path and sell nonethnic products and services in the general economy (Achidi Ndofor & Priem, 2011), even if this meant competing with extremely fierce competition, composed of both native entrepreneurs and international organizations. Even for a relatively small sample, this is a quite unique result that differentiates this study from mainstream entrepreneurship theory, supporting the argument made by Zubair and Brzozowski (2018) by demonstrating that foreign entrepreneurs don't need to necessarily rely on ethnic enclaves and ethnic enclave economies to become successful.

Undoubtedly, the main contribution that this research makes to the existing literature, which possibly is also an explanation for the low centrality of ethnic enclaves, is the introduction and in-depth analysis of the figures of facilitators. By answering the research questions in the previous chapter, it was possible to identify the role that facilitators had in the legitimization of the interviewed foreign entrepreneurs. Furthermore,

nine categories of facilitators were identified based on the feedback given by the interviewees.

The closest concept to the figures of facilitators is presented by Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) in their study of the field of social network theories. By introducing the concept of network centrality, which is a function of the overall distance between the focal person and all other people in the network, and the number of new individuals that the focal person can connect with, they also introduced the concept of brokers. To cite what is stated in the theoretical framework, brokers are actors that occupy central roles in social networks and facilitate the connection of people with complementary interests; in doing so, they contribute to increasing the network's reachability and the flow of resources and information. Their services are highly demanded as involved parties benefit from reducing the number of required links and reducing transaction costs (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

The findings of this research prove that the concept of brokers is similar to that of facilitators. However, considering facilitators as brokers that don't have monetary or lucrative interests is quite limiting. Facilitators are actors that occupy a central role in their networks and help foreign entrepreneurs in becoming legitimate actors in the host country in a variety of different ways. Furthermore, the findings have proven that facilitators don't necessarily have to be high-knowledge and high-status individuals or institutions as it is for brokers. These figures can be of different natures and social statuses, and different kind or ties can exist between them and the entrepreneur.

As shown by the findings, facilitators helped the interviewed entrepreneurs to achieve all three facets of legitimacy: institutional, cultural, and relational (Lechner et al., 2022). As proposed by Suchman (1995) the endorsements of facilitators have affected the way locals and field incumbents saw the foreign entrepreneurs; their mentorship has helped them develop their ventures and professional skills, as well as allowing them to grow their cultural capital, which significantly impacted their chances of "fitting-in" the local society (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009), and becoming legitimate actors. Furthermore, they have supported the entrepreneurs in becoming dually embedded in the host country.

Lastly, the research has shown that foreign entrepreneurs have often interacted with more than one facilitator during their entrepreneurial journey. The episodes and events that lead to facilitator change have been defined as "trigger points".

The motives behind these changes are either related to a change of perspectives and personal growth, which is followed by separation, or a change in needs of the entrepreneur, which are mostly related to the phase of the entrepreneurial venture.

This second case finds a theoretical background in the study proposed by Klyver & Hindle (2007), according to which the composition of an entrepreneurial network, also called structural diversity, changes based on the stages of the entrepreneurial process. Similarly, but not identically to this concept, the figures of facilitators have switched during the journeys of some of the interviewed entrepreneurs, based on their needs in different phases.

5.2 Practical and policy implications

This study has shown how, by relying on facilitators, entrepreneurs can overcome many of the difficulties encountered while venturing into a foreign and unfamiliar social and institutional environment. Furthermore, legitimacy has been posed as a central topic of research, and the impact of facilitators on the legitimization process has been demonstrated. Several practical implications for foreign entrepreneurs can be derived. First of all, the suggestion made by Delmar and Shane (2004) according to which a firm's organizational process should prioritize legitimizing activities is even more relevant when it comes to foreign entrepreneurship. Immigrant entrepreneurs must focus immediately on meeting all the necessary requirements that will allow them to reach legitimacy from an institutional standpoint. At the same time, they should face the new culture and environment with mental openness, and actively try to become familiar with the cultural norms of the host country. These efforts will be positively perceived by the local community, and they help them in achieving relational legitimacy and become embedded in society.

Secondly, being aware of both regional and national policies and regulations will help them identify the best opportunities for creating a successful business. However, when relocating to highly developed entrepreneurial ecosystems and global cities (e.g., Sassen, 1991) finding a trusted person that can provide them right guidance and mentorship in navigating the vast number of opportunities offered, is definitely an aspect that shouldn't be overlooked.

Thirdly, as suggested by Zubair and Brzozowski (2018), relying on ethnic enclave economies is not necessarily the easiest strategy to become successful. While ethnic enclave economies have low barriers of entry in those locations where entrepreneurs can rely on their co-ethnic ties, the business is likely to have lower growth potential in the long run. Accessing the general economy as a foreigner is more difficult, however, this study has proven that there are plenty of figures that are willing to help foreign entrepreneurs. With the right guidance and mentorship, even immigrants coming from underdeveloped countries and difficult economic conditions can become successful entrepreneurs.

Lastly, developing networks characterized by high structural diversity (Klyver & Hindle, 2007) is a key success factor for foreign entrepreneurs. The experiences of the interviewed experts have shown that any person can become a facilitator that contributes significantly to the success and legitimization of the business. For this reason, it is extremely important that foreign entrepreneurs diversify their networks and embrace with the right mentality all opportunities as potential learning experiences.

When it comes to policy implications, it stemmed from the interviews that some countries and environments have institutions that promote the attractiveness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and assign administrators that provide a significant amount of help and guidance to foreign and local entrepreneurs. National and regional governments around the world should start enacting policies that promote their startup environment through such kinds of advisory institutions. Furthermore, these institutions should also be more advertised and easier to access.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The limitations of this study leave the door open to interesting opportunities for future research.

First of all, as no extant theory was found on the specific topic of what this study defines as facilitators, the theoretical framework is composed of different interpretations of literature streams that are considered relevant to this topic. However, the degree of relevancy of literature is extremely subjective, and there are many other available theories against which the facilitator topic can be measured. The theoretical lens can therefore be modified and improved.

Second, the sample collected for this interview is relatively small, and the comparison group's dimension is disproportionate compared to the experimental group. Therefore, theoretical saturation is far from being reached. This is mainly due to the very specific sample selection criteria, which ensured comparability of data but significantly reduced the pool of potential candidates, and to the time frame given to conduct this study. For these reasons, the potential for future studies that analyze much larger samples is very high, and could potentially yield different results and implications.

Third, the geographical area covered by this study is mainly the European continent. This was not a predetermined condition, however, this was a consequence of to the primary location in which the research took place and the limited network connections of the researcher. It would be interesting to analyze the phenomenon from a global perspective and understand if the roles and figures of facilitators are different in other geographical areas.

Fourth, the semi-structured nature of interviews let the conversations with experts flow freely and this resulted in significant variance in the length of the recordings. Furthermore, some interviewees gave some strict time constraints, which impacted the duration of the interviews. For these reasons, even by following the same interview guide, some of the conversations were much richer in information than others, and the detailedness of answers to the different questions is variable.

Lastly, as no previous research addressing the specific topic of this research was found, the definition of facilitators and the extent to which a helping figure should be considered one or not, is extremely subjective. This leaves a lot of space for future research, in which more specific criteria for defining facilitators are set.

6. Conclusions

The world is full of cases of individuals that were able to identify opportunities and become successful entrepreneurs in a foreign country. A wide variety of different factors determines the success or failure of foreign entrepreneurial ventures, and many of them are dependent on the unique opportunity structure available for each of these individuals. By becoming embedded in the local institutional and social frameworks, foreign entrepreneurs are able to become legitimate actors in the eyes of the host country's society and operate and compete at the same level as local businesses. However, while legitimization is considered a socially mediated process, it has mainly been analyzed from an individualistic perspective, as if the only determinant factors in this process are the characteristics and actions carried out by the entrepreneurs.

This research added an extra layer to the process of legitimization of foreign entrepreneurs and their ventures, by introducing the figures of facilitators and analyzing the roles they occupy and the ways in which they influence these processes. Furthermore, the social and professional identity of these figures served to identify common categories and archetypes within the findings of the qualitative research.

The results of this study show that out over 80% of the interviewed experts benefitted from the helping hand of facilitating figures. This help came in a variety of different forms, and left a significantly positive footprint in the journey of the interviewed foreign entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, no prior literature aimed at understanding this specific topic has been found. For these reasons, it could be of great academic and practical interest to better investigate this phenomenon, which seems widely diffuse. This qualitative research and its limitations could be taken as a starting point for future studies.

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Appendix 1: First contact message

Source: *Own work*

[...] my name is Francesco Mian and I am a double degree student from Italy, enrolled in the Master in Management at Universität Hohenheim in Stuttgart. I am currently writing my Master's Thesis and the topic is foreign entrepreneurship.

My goal is to analyze the experience of foreign entrepreneurs and find out the impact of facilitators - i.e. key persons that possess a deeper knowledge of certain aspects of the host country (such as language, economic & legal practices, entrepreneurial ecosystems, etc.) - in setting up and developing a venture in the host country.

I am looking for entrepreneurs that match the following criteria:

- Developed to developed - the founder originates from a developed country and set up their venture in another developed country.
- No local co-founders - the founding team didn't include any host country native co-founders, at least in the initial stage (before the first sales).

Your profile and entrepreneurial journey are extremely interesting to me, and I believe could match the above-mentioned criteria. For these reasons, I would love to have the chance to find out more about your personal experience as a foreign entrepreneur. Your knowledge will surely be an incredible contribution to my research.

This qualitative research will be carried out through a direct online interview composed of 10-15 questions. If you are interested in participating or want more information, feel free to get in touch with me by responding to this message.

I look forward to your feedback and I thank you in advance for your precious time and availability.

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Source: *Own work*

- Brief introduction round
- Reminder of research goal
- Information about confidentiality of the research: The audio recordings will be transcribed, anonymised and aggregated. The results will be processed within the scope of a study at Universität Hohenheim.

----- Beginning of recording -----

1. Demographics (Name, age, country of origin, country of residency, education, previous experience & entrepreneurial experience)
2. Company name, industry & sector, workforce, job creation.
3. Why did you decide to start an entrepreneurial activity (entrepreneurial motivation)?
4. Why in another country? Why in that specific one? (Main drivers)

5. What was your prior experience in the host-country?
6. How would you describe your access to the local ecosystem/society?
7. Did someone (facilitator) help you in setting up/developing your activity? (If NO, go to ALTERNATIVE B)

ALTERNATIVE A - “Yes” to question 7

8. Who was this person? Did you know the person prior to your venture or did you meet them because of it?
9. What did they help you with?
10. Did your reference person change over time? If so, when?
11. What was the trigger point that led you to rely on a new facilitator? When did it happen?
12. How many times has this happened over time? What were the reasons?
13. How determinant have these facilitators been in the success/failure of your venture?
14. How does foreignness relate to that? Do you think it has an impact?
15. Do you perceive your foreignness as a strengths or as a weakness?
16. Do you still have ties with your home country? Do you leverage on the resources/network you had there?

ALTERNATIVE A - “No” to question 7

8. Did you not need a facilitator at all or did you just not have/find anyone willing to help?
9. Looking back what aspects would have been easier by having a facilitator?
10. Did you find a facilitator at a later development stage? What did they help you with?
11. How determinant have these facilitators (or their absence) been in the success/failure of your venture?
12. How does foreignness relate to that? Do you think it has an impact?
13. Do you perceive your foreignness as a strengths or as a weakness?
14. Do you still have ties with your home country? Do you leverage on the resources/network you had there?

----- **End of recording** -----

- If interested in the final outcome, a copy of the study will be sent via email upon completion
- Question about contacts to other potential interviewees in their network

Appendix 3: Developed countries composed of OECD High Income Nations list, United Nations' HDI and IHDI lists

Source: Scheu & Kuckertz (2023)

HDI & IHDI according to United Nations (2019)		OECD member states	Meeting at least two criteria for a "developed" country and thus included in the review
Country	IHDI HDI		
Very high human developed			
Norway	0.899 0.957	Yes	Norway
Iceland	0.894 0.949	Yes	Iceland
Switzerland	0.889 0.955	Yes	Switzerland
Finland	0.888 0.938	Yes	Finland
Ireland	0.885 0.955	Yes	Ireland
Denmark	0.883 0.940	Yes	Denmark
Sweden	0.882 0.945	Yes	Sweden
Netherlands	0.878 0.944	Yes	Netherlands
Slovenia	0.875 0.917	Yes	Slovenia
Germany	0.869 0.947	Yes	Germany
Australia	0.867 0.944	Yes	Australia
Czech Republic	0.860 0.900	Yes	Czech Republic
Belgium	0.859 0.931	Yes	Belgium
New Zealand	0.859 0.931	Yes	New Zealand
Austria	0.857 0.922	Yes	Austria
United Kingdom	0.856 0.932	Yes	United Kingdom
Canada	0.848 0.929	Yes	Canada
Japan	0.843 0.919	Yes	Japan
Estonia	0.829 0.882	Yes	Estonia
Luxembourg	0.826 0.916	Yes	Luxembourg
Hong Kong	0.824 0.949	No	Hong Kong
Malta	0.823 0.895	No	Malta
France	0.820 0.901	Yes	France
South Korea	0.815 0.916	Yes	South Korea
Israel	0.814 0.919	Yes	Israel
Poland	0.813 0.880	Yes	Poland
Singapore	0.813 0.938	No	Singapore
United States	0.808 0.926	Yes	United States
Slovakia	0.807 0.860	Yes	Slovakia
Cyprus	0.805 0.887	No	Cyprus
High Human developed			
Greece	0.791 0.888	Yes	Greece
Hungary	0.791 0.854	Yes	Hungary
Lithuania	0.791 0.882	Yes	Lithuania
Italy	0.783 0.892	Yes	Italy
Croatia	0.783 0.851	No	
Latvia	0.783 0.866	Yes	Latvia
Spain	0.783 0.904	Yes	Spain

Appendix 3: (continued)Source: *Scheu & Kuckertz (2023)*

HDI & IHDI according to United Nations (2019)			OECD member states	Meeting at least two criteria for a “developed” country and thus included in the review
Country	IHDI	HDI		
Belarus	0.771	0.823	No	
Kazakhstan	0.766	0.825	No	
Portugal	0.761	0.850	Yes	Portugal
...	
Chile	0.709	0.851	Yes	Chile
Costa Rica	0.661	0.810	Yes	
Turkey	0.683	0.820	Yes	
Mexico	0.613	0.779	Yes	
Colombia	0.595	0.767	Yes	

Appendix 4: Transcript of interview 1Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. The first thing I would ask you is a little bit about you in general. I already know where, where you're from, I know you're living in Italy, but maybe a little bit more about your work background and schooling.

I1 I was born in Romania in 67, so I'm 55 years old, grew up there and went through classical elementary and high school and that's where I stopped.

Why not go to college? Back in the day I didn't really want to, I didn't really like studying, even though everyone told me I had great possibilities.

When I was 18 I was in the military during the compulsory conscription, I came back, then I got a job. Then when it was with the so-called revolution, after '89, the citizens of Romania started to move abroad, before it was not allowed.

I worked in an electronics store and in the process I got married and had a daughter. When she was three years old, the situation was very critical let's say in Romania and I decided to go abroad to work, and that's how I came to Italy.

Francesco M. Let's stop here for a moment and then come back to the path that brought you to Italy. Tell me about your company, you have a vat number right? What is the name of your company? What industry do you operate in?

I1 The company is called [name] and operates in the construction industry.

Francesco M. You were telling me that you have and you have people working with you for you or are you alone that I don't remember?

I1 But let's say for as long as I can remember, I've had someone to help me out. We've had a collaboration and that with other artisans in the past, and now there's another artisan who works with me, not permanent, but 90 percent of his time.

Francesco M. I understand, I think it's very dynamic, based on what I see with my father's experience artisans then have their hands in the game a little bit everywhere no? So they don't always work on one side. But already 90 percent seems to me to be a good percentage of this person's time.

I1 Yes also because we do a little bit of everything: tiles, marble, resins, 10 years ago I also did epoxy resins, then I also do drywall. I mean I tell you, in the past I fixed, I also did roofing. I mean, construction in general,

Francesco M. You're a bit of an all-rounder in your industry. Anyway, I mean this period is going well I guess? I have to say that from the experience I had with my father, the construction business went better than expected, at least in our experience, because so many people invested money during the covid in fixing up their house. I don't know if you had the same experience or have the same feeling.

I1 Eh yes, yes, well, let's say a principle, those who get busy and are serious work.. The Covid period didn't give me big problems, let's say because construction was always going on a little bit, also because, I don't know if you know, when there was Covid a lot of people couldn't get around with the machines, I on the other hand had a permit because I was working with the companies that were making bathrooms for disabled people. That is, being poseurs we had to go and finish and do this work. The problem is that with Covid people's mentality has changed a lot.

Francesco M. Yes of course I understand very well. Anyway, let's not go into too much detail because we could spend hours discussing this topic.. I would like to ask you how come you decided to let's say start a business, let's call it entrepreneurial, anyway a business on your own. You told me you were working for another person previously, how come you decided to take this step and start your own business?

I1 Let's say it was kind of a confusing situation, it's not that I already had this idea from the beginning.. back in the days I was working as an employee. I started out working for a for a company, then for certain reasons I left and worked for another

company. I have to tell the truth, from the economic point of view I was earning more, however the owner was not a person of, let's say, his word, because he had promised me a permanent contract but only made a fixed-term contract for 8 months. However, I needed a permanent contract because after 2-3 years of living together here in Italy, my wife had been convinced to stay and for that we had to buy a house and it was not possible without indefinite.

Working on a construction site, I met this person who taught me how to be an installer. Because I had already realized within a month, a month and a half, that the employer was not going to give me a permanent contract, I had started thinking: what should I do? What path should I take? At that point this person told me the idea of going out on my own. He said, "If you want, come with me. I need a mason because I do masonry, if you are good at masonry I will definitely have minor jobs to commission you. And if you want, in addition to your work I will also teach you how to be a layer." For this reason, I made the decision to become self-employed and open a VAT number, and I have never regretted this choice.

Francesco M. So, was it more of a situational decision than a desire of yours to want to set up your own business and become an entrepreneur?

I1 Let's put it this way: I was planning to set up on my own, I had inquired about how to do it. I was asking however there were not the people I could ask for the right information. Everyone told me it was risky and uncertain. Meeting this person, you explained the situation better and convinced me.

Francesco M. I'm going to stop you for a moment because this is the part that interests me the most, but if it's okay with you we can come back to it in a minute. I wanted to ask you two more things first, because if I don't ask you now then if we go on about this we get lost, whereas I have these two things to ask you first.

You started open a business in Italy, and so I'm asking you, and although I already know a little bit, what you told me before, how come in Italy? What was your experience in Italy before you opened your business?

Let's say my already answered that you came to Italy to work. But how come to Italy?

I1 So I was actually planning to go away many years before I got married. It was not an easy thing because I wanted to go to Canada. I had a friend I had contact with there who was willing to help me, however, it was not easy to get to Canada.

Then it happened that I met my wife, and we decided to get married, so this new situation combined with the difficulties related to Canada made me change my mind, and here in Italy it was easier to arrive even clandestinely.

Francesco M. And when you emigrated to Italy, was Romania already part of the European Union?

I1 No, Romania was not part of the European Community. Romania joined the EU in 2007, and before that there was a long period, where we could go out on a visa for only three months.

Francesco M. So another difficulty was added, however clearly, I guess it was much easier than going to Canada. Your reason for coming to Italy was also that, perhaps? The desire to move and the ease that there was in immigrating compared to another country?

I1 Yes, because again, going to Canada was not very easy. You had to go to the embassy, and it was very different and very very very difficult. Why Italy and not Germany or another EU country? Because in Italy I had friends, many friends from my country, who were working in Rome.

Francesco M. But so you went to Rome before you got to where you are now (in Veneto)?

I1 Yes the first stop was in Rome. I landed there and from there I found some work to do.

Francesco M. And the first job what was it in Italy? What did you do in the beginning?

I1 The first two days were two days of work preparing the vines.

Francesco M. And how did you end up in construction after that?

I1 A friend of mine asked me one day if I wanted to work, because a company needed a person for a month, a manual basically. And I went there, I did a month, a month and a half, if I'm not mistaken, a renovation, an apartment in Rome, and I liked this job, although before when I was in Romania I never thought about it. But then later I discovered that in life, never say never.

Francesco M. But look, I agree. In my opinion it's normal to always get scenarios in your head, then maybe you end up differently. Being able to seize the opportunity is important, though.

I1 I until this age I learned one thing that first you have to try after you decide don't decide before you try. Because you don't even know what you lose. My dream was to be a doctor; yet, now I am doing something else and I am happy.

Francesco M. What was your reason for deciding to open the business right in Italy? Was it because you had already created a network of contacts in Italy and this person who mentored you, or were there other motivations that made you want to stay here?

I1 I honestly thought, "If I'm going to fit in this country, I have to do something more. I don't want to just be an employee." Besides that, a characteristic of mine, is that I don't like to stand still and I'm always looking for diversity. And I probably did well and enjoyed it, precisely because working on your own every day is different.

Francesco M. Of course, you have to generate value on your own. And then undoubtedly between being an entrepreneur or self-employed and being an employee there are many differences. There are people who like one thing more, and people who like another thing more, and that's a good thing, because if we all liked the same thing let's say it would be a bit complicated.

And how would you describe your entry into the Italian ecosystem and Italian society? As a worker who comes from abroad and wants to fit into society, into the work environment, how would you describe it? Because I live in another country now and I could describe my experience however everyone has their own. And honestly being Italian, I really don't know what it's like to arrive in Italy as a foreigner.

I1 Let's say it was an experience with ups and downs, like all experiences. Especially in the beginning, 20 years ago Italians didn't really see us well.. Once a friend of mine asked me, "Do you think Italians are racist?" I simply said no. I don't think so, or rather I don't know what racism means, because if as a foreigner you come to someone else's house and you start to mess up bad things and don't respect your own rules. I don't know if that is racism. It may be, it's also called racism, I don't know, but I don't see it. So you should follow a straighter line the better, because then at least you are respected. Then afterwards those who work, those who know you, appreciate you. I

remember in Rome. it's not that we were so loved because there were so many of us and so many did bad things and the good people paid for the first ones too.

Francesco M. Unfortunately, people always remember the bad things, never the good things, that's a fact and I understand that sentiment of yours. And did that make it difficult for you to enter the Italian job market or, since you had friends and were able to find work easily?

I1 In the beginning, the first years, I wasn't on the books however there was a lot of work and you could always find manual. jobs to do, especially in construction. Then after that what other people thought of us I don't know.

Francesco M. And how long after that were you able to come into compliance? How long did it take you? How long was this process?

I1 In March 2000 I got my residence permit and arrived in Italy in 1998. So about 2 years.

Francesco M. And was getting a residence permit and being able to work in Italy legally difficult?

I1 No, let's say I was a bit lucky because I arrived just when there was an amnesty. All you had to do was have housing and someone willing to hire you and you were fine. I didn't have any problems from that point of view. It just got longer because they were always finding scams and stopping. I came in May 98 and went, if I'm not mistaken, to apply in September. I waited until March 2000, but since I made the application with everything in order I could consider myself okay, because I was registered at the police headquarters.

Francesco M. I understand. You told me that you had a facilitator, a person who helped you in starting your business. This colleague or mentor of yours anyway right?

I1 Yes, it depends what helped means. When I set up on my own, he would give me jobs and we would do jobs together, where I would do the masonry part. Then, a little bit at a time I also learned to do the laying, because back in the day I understood that everybody is able to do masonry, but not everybody is able to do laying, so I took opportunity.

Francesco M. So you met this person before you set up your own business, and he gave you advice and helped you in finding work of which you were giving a part of the profit to him?

I1 No, I used to work more for him. I'll give you an example, if he was taking I don't know, like a ladder construction job. I would make the support of the staircase, he would lay the marble and meanwhile I would learn how to make marble stairs. In that sense there was this, this cooperation, but at the end of the job he would pay me according to what I got from the total, by invoice.

Francesco M. Earlier you told me something interesting, namely, that this person gave you tips on the process of opening a business on your own, am I wrong?

I1 Yes, yes, let's say that he explained to me in a clearer way the pros and cons of taking this step. Back in the day honestly it wasn't that difficult, now it's very difficult because you risk finding people who don't pay you and try to be smart. Back in the day it was not like that, people were much more fair.

Francesco M. I mean he gave you some guidance on that. And as for the legal and economic part related to opening your own business, did this person help you in the minimum or had you already informed yourself and already knew what you had to do?

I1 No, no. He informed me, but more importantly he gave me a phone number of an accountant, so that I could ask all this information directly from an accountant, since he was not an expert.

Francesco M. I got it, I got it. Surely he must have also helped you develop your network of contacts I guess? Maybe by working for him you were able to meet more people, customers, suppliers, etc.?

I1 Yes yes, of course.

Francesco M. So you said you left with this person, right? With this mentor, this facilitator. And then there was a time when then the mentor person changed? That is, you broke away from him later and maybe you needed something else? Maybe because your needs changed, you became an expert in certain things, but maybe you lacked something else. And I'm not talking about someone you paid like

the accountant, I'm really talking about someone who helped you with something else without wanting something in return.

I1 Yes. Then the issue that we had this collaboration for 4-5 years. Then he took a different path and tried very hard to go the extra mile.

This is not my way, though, of working. I know my limits and I go up to a certain point but then if I can't do anything else, whatever. I was born this way and I never thought of doing stuff that I'm not sure I can do. I mean I'll give you an example, he tried to get into the remodeling business. The thing is very tough.

I saw that he was not making the right decisions and had a different mentality than I did. I ask you for a certain amount of money because I guarantee you a job done in a perfect way, whereas he was always trying to save money on materials and wherever you could, and to me it seemed like a rip-off.

Francesco M. So then you separated from this person and there was someone else who replaced his figure in a different way, however in the same way he gave you advice, maybe when you were another point in your life and in your enterprise?

I1 No, no. Let's say from that time I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to do two fairly major jobs, two renovations of two houses, and from that time I went out on my own and started to figure out one step at a time and gain experience.

Francesco M. Sure, absolutely. And then whatever, maybe in your field it's important to make yourself known. Clients then maybe recommend you by word of mouth.

I1 Yes in fact after those two jobs I did 10-11-12 more jobs, because they were happy, and they commissioned me to do more jobs.

Francesco M. So anyway after that person you didn't have a facilitator, a mentor who helped you in other things?

I1 No, no, I was on my own. I didn't know, I wasn't really ready. I wasn't sure if I was ready to take this step. But I said whatever, let's try it because I was feeling it. And it went well after that.

Francesco M. And in your opinion, how instrumental was this person, this facilitator, in the success of your entrepreneurial activity? How important was his figure?

I1 He was a very very important to me. Also because it's not like we were just in the construction site, I had a lot of good experiences with him outside as well, so he was a very important person.

Francesco M. Did he also introduce you to clients maybe? You said you had, you had these two big jobs right after you set up your own business, was it also because of this person?

I1 No, those are not. But it is true that even now there is an architect, actually a couple of architects, with whom I still collaborate, whom I met through him.

Francesco M. And the fact that this person had this importance to you is also attributable to the fact that you were a foreigner? That is, was this person Italian or was this person foreign?

I1 No, he was Italian.

Francesco M. And did the fact that he was Italian help you understand certain things concerning some aspects of working alone and being an entrepreneur?

I1 Definitely yes, if you're going to take an important step you have to have a local, local person to go along with you. Because then you understand quickly and you understand things the right way.

Francesco M. And the last thing I'll ask you and then I'll let you go: the fact that you are a foreigner, do you perceive that as a strength or a weakness in your work and based on your experience in Italy?

I1 I have also had experiences and even a client who did not accept the fact that I was foreign, even though the architect had assured him that I was better than many Italian installers. For example, this can happen often, however, it happened to me only once. Other than that, I never had any big problems. What people think maybe is another matter, but no one has shown it so directly.

Francesco M. Maybe now you have your own network of contacts as well. Surely times have also changed, being a foreigner in a country is much more normal, but maybe you have also created a network of people that makes it easier to overcome this obstacle, because they know how you work and that you are good and so they

look at your work and they don't look at anything else. I mean it doesn't matter what color what language, what nationality you are, if you're good you're good, right?

I1 That definitely, also because precisely now I have my own circle of clients who have known me for years, who call me, who commission work to be done. Then in general when I go to a construction site on behalf of an architect, I'm sure that the client doesn't think badly the moment the always Italian architect trusts me even if I'm a foreigner. I have the utmost trust and in my opinion everyone is quiet.

Francesco M. So the fact that the architect is Italian and trusts you is important? Is there anyway you need confirmation from a local person according to people?

I1 More or less say yes, because of the fact that I am a foreigner in my opinion this thing helps. But in general even if you were Italian, the moment an architect sends you, people trust you.

Francesco M. Yes, yes, I understand. If there is a person in general, regardless of nationality, like a good architect who advises you, the person rightly trusts. Alright anyway I would say we had a good talk, so I can close the recording.

Appendix 5: Transcript of interview 2

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] Okay, so obviously, being a start-up in the launch phase, I couldn't find g great information on the internet. I guess that's normal. So I'm first asking you for some general information about your background, your course of study and your approach to the world of entrepreneurship. Then some information about the company.

I2 [00:00:32] Okay, so I'm 26 years old, I did a three-year degree in International Business Administration in Naples because I'm from there. During the triennial I did 2 Erasmus, one in Spain where I came back and currently live, and the second one near London, in Colchester.

While at the University of Salamanca in Spain, I took an exam on the economics of innovations. And in 2017, which is now almost three years ago, I got interested in startups. Then from there I tried very naturally to follow the startup scene especially in Italy and I was part of Starting Finance, for which I wrote a couple of articles, but a career as a journalist is not for me. I'm still very connected to that world in general,

though. Then did a personal exam during my three-year Start up & Creativity Management degree, with a professor, I think one of the Italian excellence on entrepreneurship. His name is Michele Simoni.

Francesco M. [00:02:30] I've heard it before, I don't know where, but I've heard it before....

I2 [00:02:36] And so always with him did the three-year thesis on the second-hand fashion market. A thesis, a bibliographical thesis, I would say quite historical, socio-economic. Even all too historical, because it goes right back to the birth of the junk dealers, the birth of the second-hand second-hand sense. Because, precisely, the company we are about to launch is a marketplace for second-hand clothes. Similar to [name] and other companies many are taking this movement forward in the fashion world. My passion is consolidated with this thesis. During this thesis in 2020 I start making various applications to English universities, because in the meantime I had also done a second Erasmus near London and realized that I wanted to continue studying in England. So I applied to King's College, Imperial, and London Business School. All three accepted me. King's College with a scholarship, though, and so I go there.

Francesco M. [00:04:26] Of course I understand.

I2 [00:04:32] I am then accepted with the scholarship for my project, which was originally called [name] which was to be an app of transformations and repairs of second-hand clothes in British prisons. A specific target audience, with zero rental costs. The clothes were to be collected and then taken to women's prisons where they were then adjusted and brought back by various drivers who would pick up, bring back to the prisons, be transformed, then bring them back to the customer.

From there then from my project it developed much more, because anyway I started the master's degree and acquired other notions, like web development, notions of more in-depth market studies, even too much sometimes. So I changed the value proposition a little bit and also changed the name of the project. As of today it is called [name].

Francesco M. [00:06:34] Yes, I read a little bit on LinkedIn the description, however rightly being in the initial state it's difficult to glean information from the outside.

I2 [00:06:45] Yes it is also intentional.

Francesco M. [00:06:48] Yes, like those realities that start with the project, but without revealing an end goal. Anyway, so, this start-up company you are founding in London. Right?

I2 [00:07:06] Yes, I did this Master's degree, or rather I am doing because I haven't completed the exams yet. Then last year I was preparing for a PhD also at King's College and in the meantime I was working on the project on the side. I gave up both for personal reasons by taking a sabbatical, in which I helped some family businesses that are here in Spain, two pizzerias and a B&B. So I moved here.

Francesco M. [00:07:57] You are full of entrepreneurial activities in short.

I2 [00:07:59] Let's say yes, I kind of act as a wild card here, especially for digitization. But it's actually helped me a lot, because then the skills are always transferable, no matter the industry where you work.

Francesco M. [00:08:19] I agree, my father has a business and on certain things I help. And I realize that maybe when you're the direct stakeholder and maybe 100% responsible for something it helps you grow, especially if it's your own company. So you really care about the project. Can I see myself in what you're saying? That's it, however you're in Spain and you're planning to go back to England when you launch the project?

I2 [00:08:53] This yes, absolutely. So far I have sent 2 out of 3 chapters of the thesis, the last one is missing and then I am done. The thesis is actually [name]'s business plan. I'll explain now as an academic commitment and then in real life. As an academic commitment, I have to send the last chapter of the three, however in the business plan it is different.

Francesco M. [00:09:33] Okay.

I2 [00:09:37] And then yes I think I will go back to London in January/February to continue the pre-launch phase. Right now I have two partners. One is a professor at [name] Fashion School.

Francesco M. [00:09:56] Which is in Italy?

I2 [00:09:58] He is in Italy, London and Dubai.

Francesco M. [00:10:00] okay.

I2 [00:10:02] He and I met just through LinkedIn.

Francesco M. [00:10:07] And he is Italian?

I2 [00:10:09] Yes, it's Italian.

Francesco M. [00:10:10] Who lives in London?

I2 [00:10:14] Yes, he lives in London.

Francesco M. [00:10:16] What about the other partner, though?

I2 [00:10:19] The other partner is more of a collaborator. He is from England and he is a web developer at King's, but he is the youngest of me and has already been working for BlackRock for two years. I am 26 and he is 21.

Francesco M. [00:10:41] But this time start up will be based in London as the registered office?

I2 [00:10:49] Yes absolutely, as the first target market and legal location.

Francesco M. [00:10:57] And are all three of you primary founders or do they play other roles? You are the CEO and they play more advisory roles? How would you define that?

I2 [00:11:16] For the moment the hierarchical structure is not organized, let alone the operational structure. We have made several demos of the app however to date the project has changed. It is no longer an upcycling service, for women's prisons from prisons. It is a kind of deliveroo for tailors.

Francesco M. [00:12:02] For raw materials?

I2 [00:12:09] No, always for secondhand items. You download towards and the UX interface is the same as Instagram. So in the home there is a marketplace like Instagram, where you can buy and sell clothes okay. In the magnifying glass there is an interactive map like Uber. But instead of cars there are drivers who come and pick up your clothes, take them to tailors. In case you want to repair or transform it, you pay for the tailoring service. In case you want to sell it, that dress comes to our factory, which we have already identified to be the [name].

Francesco M. [00:13:15] Okay.

I2 [00:13:20] Stay there and the whole sales process is carried out by young graphic designers who take photos of the dress and put it on the marketplace instead of the client. So instead of leaving the client in the lurch like on Vinted, we take care of the whole selling process.

Francesco M. [00:13:50] You talk about tailors, meaning I want to repair my garment and I send it to a tailor through these drivers. But if instead one wants to sell it, does it still go through the hands of tailors? Or are the tailors going to be in-house, so from [name] and they will put the garment back together and then resell it? How does that work?

I2 [00:14:18] If you don't want to have it set up it is resold as is.

Francesco M. [00:14:24] Okay, so there are two possibilities.

I2 [00:14:27] That's right, two possibilities in one app.

Francesco M. [00:14:30] Okay. But it is interesting, and if it is successful, as is hoped, I certainly know more than one person who would be interested in using it. I am based in Germany, however who knows in the future being an app it may expand. Moving on to a little bit more personal questions about you, your motivation for starting an entrepreneurial activity, leaving out what you've already told me, which is a part of it, but also just on a personal level, entrepreneurial activity is associated with risks. What are you motivated by? Other than the interest you have in this area.

I2 [00:15:27] I am motivated by making money for myself.

Francesco M. [00:15:36] Which is a very good answer.

I2 [00:15:40] A first response -- and then in descending order of importance, to create an impact. Because I really care about the topic.

Francesco M. [00:16:09] Definitely a very hot topic. I have friends who work in the fashion industry who are very interested. Let's say the second-hand clothes waste, it's an important issue and definitely something needs to be done about it. I agree that what you are trying to do is definitely important in so many ways.

I2 [00:16:45] No absolutely, that's what I meant. The environmental point of view maybe would be in the third place. In the first place I said earn from me.

Second hand as caring for the environment as third, and second hand also as caring for society as second.

I am not the son of professionals, my father is employed at the City Hall and my mother is a housewife. I experienced the whole fashion junkie through my uncle. I have always been into fashion, but I experienced through him the cliché of the fashion victim; therefore, how people compulsively buy. So to go back to point two, second fashion also to wake up society a little bit. To make people realize that fashion is serious, but it has become too serious. It has become so much so that we have destroyed the planet.

Francesco M. [00:18:16] I agree on all points. I understand. Maybe in Italy we are still a little bit behind in this point of view. But we will get there in my opinion.

I2 [00:18:28] It is from Italy that the good stuff starts.

Francesco M. [00:18:30] Sure, but a friend who wrote a thesis on luxury garment rental, and let's say the results of his research are that in Italy people are not so willing to open up to this possibility.

I2 [00:18:51] Put it this way, maybe the rental is a little different.

Francesco M. [00:18:57] Definitely different from what you do. But always related to this issue, which is to reduce the waste of garments, because clearly fast fashion is totally destroying the concept of fashion. And this consumerism that we have in food, in garments, now ... I mean I buy a house in Zara, then I throw it away after two weeks. It's not really a good thing, also because the labor used to make these kinds of garments is not really treated fairly.

I2 [00:19:36] Of course, of course. And meanwhile, in fact, who is taking advantage of this countertrend? Because precisely, there is this second-hand countertrend that is having effects, because already renowned companies are rushing to the introduction of sustainable fashion practices. So, for example, H&M has done a consciousness line. Zara is trying to be more traceable in the supply chain --and then one that is taking advantage of this backward step of fast fashion brands is Shein.

Francesco M. [00:20:36] Yes it is true indeed.

I2 [00:20:39] Shein is an ultra fast fashion, which having less reputation to defend, and reputation sometimes a double-edged sword, because Zara and H&M have to behave in a certain way compared to Shein which continues to run as much as it wants and continues to grow in this new ultra fast fashion industry, where their costs are still are even lower.

Francesco M. [00:21:18] Sure, absolutely. I never thought of Shein, though, now as you pointed out....

I2 [00:21:28] It actually works very, very well.

Francesco M. [00:21:33] Yes. But then you have to see what's behind it, though.

I2 [00:21:40] Indeed yes. It depends on how deep you want to go, doing a study of entrepreneurship in general, however if you want I have some sources on Shein.

Francesco M. [00:21:53] Yes not for my thesis, but I am interested in the topic. In general everything about current issues interests me, but just out of personal interest.

I2 [00:22:05] Yes, although it's not the only industry I like. Because in point four of why I want to become an entrepreneur, there's a little bit more long-term project, I would like to start in the fashion industry and to contribute to med-tech with a little bit more complex innovation that's about the research market in the fight against cancer. But my short-term project is to start as a fashion entrepreneur. And to gain experience.

Francesco M. [00:22:51] For that you absolutely deserve admiration. Then I'm working right now at [name] in the medical sector; so, I feel close to these issues as well,

I hear about them every day. So this certainly is an important cause and also a potentially very profitable area. Then you have to, you have to understand the dynamics a little bit.

Here and listen, going back to your current project instead... What was the reason for coming to England? Was it just a matter of connections, your studies and people willing to support this project, or were there also other reasons for wanting to open the company in England?

I2 [00:23:47] So, both because of what you said, and because of the market research that shows anyway, more than a strong consumer demand, a great ease of investment. Since we are a start-up anyway that will try to get as much external funding as possible, there is a dense network of investment in London between public and private - equity, angel investors etc. - who believe in the cause.

Francesco M. [00:24:37] Undoubtedly a definitely important reason, therefore, not to be underestimated.

I2 [00:24:44] Then even in the great diversity of the customer base, among different ages and nationalities, you can still select each nationality and understand what they are looking for.

Francesco M. [00:25:07] London is the European New York, it's an incredible melting pot. Much more than anything else. I lived in Paris, which in my opinion has much more local mentality than London. In my opinion London is really a European city. Well, maybe not in Europe anymore given the recent exit of England. You see what I mean, though.

I2 [00:25:41] Yes absolutely. You are right in the world but in a small town.

Francesco M. [00:25:55] I understand.

I2 [00:25:58] Yes and one imagines for [name] a great breadth of international customers.

Francesco M. [00:26:10] Okay, and as far as, well you're still in the pre-launch stage though...

I2 [00:26:19] Yes, we did an MVP, and we realized that the most friendly and the fastest, easiest UX interface is Instagram. And so just use the very first screen, the home screen with the little house button on the bottom left. Click on the little house and you find the Vinted-style marketplace. On the magnifying glass comes out the interactive map with the drivers who come there to pick up clothes, if you want to have them fixed then they bring them back to you, and if you want to sell them then they take them to someone else. Again with Glovo or Uber Eats style backpacks but with a different logo.

Francesco M. [00:27:16] And listen, how would you describe your access to the local ecosystem in London? In terms of becoming an entrepreneur, how easy is it to find clients and investors? You already told me that it's definitely a plus compared to other places, however as a foreigner, as an Italian like, what was it like?

I2 [00:27:46] I still can't answer you fully, because right now the only proposal we received was from the King's College accelerator. However, I want to target the accelerator from the Kering group, PVH, LVMH, more related to fashion.

Francesco M. [00:28:24] And for you, as an Italian. Who wants to start a company in England. Leaving aside the current state of your venture, how was it? Then especially now that there is this Brexit situation, but I don't want to go into too much detail, is it difficult for an Italian to interface with this world in England?

I2 [00:28:56] Yes I think I think so. In the sense that it looks easier from the outside. It definitely has its pros and cons.

Francesco M. [00:29:13] But I tell you, I live in Germany now and I have been learning the language for a year. But it's clear that, for example, if I think of England, the language maybe is a much lower barrier than in other places, because English, good or bad, anyone with a certain qualification has to chew it. So this for me from the outside, as you say seems easier, however then I'm sure inside there are mechanisms that are complex and it's not so easy to fit in as a foreigner.

I2 [00:29:47] Yes, I agree with what you're saying, but then when you talk about giving money, investing on an idea, there's a lot of interest in whether the team is good.

Francesco M. [00:30:07] Sure.

I2 [00:30:09] As much as the idea. So there's crazy competition and especially there's high expectation.

Francesco M. [00:30:29] And so you told me about your team, in which there are these two people. I would like to understand the role of these two people in your team. Because then my question to you is whether there is anybody who is helping you in creating this business of yours. Other than the people directly involved, who share with the business risk.

I2 [00:30:53] Wait a second, a colleague is talking to me, I'll be right back.

I2 [00:32:06] Here I am.

Francesco M. [00:32:12] Going back to the question earlier, why did you say you have a local co-founder, or is this girl not a co-founder of the company? It's just a notice. I mean, I know there is no hierarchy yet.

I2 [00:32:34] These are two guys. So [name] is a student at King's in computer science and he's a web developer, more of a collaborator.

Francesco M. [00:32:50] Okay.

I2 [00:32:53] The other one, however, is [name]. [name] is 21 years old and he is English, from London. [name] is from Emilia Romagna and a professor at [name] in London and I met him on LinkedIn. [name] at King's entrepreneurship institute, where they organize meetings between web developers and founders. We worked closely last year and then continued online before taking 1 year off. We tried to create the MVP together, with demos of the app. Actually we are not only 3 in the project, they are the main ones. So far there are more than 15 people in the project, almost 20.

Francesco M. [00:34:10] Okay. And would you say that you have had any kind of figure that has helped you in the in some practice of developing your enterprise? And here I'm not talking about other founders or otherwise people who are actively part of your project, but I'm talking about any kind of person who has helped you understand some aspect that you knew less about in the country or I don't know, for example you want to start a company in England, however you don't know anything about the legal aspect. So maybe talk to a friend of yours who is studying law, or a lawyer, an unpaid

professional. But a person who might have helped you open your eyes to certain things.

I2 [00:35:11] Yes, yes, there have been a couple of people, however, not more than a chat and free consultations.

Francesco M. [00:35:22] And can you name some of these people?

I2 [00:35:27] So yes, there is an Alexander McQueen manager in London. Another manager from Vestiaire collective

Francesco M. [00:35:47] Yes I have heard that, however I am not an expert.

I2 [00:35:48] A Vinted only for luxury.

Francesco M. [00:35:55] Ah yes, a friend of mine told me about that. And what kind of hand did these people give you? Going in order.

I2 [00:36:07] To understand the profit margin on the clothes marketplace, the time of production and the various repairs, transformations, etc.

Francesco M. [00:36:27] But what kind of relationship did you have with these people? That is, a prior friendship relationship? Or did you contact them on purpose?

I2 [00:36:44] No, I don't have any friends in this project.

Francesco M. [00:36:49] And why did these people decide to help you? Was it your request based on your project? Or were they contacts of contacts?

I2 [00:37:01] Contacts of contacts.

Francesco M. [00:37:08] And so these two maybe helped you now, at least in the beginning. Just in understanding the potential of the market, I guess.

I2 [00:37:25] Yes and in understanding the day to day of the company.

Francesco M. [00:37:29] And then this kind of person, facilitator changed once you developed the project? Okay, you maybe started out and needed some initial information. Then you said that you have already developed an MVP and you have a little more concrete plan anyway, right? Did the type of person helping you change, that is, did you need another local person to help you understand certain things?

I2 [00:38:04] I think once I turn in the last chapter of the thesis, I will need another person.

Francesco M. [00:38:12] But another person who will not be part of your company?

I2 [00:38:17] That I don't know.

Francesco M. [00:38:19] I don't but say...

I2 [00:38:21] I understand what you want to know. I can't know for sure, though. Then another person will serve as my mentor. Then I don't know, in factuality I leave a lot of room for collective decision.

Francesco M. [00:38:41] And instead this professor and this other guy Lucas, you wouldn't call them mentors. Would you characterize them more as partners?

I2 [00:38:54] That's right. So as a mentor I had the Turkish professor with whom I was preparing for my PhD.

Francesco M. [00:39:00] Okay.

I2 [00:39:02] But but it is far from today's mentorship.

Francesco M. [00:39:13] No but that's okay, if you don't think it's an important part of what is of your current company that's okay.

I2 [00:39:19] No, no, not specifically for [name] but more for my career.

Francesco M. [00:39:24] And instead specifically for [name]. Now that you have gotten to a more advanced stage of the journey? I don't know, I'm saying -- going back maybe to the business aspect, to meet investors, or I guess there's paperwork to be

able to start a company right? Do you go directly to an accountant, a lawyer etc. or do you have someone who has given you tips?

If you have come to this point, because maybe you have not come to this point, then let's talk about nothing.

I2 [00:40:14] No, in the sense that this point is on hold until I deliver the last chapter. Until I organize my return to London anyway.

Francesco M. [00:40:23] Okay, okay.

I2 [00:40:25] Actually the primary strategy is to use more the network of [name] and [name]. Being a fashion school marketing professor, let's say he is the key guide.

Francesco M. [00:40:46] Sure. And let's say, I ask you two more things just. Meanwhile, if you think this contribution that these two people from McQueen and Vestiaire made, how important was that in deciding to pursue your idea? I mean without their input, you say it would have gone ahead anyway, but was it an additional thing? Or was it really their confirmations that gave you that extra sprint to want to implement this idea?

I2 [00:41:33] I don't think I would have gone on like this. In fact, when this thesis situation unravels, I also want to reach out a little more directly to competitors. Networking, even with Vinted and Vestiaire.

Francesco M. [00:42:01] Okay I understand.

I2 [00:42:04] With an indirect competitor that is also publicly traded, but it is indirect because it only works in America. It's called [name].

Francesco M. [00:42:13] Which is similar to Vinted?

I2 [00:42:19] Also similar to us in the sense that they do a Vinted with delivery.

Francesco M. [00:42:24] So he is really a direct competitor.

I2 [00:42:28] Same 80% because they have marketplace of second and deliveroo like me. 80% though because they lack the repair and transformation component.

Francesco M. [00:42:49] Well, anyway, you've diversified a little bit, and that's a good thing.

You've had these mentors, and you're definitely going to look for others, whether they become partners or not, that will be seen. But does the fact that you are a foreigner lead you to need a mentor, a facilitator more or not? In your opinion, if you were to do this in Italy, would it be easier?

I2 [00:43:50] I would need the same, In fact, maybe even more in Italy.

Francesco M. [00:43:58] So it depends more on the path and the experience you had before that led you to have these important partners, who maybe have important connections, than the fact that you are Italian, right?

I2 [00:44:11] Italianness, actually can also be considered a good calling card.

Francesco M. [00:44:19] In the fashion world maybe yes, maybe in many other things less so.

I2 [00:44:23] Of course, in so many other things that argument doesn't apply.

I2 [00:44:30] Although still there is no successful Italian second hand company.

Francesco M. [00:44:37] Sure. And so you perceive your being a foreigner, especially being Italian, as a strength rather than a weakness?

I give an example: I have a friend who tried to start a company in China and had a product that was going, however, they told him it was not Chinese. So the investors said, "I would be interested, but you're not Chinese. So it will never break through in the market." So his being Italian, regardless of the product, was a big reason why his idea failed. I think in Europe and in England the situation is different. however, there may still be some dynamics that you are involved as an Italian.

I2 [00:45:26] I can give you an interesting answer, at least in terms of fashion. Maybe this particular friend of yours really wanted to start in China?

Francesco M. [00:45:39] In what sense?

I2 [00:45:44] That is, did you really want to launch the product or service in China as the first market?

Francesco M. [00:45:50] Right, yes, as the only market, moreover.

I2 [00:45:56] And that's why I think it's just impossible to think of China as an initial market. Because they have much more consideration than already established entrepreneurs. It's no accident that Vestiaire is expanding strongly in Asia. So maybe it can be a case study to compare what it means to launch in China and what it means to expand.

Francesco M. [00:46:35] In fact I am leaving the less developed countries, or the countries that are too different, out of the data sample specifically for this reason. Because in my opinion establishing yourself as a foreign entrepreneur in Europe, in England, in America is one thing. Going to take on China, India and those kinds of places is a whole other thing. I mean just not comparable. In my opinion, factors come into play that are incomprehensible to us.

I2 [00:47:08] Yes absolutely, although they are very fast.

Francesco M. [00:47:10] Yes, but maybe that's why I didn't include it in my study, because I wouldn't want to find data too difficult to compare. But for you then, being Italian in England, what is it like?

I2 [00:47:28] At the end of the day I think it's a good thing. Enough but not too much, because you always have to take into account the very high claim that all the stakeholders have.

Francesco M. [00:47:52] Sure.

I2 [00:47:54] Anyone.

Francesco M. [00:47:55] I understand. Then maybe being London is still a little bit different reality. I don't know, if I wanted to open a business in Birmingham rather than, it would be different. There are positive and negative things. That's okay though. Let's say we had a good talk. I think there's a lot of interesting information I can take from what we talked about. So I can close the recording.

Appendix 6: Transcript of interview 3Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] Okay. So first of all, I just want to know a little bit more about you besides obviously the information which I've retrieved already through LinkedIn, but something more about your path, I would say academic and also as a person, as a foreigner and as a founder.

I3 [00:00:19] Absolutely. Yeah. So I'm originally from Spain, from the south. When I was studying industrial engineering, I decided to write my master's thesis abroad. And the first place, the place that was good for me was Poland in that moment. They offered this kind of thesis. So I'm off to Poland and then I land there I was -20 degrees. So, as an engineer specialized in automation, I thought, okay, maybe the building have to be very efficient in this area as it was super cold. So I had some specialization on it and I checked it and it was a disaster, so a good opportunity to improve, but it was still too early. So I finish my thesis, then I stay there a little bit more and have fun while I was working as a project manager in a company. And the idea of this company was already in my head but it was too early. So, two years later or one year and a half later after finishing my thesis, I got an offer from automation company in Germany to automate high-tech plans for the industry, like for Siemens, VW, etc. It was a small company but the clients were and we had big projects. So it was very interesting and they offered a German course and a flat, everything together. It was a good opportunity and I had enough of Poland, so I decided to go and I worked for two years there. So that was the second country, let's say, as a foreigner. And after 2 years I basically decided to quit the job and start the project. Then six months later and I called my co-founder from Alicante, he was working in the Department of Physics at the university. And I told him the idea and he joined me.

Francesco M. [00:02:15] We can get into more details later, but just one thing I wanted to ask you. So I've seen from your LinkedIn profile that you already had a previous, smaller entrepreneurial experience. Am I correct?

I3 [00:02:26] Yeah, I made many projects, right? There was this digital broker trading stuff that I was doing but that was a tool, let's say that was the only one that was really public, I did many things. But yeah, that was like trading basically everything from Poland to Spain, and Germany, and then it was also selling olive oil to Germany.

Francesco M. [00:02:48] Okay, wow. Because you know, since and I'm doing it for the entrepreneurship chair...

I3 [00:02:55] You are more interested in that right then?

Francesco M. [00:02:58] Yeah exactly. My thesis will be about entrepreneurship. So, I want to understand if the person has an, let's say, innate entrepreneurial mind. And it seems like you do because you say even if it's a minor project, right, not as comparable to your current company, you've always done something

I3 [00:03:19] Actually. I used this project to finance the prototyping of my current company.

Francesco M. [00:03:24] Okay, that's really interesting and really cool. And so, you've done this project and then started the current one, which is not a project anymore. Of course, this is your company. So your company is [name]. That's the name, right? And it is, from what I've understood and from the research I've done, it's an AI software together with construction in a certain way... So not construction, but it's applied to buildings and it's to make them more efficient from an energy standpoint. Could it be so?

I3 [00:04:06] Yeah, exactly. So, we developed a software that sits on top of the current infrastructure of the energy systems in commercial buildings. So like office schools, malls, and everything that is nonresidential. And we are able to operate the legacy equipment, so the machines are already there, in a more efficient way without adding any kind of hardware. And we can do that here or in China or anywhere in the world. We have projects in seven countries, because we know we don't need to be there.

Francesco M. [00:04:35] Okay.

I3 [00:04:35] And the good thing is that we are saving on average around 26% and we have top-notch customers right now. So that's really good and is working right. That is the most important part. We developed it for five years.

Francesco M. [00:04:47] And it is important from the economic standpoint, but also it's a topic that is close to many of us younger people. So about doing something for this current situation with the climate we have. For me, it is really motivating to do something like this. And this is something not related to my thesis, I won't include this information, but this is personal curiosity. So, you can use this in a preexisting building

and you can eventually build a new building and already put this into it? Like how to how does it work?

I3 [00:05:29] I mean, the mission of the company is to decarbonize, so to reduce CO2 emissions for energy consumption and as quickly as possible worldwide. So, the only way is to really optimize what already exists, right? So that's the main mission. Can we do it in new buildings? Of course. We have also customers, I don't know a hotel and other things that are like six months in the building process and they put [name] on top. Yeah, but the main problem is that 99.9% of the buildings are already built, and we have to do something with it. And retrofitting and changing the hardware is also necessary, but we don't have 20 years again before we are floating and on fire at the same time.

Francesco M. [00:06:13] Okay. Okay. No, no, of course, I understand. And you have a point. A very valid one. So, coming back to you specifically as a person, why start an entrepreneurial activity? So, I know now that you've always had this sort of instinct, but why become a founder?

I3 [00:06:49] Because I mean, especially in our case or in my case, you couldn't find a real solution, right? What I just mentioned. So, everything is there, and we have the infrastructure, but nobody is taking action fast enough and we need to take a decision. And you can that I was selling olive oil before, and other stuff and I've always been an entrepreneur. In the end, I think you have to like the creation and foundation of a new project and the excitement that come with the risk. I am a person feels comfortable in very uncomfortable situations for 99.9% of people. So I am a fish in the water in under-pressure situations. So I see myself I like this, if not it's boring. I need to take on some challenges. And in working for another company doesn't compare to this.

Francesco M. [00:08:04] Yeah, of course. Of course.

I3 [00:08:05] It is too easy, but not easy. Right. I respect all jobs but it's just not enough challenge, with everyday life fluctuating and changing.

Francesco M. [00:08:18] Of course. And I mean, as you said, many people are not comfortable with this, so it's good that we have both.

I3 [00:08:26] Exactly, it is not going to be one thing or the other. But it is something that somehow I needed, I thought about this my whole life. And I am a person that

has constantly ideas on how to improve procedures, processes, technologies, stuff like that and I think that is the only way, to just do it.

Francesco M. [00:08:50] You're an engineer.

I3 [00:08:52] Exactly. And you want to exploit it, when you work in a company they limit you a little bit, right? Because you need to be specialized in a certain thing, and that's not for me.

Francesco M. [00:09:03] Of course. So why in Germany, then?

I3 [00:09:10] Just coincidence. I came from Poland to Germany. But anyways, it is a worldwide technological hub, of course. Actually, it was very tough at the beginning to sell new technology innovations to Germans, not being German. So that's this, I would say...

Francesco M. [00:09:30] You think was a liability being foreigner?

I3 [00:09:35] Absolutely. It is a fact. So, it's not a liability, right? Because you don't have liabilities, but it's a barrier.

Francesco M. [00:09:42] No, no. But this is a theory of entrepreneurship called liability of foreignness, which is exactly what you said.

I3 [00:09:50] Yeah, it is really hard.

Francesco M. [00:09:51] And the thing is, we think that in Europe it's easier, which it is in a certain sense, but it is not. But for example, when you think of a country like China or Japan, then, you know, that's so blatant that it will be impossible for a non-speaker and a non-local. But also in Europe, I think... we have this idea that Germany is very linguistically advanced, but when it gets to the real business...

I3 [00:10:19] Yeah it's not true. And top decision makers like to speak in German.

Francesco M. [00:10:24] Yeah, that is so true. But anyways, I mean, you obviously saw more positives than negatives of staying in Germany. And that's why you created the company here, right?

I3 [00:10:36] To be honest, I saw it as a challenge.

Francesco M. [00:10:39] As a challenge.

I3 [00:10:40] If I made it here, I could make it everywhere. Spain would be easier for me.

Francesco M. [00:10:45] Of course. In a certain sense, it's also, as you said, a technological hub and there are a lot of money that can be potentially invested.

I3 [00:10:55] Resources, true. The kind of founding round that they make in Germany can't be made in Spain and Italy.

Francesco M. [00:11:02] In Italy even less, probably. Okay. So then. Well, so I know the answer to this question. But what was your prior experience? Was that you worked here, right? You worked for two years.

I3 [00:11:18] Yeah, as an automation engineer.

Francesco M. [00:11:20] In Düsseldorf? Have you always been in this location?

I3 [00:11:24] No, I was working before close to Erfurt.

Francesco M. [00:11:27] Oh, okay.

I3 [00:11:28] Yeah. That it was originally where I moved to Germany. I moved close to Ilmenau. You can find also a university there. Technische Universität Ilmenau, that is actually quite well known in automation technologies.

Francesco M. [00:11:43] Okay.

I3 [00:11:44] And yeah, there I actually presented [name] to a top-notch professor and he loved it. So that was one of the validations to start the project.

Francesco M. [00:11:58] Oh ok. So you touched a little bit base into this, but how do you describe your entrance into the local German ecosystem, the German society, the local society? Not so much in terms of you as a person, which we already talked a little bit about it, but also as a founder, was it difficult?

I3 [00:12:23] Sort of the level of difficulty for it?

Francesco M. [00:12:29] Yes. But don't just just stick to that. Whatever comes to your mind.

I3 [00:12:35] Okay. Yeah. Yeah. It was difficult. Extremely difficult because you don't have a network, right? So in your case in Italy or in Spain for me, you always know someone that knows someone. And you have friends in your country, and you can express yourself better. In this case, I was young, and I didn't speak the language properly. And in the beginning, it was a new technology, and explaining a new technology is hard. It is always hard because nobody really knows about it and you have nothing to demonstrate it. You have no one that says "yeah, I know this guy, listen to him" or a prototype. So, you have to really work to open a way for it.

Francesco M. [00:13:26] Okay. And so, difficulty in both getting customers and in getting investors I imagine, right?

I3 [00:13:33] Yes for sure. That was actually the following level.

Francesco M. [00:13:36] And your co-founder is Spanish as well, right?

I3 [00:13:42] Yes, yes.

Francesco M. [00:13:43] And so like, sticking to this point – Did you have anyone, a person or a facilitator or a mentor that helped you in this process? The person that knows someone? Did you have one of these people or did you have someone that told you even before you started "Yeah. This is a good idea. Go for it."?

I3 [00:14:10] Yeah. Yes. So, I mean, it was not only one. There were many in different phases. The first one was the professor; I basically went to the university when I started from 0, knowing that it was a well-known university for automation, and I presented my idea. And there they had some kind of founder network, but very small. And then I met one person that is dedicated to entrepreneurship at the university, even if I was not enrolled and not even from the country.

Francesco M. [00:14:48] And this was a German person?

I3 [00:14:50] Yes. And then they told me “Look, you can talk with this professor to see what you can do” and then we took it from there. The professor presented me to the president of the building where we installed the first prototype. Then, we basically applied to different competitions for innovation, and we caught EON’s attention through one of them.

Francesco M. [00:15:19] And this university and professor were close to where you worked your previous job?

I3 [00:15:26] Yeah, exactly. Connecting dots, right? So, you basically use what you have around. That's all. That is the only thing you can do. You shouldn't think that you need to build a rocket and then I move. Use whatever you have and move to the next stage.

Francesco M. [00:15:49] And this was in the initial phase. Now your company is six years old, so you're in a much more advanced phase. You said your reference person or your facilitator changed. When? When did it change?

I3 [00:16:12] From the moment that we had to build the first prototype and we and we got to install it into the building, then we were able to present ourselves to competition and have some results.. And then from this moment, EON laid their eyes on us and we applied. So we started getting into the world of this energy company that is like a German tank basically. And then from this point on you start having network effects.

Francesco M. [00:16:49] So this professor helped you develop the prototype?

I3 [00:16:53] No, no. He was just very excited about what we were doing. And he told us “Look, I cannot support you in any way, but here is a room, you can sit there and I can try to talk with the guy that manages the building to convince him to let you play with the BMS (Building management system”.

Francesco M. [00:17:10] And then you've done this, and the first prototype was done and then you got into EON and their network. So when your project started being more than an idea and you had an MVP or at least some first idea of the product, was the trigger point that led you to have a new facilitator, right?

I3 [00:17:36] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:17:37] And who was this next person? Not in detail.

I3 [00:17:44] It was the person that was assigned by EON to be the mentor.

Francesco M. [00:17:50] Okay.

I3 [00:17:51] He was an entrepreneur as well. But he had his own network.

Francesco M. [00:17:58] And then EON was receiving any part of your profits or how was it?

I3 [00:18:08] Yeah. In the beginning, they did what is popular in these kinds of accelerator programs... You're there for three months to get some coaching, and they get some data from you. And in the end, they had the possibility to invest in you if they liked your company.

Francesco M. [00:18:28] Okay. And so they assigned this new mentor and like, you said that a lot of people helped you. Could you quantify more or less how many times or at least like at what stage you changed your needs? Because if I imagine a company: at the idea stage there is someone that can help me, for example, getting the contact of a person that could help me develop my product. And then maybe my company starts running, so I need someone in the legal area that gives me a piece of advice on how to set the company from a legal perspective, and so on and so forth. That's the idea I have as an inexperienced person. So, more or less how many times or what were the trigger points that led to change and your needs that led to the change of this person, until you were able to run on your own legs? So, at a certain point, I imagine you created your network, you had your contacts, and you had your employees. You didn't need a German person to help you necessarily, right?

I3 [00:19:39] Yeah. But it takes time until this point.

Francesco M. [00:19:41] Exactly.

I3 [00:19:42] Um. I think it's a very interesting question. I would love to download all of this and give it to you, of course. But I can tell you is no rule here, right? So I can not tell you a clear path. You can't make deterministic something that is very unpredictable. In the end it depends on human interaction and communication more than anything else.

But the key is to not be afraid and really try to connect with as many people as possible. Don't be afraid of asking for help. And have a ton of perseverance and resistance in getting No's and in people looking at you and thinking that you don't fit in there.

As a path, in the end, for us it was like: from not having anything, just an idea, to getting it to the professor that was an expert in the topic opened the door, and said "okay, that makes sense, develop something". And then we were presented to the person that allowed us to demonstrate the theory. Then this person helped us demonstrate the prototype, which allowed us to open the door of EON. This in turn allowed the people from EON to say "okay, these guys have something that works, so they can move to the next level". And what is the next level? That they were open to having an investment in the company. And to do that, they have to put you in contact with more people, who once they invest in the company, will have to help you, because they need to make their investment successful.

Francesco M. [00:21:33] Okay.

I3 [00:21:33] At some points the programs changed, sometimes they disappeared, and then the first customers came. Networks, events, etc.

Francesco M. [00:21:42] I mean, for me, what I was more interested in was these first people that did it, not for profits, but because they were interested in the project and wanted to help you.

I3 [00:21:50] Yes. Because they wanted to support.

Francesco M. [00:21:52] When someone is involved in your company in any way, whether directly or indirectly, and they share with you the risk and reward... That's more of your investor or your client or your supplier. And anyways, I mean, you gave me a really clear picture of what happened.

And, stupid question, because I already have an idea of your answer. But of course, these people have been extremely determinant in the success of your venture, right? So, like, Almost indispensable in a certain sense?

I3 [00:22:35] Yes very important. But difficult to know if indispensable.

Francesco M. [00:22:36] Of course, but if it wasn't them you probably would have found someone else. That's what I'm saying.

I3 [00:22:40] Exactly. Exactly. We would have found another way and other people.

Francesco M. [00:22:43] Exactly. And do you think that you needed these people because you are a foreigner? Or do you think that you would have needed them in Spain as well? Since you speak the language, and you know your way around things, maybe it wouldn't have been that important to have someone to push you?

I3 [00:23:08] So the question is if the ways are different when you are abroad and when you are in your country? Yeah, they are different. They are completely different. Probably you will go in different ways, if you know the language, you could go and open different conversations. In this way, at the beginning here you need more of an evangelist – someone that is really motivated just because they are fascinated about how you do it. And also about you being a foreigner.

Francesco M. [00:23:38] Yes of course. It's like an angel investor that doesn't invest. Let's put it like this.

I3 [00:23:46] The investors want only to earn money basically.

Francesco M. [00:23:48] I know exactly. But the technical concept of these very rich investors is that 90% of them invest in something they believe in or have fun with. And the last thing I want to ask you before letting you go is: besides what we already said about foreignness in Germany, do you perceive your foreignness as a strength or as a weakness?

I3 [00:24:13] Depends on the situation. In some points, in some situations, it is a weakness, while in some situations it is a strength. When you want to differentiate – let's say you are somewhere and they are all German, but you are the only foreign one. But it depends on the person. For example, when I was in Thüringen, ex DDR, and had to present myself in front of all white men, being a foreigner was not helpful.

Francesco M. [00:24:51] No, of course.

I3 [00:24:52] But when I was in Munich, presenting on the stage, or in Berlin... That was charming.

Francesco M. [00:24:59] Yeah, of course.

I3 [00:25:00] And different, of course.

Francesco M. [00:25:01] Of course. And I think it also depends on the industry you're working in.

I3 [00:25:04] Exactly, exactly.

Francesco M. [00:25:07] Okay. I mean, we had a nice talk and you gave me a lot of information to work on, so I can stop the recording now.

Appendix 7: Transcript of interview 4

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] The first question I'm going to ask you is some general information about yourself, I know where you're from and your age, however maybe about your school and work experience, and what led you to be who you are and get where you are.

I4 [00:00:31] So I went to Algarotti in Venice, the tourism school. When I finished school, since I was never a study lover, I decided not to go to college and get a job right away. I found a little job so to start for a cooperative that was looking for a person to do online programming and various things. But still I wanted to gain experience abroad, particularly in London. Anyway, Venice is very nice however small and with less opportunities. At any kmodo I didn't adnate to England because I couldn't find work in Italy, but just for personal choice and because I wanted to get the experience. I left when I was 19, the February after high school graduation. The beginning was kind of bad because the people I was living with were not on the same wavelength as me and they were very boring. So it was difficult, between being away from home and among so many things I wasn't too happy. But then I got together with a friend of mine from Padua whom I had met many years before, and to make a long story short I ended up living at home with him, and other people. One of these people is my current partner. While staying I started to get a more permanent job in an Italian delicatessen, since I was doing odd jobs here and there before. We basically lived in a kind of warehouse-a kind of peculiar situation.

Francesco M. [00:02:10] Yes, [name] had mentioned to me, chatting about this and that.

I4 [00:02:17] That's right, I was 1 1/2 years while they were 2 years. And it's important that I say these things, because in the same warehouse there was this Norwegian salmon smoker, which my friend had already told me about when I was in Italy.

There was an old boiler room in the building below, or rather this building had two floors. He used to smoke salmon in this boiler room on the ground floor, and he had his office upstairs, near where we lived at that time. Then during Christmas, in 2014, he needed...

Francesco M. [00:03:12] But wait, going back a step, you told me that you did some work and after that you did something else right before you got into this business, right?

I4 [00:03:20] I worked in this Italian delicatessen for about 6-7 months, and it was my first serious work experience in London.

Francesco M. [00:03:32] So then while you were doing this thing here Christmas came and then what?

I4 [00:03:41] Christmas came, and this Norwegian was looking for someone to be on staff for the various markets where he had booths in London. A temporary thing, during the Christmas season to sell salmon on Saturdays.

Francesco M. [00:03:56] But was this Norwegian guy, let's say, how could he be a farmer selling his produce or did he really have some kind of pseudo-farm behind him?

I4 [00:04:08] He already had an established business, in fact he was already quite big at that time. He had contacts with important restaurants and had received some investment, starting 5 years earlier. About the same point where we are now on the time level.

Francesco M. [00:04:42] Okay.

I4 [00:04:45] Anyway I never had basic skills to do what I do, in the cooking world etc... It was something that I found myself doing and I learned a lot of things. I don't know if there are any other questions or if you want me to continue freewheeling.

Francesco M. [00:05:23] The next question is a little bit about your company, your company, in general. So you can continue what you're saying in my opinion then let's see where it takes us.

I4 [00:05:35] So I'll tell you how we got to this point. Anyway, after a short while this person had taken my partner to work full time, however, he didn't last long before he broke down. This person was a genius however he was also very messy, so you often found yourself having to solve delicate situations on your own. Let's say he was living the good life and wasn't really behind the business, but at the same time he never put anyone in charge of the business, he just wanted to do it himself. So it was not easy to work together. But still it was an important opportunity, so we did it gladly and worked.

Francesco M. [00:06:23] I mean, in a nutshell he had a very strong product, which is what you sell, rightly so. I can be a witness to that. But it didn't have a strong organization and administration behind it, right?

I4 [00:06:40] Exactly.

Francesco M. [00:06:42] But already that it had a strong product was important.

I4 [00:06:48] Exactly, that was his luck.

Francesco M. [00:06:53] And I think that was also your luck.

I4 [00:06:55] Definitely that's our luck. [name] so after a while he stopped, and then I started working on it full time. I worked for him for a year and learned everything I can do, got into a lot of situations where I had to solve various problems, and having to learn how to do a lot of things. And like I was running the business for him. And so it was like that for me. I mean, anyway, there was so much work, so much pressure, so many things to do even though I was only 21 years old. Then, anyway, we were doing events of a certain kind, working with quite important restaurants, I was doing meetings with chefs of a certain level... a little bit of everything, that was the good stuff too. Until after a while there were some things that kind of made me want to stop, because I had learned what I needed to learn and I didn't see the company going in the right direction. In fact it was more and more, let's say, left to its own devices, there was no growth, and that's what led me to leave; and in fact it closed after only 3 months since I left.

Meanwhile, the owner moved from the boiler room because he had met this billionaire family who wanted to build him a smokehouse on their land, which is the same one we use today. They are the family that owns the [name] company the most, they make earthmoving equipment and they are famous all over the world. Of course, when he quit, the smokehouse remained empty. Meanwhile, the other partner is working for this company in one of the stores in London, so after a year that we knew it was still closed, we proposed to take it over by presenting them with a business plan.

Francesco M. [00:09:22] But he worked for [name]?

I4 [00:09:26] No, [name] are the landowners, the farm is called [name] and it's the organic farm they have on their land. Let's say they have this organic farm a little bit rich and VIP.

Francesco M. [00:09:50] I understand.

I4 [00:09:51] Let's say the investment was made by his wife, [name], who had decided to invest in this Norwegian man's business and had built him the biggest smokehouse, a real laboratory on their land, next to their farm buildings. And so we took over that and we didn't have to start from scratch, build a building from scratch. We already had a place built, like taking over a restaurant with all the equipment in it, instead of taking, I don't know, a shoe store to make it into a restaurant, converting the whole interior and buying the machinery and so on. So we started from that. That was let's say the pre, and from here if you want I can start talking to you about the actual business. If I answered the first question so we can move on to the next one.

Francesco M. [00:10:59] Great, you answered very well. You gave me a lot of information on this. I tell you, maybe I am less surprised than I would normally be, but simply because I have heard this story from John before.

I4 [00:11:20] Yes yes of course, also because John has been there.

Francesco M. [00:11:21] Yes, you told me that he was there.

I4 [00:11:24] I don't remember if he had also been in the warehouse... or anyway he came at a different time.

Francesco M. [00:11:32] It certainly seems to me that he had seen the smokehouse from what he had told me.

I4 [00:11:38] Yes he must have also come when the Norwegian was there. Now that I remember he had come there already, so I saw both companies. Let's say the before and after.

Francesco M. [00:11:51] Sure. Anyway, the company operates in the Food & beverage industry obviously. Food in this case. But you mainly sell though, direct to consumer online right? And then you sell to restaurants or any B2B catering, whatever right?

I4 [00:12:16] Yes, which we say is our main source of income.

Francesco M. [00:12:23] I guess, in the end businesses have more money to spend, and the restaurant is understood as a business clearly. What's next? Whatever, you also have a nice site I think. Or was it a flyer, I can't remember?

I4 [00:12:37] Yes, we have a site, we always do PDFs for Italy, but now soon we will launch a site for the Italian market as well.

Francesco M. [00:12:48] Whatever, anyway you definitely have a B2C component as well, which may not be as big as B2B, but who knows in the future what will happen. And instead, in terms of your structure, you told me that you are with two partners, right?

I4 [00:13:05] I have two partners with whom let's say we founded the company. [name] and I started working on it first, and then let's say there has always been [name] next to us, who takes care of all the visuals, brand identity etc.

Francesco M. [00:13:22] So you are three Italians?

I4 [00:13:25] All three of us are Italian. [name] and I have no particular education in business studies. Although [name] then over time took various courses and studied, getting into reading and learned a lot of things self-taught, although he also took short college courses, but without a degree, more for personal enrichment.

Francesco M. [00:13:57] Let's say that we live in a time when you don't need to go to the university institution necessarily. If one is interested one can find anything online ... it's obvious that maybe having an address and being pointed toward a path is a good thing. But when you're talking mostly about entrepreneurship, economics, me having completed my bachelor's degree and finishing my master's degree in economics and management, if you ask me what I did, I'll tell you anything and everything. It's not like I'm a doctor, and I learned, doing hospital internships. You know? That is, anyone could do what I do and vice versa. You can be successful without going through the university route.

I4 [00:14:41] Yes of course, but it's to tell you that [name] went to university and studied here in London. So of the three he is the one who has the qualifications for his profession. [name] and I have the high school diploma, that's it.

Francesco M. [00:15:06] I understand. And besides the three of you do you have any other human capital working for you?

I4 [00:15:14] Yes, we have three employees.

Francesco M. [00:15:16] Who work in the warehouse?

I4 [00:15:17] Well, you count that the boiler room where we were before we don't own it, we have this smokehouse in the farm and it's the only real estate we have. So they work in our laboratory in the [name] farm. And all three of them are local, which also another thing, in the sense that you're in a country place, without a car you don't move. So it's hard to get people from London, which is an hour and a half away.

Francesco M. [00:15:59] And then people who are in London, generally, especially if they are foreigners, are they aiming for another kind of asset maybe?

I4 [00:16:12] Yes, but there are a lot of foreigners outside the city as well. Especially communities of Romanians, who tend to move in families, and they have different living demands, especially for the costs, which are very high in London.

Francesco M. [00:16:27] Yeah well sure, instead outside is better? I mean that they are fine.

I4 [00:16:33] They are also fine in the country, just work. The farm has so many Eastern European staff. We don't have any, but not because we decided to, but we simply found these English people earlier.

Francesco M. [00:16:53] So you found these three workers, so in total there are six of you right?

I4 [00:16:58] Yes, that we work full time yes.

Francesco M. [00:17:03] And the company is doing well anyway, right?

I4 [00:17:06] Yes. The company is doing well. We just got a recent investment. Last week we did the first export to Italy. Because we found some Italian partners, from Venice, who are interested in buying the fish. They are two guys, one is involved in selling fish and has a stall at the Rialto market.

Francesco M. [00:18:00] I lost you...

I4 [00:18:02] They put themselves, let's say now they will put themselves together in a third company, but because simply the guy who sells fruits and vegetables works with a lot of restaurants of a certain level and he always put fish in the middle as well. Let's say they help each other with the clientele. So we sell it to one, but then it's the other guy who sells us the goods basically. So in fact this fish market buys us the goods, and then they both sell it to restaurants, stores, etc.

Francesco M. [00:18:39] So pure B2B.

I4 [00:18:41] Yes, B2B. More because with Brexit it has become much more difficult for us to do B2C. because of all the bureaucracy behind selling. If I sell a whisker to you, I have very high costs that are not justified by selling smaller quantities.

Francesco M. [00:19:00] In fact when we bought from you, which has been now two Christmases in a row, if not if not more, we always did a joint order with other families, because being that my parents are friends of theirs and there's the whole business, then you probably pay a lot less you and also at the expense of time and economic, to do one order for everybody.

I4 [00:19:25] Yes, count this Christmas was the first real one with Brexit, and we sold everything to a single company. Fatality one of my partners has a company in Italy, and we had to sell everything to them. Then we asked the various groups of acquaintances to collect all the money together and make a single payment to this company who then invoices us for larger quantities of goods. This is to keep it simpler, but now we are acquiring this company of my partner, because he doesn't use it anymore, and it is more convenient for us to do B2C. We can sell everything to this company that then actually does the selling in Italy, which is very difficult for us. It's a very common thing that's happening since the Brexit and so many companies are setting up a company in the European Union and then selling to the same company and doing one shipment. Then that one does all the smaller shipments since the goods are already in the European market; so, it doesn't have all the rounds to do for all the single sales. Besides the cost that would be so high that it would not be manageable.

Francesco M. [00:21:00] They made no small complication in a nutshell. But instead coming back to you as a person ... the next 3 questions actually you've already partially answered me, but I'll ask them again anyway, maybe you can tell me if there's something I don't know.

So the first would be, how did you decide to go into entrepreneurship? From what I understand it was more a matter of situation and combination of events that led me to make that decision. But maybe you're telling me that inside of you, probably even in your partners, I don't know, there was always this desire to have your own thing? I don't know. I suppose it might be as well as it might not be.

I4 [00:21:59] So can I ask you a courtesy? I have to take a five-minute break, and then we'll resume the rest.

Francesco M. [00:22:10] Sure, go ahead and take your time.

I4 [00:22:15] Here I am, I'm back.

Francesco M. [00:22:20] So, the most general question is, why did you decide to start an entrepreneurial activity? Then answer as you see fit.

I4 [00:22:30] So I wanted to start because I had seen the potential of the work experience that I had done before and that I already wanted to make changes to. That, however, was not possible as it was not my company. So when this opportunity arose to do the same thing, I wanted to do it because I thought, and I still do, that it is a great

opportunity. And also because, not having done any studies or things aimed at this life, when I had the opportunity to do this thing, and I saw that I was doing it well, that in my opinion it is also a good business, I decided to start it because I saw it as my opportunity in life. Also because when you start working and you realize that we all have to work together anyway, if it coincides with something you like then it creates a better situation. And so that's why I wanted to continue on this path or at least at least try. Maybe in 20 years I'll break my balls and I've managed to put something aside and start something else.

Francesco M. [00:24:07] But so what? I mean, if I now reconstruct a picture of what you told me, let's say you came to England out of a desire to see something else?

I4 [00:24:24] Yes, to stay a few months.

Francesco M. [00:24:25] To stay a few months. Then you got comfortable, you stayed and started working there. Right? In the beginning you didn't find yourself so well, however that is maybe also quite normal. That is, people think that going abroad is easy. I live abroad like you and I have lived in other countries abroad as well. Not all that glitters is gold.

So, anyway you then found your own reality, you stopped there, and after that you started this business, partly and mainly because of this opportunity, this window of opportunity that opened up. But did you come, or rather, did you already have an idea to start, to do something on your own, to open an entrepreneurial activity at some point in your life? Or was it really an opportunity that later turned into what you want to do? But you came initially saying work then, in short, without a clear idea.

I4 [00:25:23] So to be honest, before I set up my own business I wanted to go back to Italy. Because I had learned everything I could learn and I wanted to go back to Italy and try to work there. I also had a contact in Venice to start working; so, I wouldn't even have to look for work.

When I came here, I had no intention of opening something of my own. I was 19 years old, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do yet. However, to start doing something, I wanted to work to see different things and look around. And then that was it, I mean. Then there was this thing, and I tried to jump at the chance. But it's not like I was already planning to do an entrepreneurial activity.

Francesco M. [00:26:25] Okay, okay. That's the interesting thing, I think it divides into two types of people. There are those who maybe always have this need and impulse

to try to create something. Whereas there are those who maybe take advantage of a situation or realize later that they need or want to start something of their own. So I belong I think to the second category, so like you, that is, I am very opportunity-driven, I don't preclude myself from anything. But there are other people who have this entrepreneurial mindset, let's say as an innate quality.

I4 [00:27:17] Yes, yes absolutely. I've met several people who have that mentality.

Francesco M. [00:27:20] Yes, that they tell you "when I was 16 I started selling this stuff, then I changed, etc." You know? I wasn't like that, I never was. I know people who are like that, though. Then it's not that one is better than the other. Actually success depends on so many factors and most importantly, look at your story, if you tell it, it sounds like a movie almost, that is, crazy stuff.

I4 [00:27:43] Yes, more or less. Even for what I ended up doing, because it's just strange to have ended up selling salmon.

Francesco M. [00:27:48] Sure, of course.

I4 [00:27:50] Even when I tell it in England, people are surprised.

Francesco M. [00:27:52] Also because you are Italian, I mean it's not like you are Norwegian. So you say, if you had opened a restaurant, a factory that manufactures pasta or mozzarella would be more understandable. Anyway, that's how it ended. Your experience in the country, in England, has already described it to me. But why in England? Usually this question applies to "why did you open businesses in England?", however, to you I change it a little bit: why did you want to go to England, and to London, compared to other places?

I4 [00:28:31] Well, first of all because I already knew the language anyway. And that was a step to start with. I tell you almost maybe I don't remember why anymore. I know I always liked London, I had been before. Even though in Italy anyway, there's always a false myth, which is that you arrive and there's immediately someone at the airport who offers you a job.

Francesco M. [00:29:07] Sure. Like the American dream, London is a bit of a European New York.

I4 [00:29:09] If you don't want to work, you're not going anywhere.

Francesco M. [00:29:14] Sure. But as I was saying, though, in my opinion London, it's kind of the European New York, so there's this idea of more opportunities.

I4 [00:29:19] Ah well sure, for me still even now, well maybe a little bit more in pre-Brexit, it's the most important city in the world, or at least one of the top five for so many things. Yes okay you have America, meaning the United States, you have New York. But London is something else, though.

Financially, in so many areas, in universities, it's a place where you come and if you have an idea, you can make it a reality and you can meet people who can help you. Let's say if you have an idea you find someone who can help you cultivate it from a better point of view, who maybe comes from Japan, South Africa etc.

Francesco M. [00:30:14] Of course, it is a melting pot that is not indifferent.

I4 [00:30:15] Exactly. So I always say that in London if you want to do something you can accomplish it, but if you don't want to work you are not given anything. On the contrary. Because I hear so many people complaining all the time about the cost and the difficulties, but no one makes them stay.

Francesco M. [00:30:39] Sure.

I4 [00:30:43] So that's why I was always attracted to it, and I tried to carve out my own space.

Francesco M. [00:30:58] Clear. And how would you describe, let's say your access in the local ecosystem in London? Both from a human point of view, I mean you as a person and then also from a business point of view. I mean, I think everybody has a different experience from the foreign access point of view. We can be in the same city, however, you can tell me "I got along well right away, I met the right people," and I can tell you instead "look, I wanted to shoot myself in the first two years because I didn't know anybody, I was working all day." So I understand your experience, as mentioned before, however how was it? Difficult or easy?

I4 [00:31:50] Well, I told you that the beginning was difficult, because, of course even though I arrived through a contact, that is my friend's boyfriend who already had the house; so, it was easy because I already had that and also his roommates who had

been living here for a few years already, but the ultimate Saturday night was smoking two joints and watching TV, you know. I had arrived full of energy but still I didn't know anybody but them. Then I started going out on my own for goodness sake, however in the beginning, seeing them without stable jobs as well was not encouraging, if I think about it now *mamma mia*, I get misery thinking about their lifestyle. Then I was out of the center anyway, so it was a bit of a journey to move anyway. So at first I was staying with them a little bit but I felt like I was at home in Italy, even being in London. Then in time I got out of it, but it took five months more or less. You get the picture though, for me it was like that was the norm and so I found it boring. But as soon as I met the right people, though, I got unstuck and integrated quite well, going out and meeting people.

Francesco M. [00:33:41] So your entry into the working world and the London ecosystem was also difficult?

I4 [00:33:52] It was difficult because I had never looked for a job, but not even in Italy, so I didn't even know how to do it. I was in a new world, okay there were sites but it's not like now, having apps is much easier and faster. To tell you, I didn't know at all what to write on a cover letter also because I had no experience.

Francesco M. [00:34:16] Damn cover letters.

I4 [00:34:18] Then, cover letter to make sandwiches, understand? What do you have to say, I want to work here because I like to make sandwiches? And you understand that in the beginning it was difficult, also because it was not I had help to I had to do everything by myself. And anyway also because I was sending applications and maybe they didn't answer me, and I was a little bit hurt. Then I found the right job and things got better from there.

Francesco M. [00:34:52] Well, you're bound to get hurt.

I4 [00:34:53] Yes, more just answer no.

Francesco M. [00:35:03] Look, I've been there although in a different way, because obviously I was looking for a target, I mean a different kind of work, however, it's the same principle. Eventually, after a while you get used to not giving a damn, but that's kind of everywhere. There is also, I say randomly, with friends.

I4 [00:35:22] At first it was a mix of things. Personal life was not great. The job was not stable. When I started working in the delicatessen, which was called "[name]," I had colleagues and it was still a way to expand knowledge in an easy way.

So the two things combined, especially not getting a job--although I did some jobs for a few months, but I quit them because I didn't like them but they were to start combining something. The two things combined, personal and work life not working, it kind of depresses you. Then, anyway, coming from the comfort zone of the home where everything is done, for goodness sake, my parents always gave me everything they had to, but my mom raised me to be independent and that's also why it helps to get experience. I always had roles in the house, like my brother. So much so that as soon as the summer was over she told me, "You get a job, or you go to study. I accept the choice, but you don't stay home and watch TV and do nothing."

Francesco M. [00:36:45] Sure.

I4 [00:36:47] To tell you, my mom is like this and has always been like this. I left with my money, then when there was a need, anyway, they always gave me something. And for goodness sake, that yes, that happened a few times, but it happened.

In my opinion that was it, however coming from there, with all the friends I was comfortable with, it took a little bit. And then, for goodness sake, now I would never go back to live at home with my parents.

Francesco M. [00:37:20] I know that very well.

I4 [00:37:21] Even if it's just for a few days it's very tight for me. But whatever, I'm not going to get a hotel in Venice.

Francesco M. [00:37:28] In my opinion two weeks, then after two weeks it becomes agony. At Christmas I come back willingly, I do Christmas with my family, then in early January I run away again, but rightly they too, as in your case, after a while got used to you being out and doing your own thing.

I4 [00:37:55] Yes, yes.

Francesco M. [00:37:56] But what about how from the business point of view -- and then we move on to the crucial question. In fact, we've been going on for a while here and I don't want to take up your time.

I4 [00:38:09] No, no, go easy.

Francesco M. [00:38:10] You guys took over this business. And fitting into the business system, into the London ecosystem as a company, was it difficult or did you still have the previous contacts?

I4 [00:38:34] It was a mix, in the sense that, of course the first thing we did was to contact all the customers from before. But in the meantime as soon as the company went out of business, there was another one who fatefully had just started making smoked salmon. So this one had started a year earlier and in the last year of the Norwegian, this one had developed a good product and so he got a lot of customers without a supplier; so, it was a godsend for him. So when we started again, we contacted the old customers but so many had switched to this new supplier, as is normal since a year had passed in between.

However, in a short time this had become very famous in and around London, so there was this strong competitor. In the beginning of course we went and some we were able to get since our product was a little bit different, but so many people told us no, especially the big restaurants. Also because often the upscale restaurants are the ones who then don't want to spend as much, and we were entering the market with a higher price than the others. So it was difficult in the beginning, especially with so many "no's." Then you know, you go to the meetings and so many people really liked the product but then they didn't hear back.

And so yes, it was a bit difficult. We had a minimum clientele that made us survive but not that extra step. Then we found a big customer, which helped us a lot, since they were taking a lot of salmon at a time. Everybody was ordering us two, three salmon per order, and then came the 15-20-per-order one whose two orders were enough to sell as much as everybody else.

Then slowly there was the pandemic that slowed us down ... we started well from mid-2018, so a year and a half well in which we had the markets and somehow we were pulling up some money. And then the pandemic came and it was very difficult because we were working so much with restaurants. But through Instagram and social, and a little bit of influencers, we were able to make ourselves known and we survived thanks so much to private clients. Then, I don't know how, there was a turning point, also because a big chef took it well with us and so thanks to him other big restaurants started to contact us.

Francesco M. [00:41:44] Sure.

I4 [00:41:45] So many restaurants that said no to us at first also wrote to us, and we also had a little bit of a payback.

Francesco M. [00:41:51] No, absolutely.

I4 [00:41:52] I mean that's the thing that gives you the most satisfaction. Because we were always trying to push each other anyway, we were saying, "One day you'll see that we'll get there. In fact, they will be the ones to write to us." And then anyway, not even too long afterwards, so it was. And nothing, so, it was a little difficult the beginning, more because of this strong competitor. Of course, then now you know we have the fame, a few newspaper articles from here, a few chefs supporting us, a lot of chefs who then change restaurants; so, maybe the restaurant keeps the product, but the chef contacts you for the new place. And so that is also a way of selling. We have always tried to have a good relationship with the chefs. I deliver and I always see the chefs and talk to them and listen to them, and that is also something that makes a difference. It's not like you're talking to person x who works on the team. Then when someone new comes in they ask me, "but are you one of the owners? This product is so good, I've never had salmon like this," it makes a difference, and so we're pretty well embedded now.

However, even on a personal level, I am now very well-connected. In the sense that we have a lot of friends, we have the trusted bar where everybody knows us, etc. So then things changed, the first months were a little bit like that but then everything changed. I made many friendships, many acquaintances.

Francesco M. [00:43:45] Definitely there was also a skill of your own, because you know, when you're out and you've gone out of your comfort zone anyway, you have to be able to relate to new people.

I4 [00:44:03] Let me show you what the village looks like where we are.

Francesco M. [00:44:08] Typical British.

I4 [00:44:12] Yes, everything here is like that, it's a very rural area.

Francesco M. [00:44:20] I'm losing you a little bit.

I4 [00:44:23] Here I am in the Bermuda Triangle, as I call it. There's very little field. Can you hear me now?

Francesco M. [00:44:39] Yes, without video I can hear you better.

I4 [00:44:41] Anyway, I'm in the office soon, so at most I'll call you back from there that I have wifi.

Francesco M. [00:44:46] Yes, that's fine. Anyway, let's try to go ahead, then see what it looks like.

But listen I come to the main point of my research. In my opinion, already your experience with this Norwegian could be considered as such. But starting from when you took over the company, did you have someone who could be called a facilitator or at least a person with more in-depth knowledge than yours, in any area of the host country, who helped you in leaving, in starting again?

I4 [00:45:42] I would say no. There was only one person, which was the former partner of the Norwegian, a Spaniard who works in finance, who gave us some tips to do the business plan. But then we continued on our own business. And he is Spanish anyway, not English but he lived here.

Francesco M. [00:46:08] It doesn't have to be English, I mean in my opinion it's more just this figure of a facilitator. And this Spaniard in my opinion can be called a facilitator because he helped you. That is, I don't want a person who helped you and then joined the company and started sharing the business risk and also the reward, and then the earnings of the company. Just a person who helped you in any one thing. And in the initial stage, that then probably usually changes. I mean in the sense, I'll give you an example, I'm in Germany, I came to Germany, my girlfriend is German but we've been together since before I came to Germany. So in the first period, she helped me a lot in certain things. Although not a company, I'm really talking about the acclimatization. Then after a while I met another person. This person helped me in other things, for example specifically in the university.

So my guess is that even in companies this often occurs. Maybe you come in and in the beginning this Spaniard helped you with the business plan or something anyway. Then maybe later another person took over, etc.

It may be not though, it's a guess. I don't know if I made the point, maybe that was a little bit of a confusing explanation.

I4 [00:47:41] Then I see what you mean. I couldn't tell you. I don't think we had somebody who explained to us how to do the business. In the sense that we already knew

how to do it and we started it with our knowledge, but we never had a particular figure who helped us. I must say that then yes, some chef helped us to push us, in the sense that, the fact that he spoke well of us, so many people bought the product. That one did.

Francesco M. [00:48:27] I understand. Maybe even not from a business perspective. This smokehouse where you are, is it owned by this family? For example, this family could be considered as such.

I4 [00:48:43] The owners actually do not even know our names.

Francesco M. [00:48:44] But do you pay rent?

I4 [00:48:46] Yes, we pay rent. At first they gave it to us for free though, to start with. That is.

Francesco M. [00:48:51] Exactly. So you see they could fit into the discussion, right?

I4 [00:48:52] Exactly that yes, at first we didn't pay.

Francesco M. [00:48:55] So according to this is an important thing.

I4 [00:48:57] Now I'll show you that I've arrived. Now I don't know, the signal might go out. Anyway, this is the smokehouse.

Francesco M. [00:49:04] Beautiful!

I4 [00:49:06] Here. This space here is where we are.

Francesco M. [00:49:25] Sure. All very new.

I4 [00:49:30] Yes, let's say it was all here already.

Francesco M. [00:49:32] Whatever. Looks good to me, renewed.

I4 [00:49:41] This is production.

---Pause in the recording, due to bad connection---

Francesco M. [00:50:01] So in my opinion, although you initially said no, you had this kind of figure. Both from the point of view of these people who allowed you to start without paying rent. And both from the point of view of this Spaniard who gave you a hand in creating the business plan. Right?

I4 [00:50:40] Yes, we can say that these people gave us a hand.

Francesco M. [00:50:43] Okay. Anyway, then, I mean, not classifying them with a specific name. But still they are people who helped you in two different areas, that is, one did one thing, one did another. And that was the beginning.

Then of course you evolved you started walking on your own feet. Right? And could there have been another figure who may have helped you, from any point of view?

Let me give you an example. I have a friend who is studying law. For example he might say to me, "Look, in my opinion from the legal point of view you do an LLC instead of another type of company." It's a random example, but I hope it gives the idea.

I4 [00:51:41] Yes.

Francesco M. [00:51:42] Then maybe you never had anybody, you have to tell me that.

I4 [00:51:46] Definitely what you said, however look in selling more than anything else we were helped. Because I'm telling you about the chefs, because in our work they are the ones that count so much. Because you know if they push you, they talk to other people, you get to a wider pool of people and anyway their opinion matters in this environment.

I'll tell you if you make me think of one person, a chef from Puglia who worked at [name], which is a very famous restaurant in England. The chef is a little bit like our [name] and he is French, however he has always worked in England and he is famous here; his restaurant has 2 Michelin stars for a lifetime and it is an English institution. And he, not so much directly he helped us, as much as when he could yes, but so much his former chef, that this guy from Puglia, however he introduced the brand in the restaurant.

He also helped us with recipes for when we did events, gave us the perfect recipes and then sold the product at the event. He pushed us and introduced us to the chef.

And we also developed a product with him, soy & whiskey salmon, and he gave us the opportunity to have a product developed together with the chef at [name].

Francesco M. [00:53:52] And anyway, already three people in my opinion, one indirect because maybe they didn't know you directly, however they helped you at different points without financial remuneration, maybe.

I4 [00:54:09] Well then actually there was anyway with the chef, with the others not. Well, with the homeowners, of course they make money off of us and we also make salmon for them under their brand. They sell it as [name] salmon, made in our smokehouse, and they have a favorable price. However you know, it's not like they gave us the place because they have big hearts. They think a lot about money. But you know it's a win-win situation, though, which is we got the place to start they got the salmon with their brand. So they can say it's smoked in their smokehouse, whose rent we pay, plus they have a building that works, because you know keeping a building stationary is worse than having it in use. It deteriorates.

Francesco M. [00:55:10] Sure. And instead this Spanish guy just helped you out?

I4 [00:55:17] Yes, but at first it was more about understanding the prices and from the economic point of view. But then of course to continue he wanted half the company and so we didn't hear anymore. But now anyway we are talking, I saw him two weeks ago, he came here to smokehouse. Now there is a project with them to open the European headquarters in Spain.

Francesco M. [00:55:49] Sure.

I4 [00:55:51] It would be taking the big step, because it means having a lab that we build from scratch. So much money in between, it means working with the whole European market, I mean at big levels. I'm very slow about it because, I like to dream but I want to keep my feet on the ground. While my partner is a dreamer, I am very realistic and prefer to have zero expectations. Now what is fine, but you can always be faced with disappointment. In one side you have an unexpected thing and you are happy and in the other side there is something that sinks you.

Francesco M. [00:56:37] I am totally of your party, that is, just as a person I am inclined to the worst only to find out the best rather than the opposite.

I4 [00:56:48] I'm like that with all people. Sometimes I'm wary, then I find out that I was wrong, but it's better that way than finding out that a person tried to rip you off, gets hurt twice and understand. That's the way business is for me.

I don't want to be negative, but I want to see the reality. So much so that to tell you one more thing, [name], because [name] is more like me, when he goes to meetings and hears the well taken chef promising to buy 20-30 whiskers, he gets phagocytized. But I tell him until he issues the first invoice for me the sale is not done. There's words I can't do anything with.

Francesco M. [00:57:48] Sure.

I4 [00:57:49] Thanks for the nice words, but until he wants to issue the invoice I'm not happy. Because in the beginning we were happy, then when they don't contact you anymore you made a film for nothing.

Francesco M. [00:58:07] I absolutely agree. And instead this Italian chef was your client, and then he helped you?

I4 [00:58:21] Sorry, that I have things outside and it's raining. That's the beauty of England.

Francesco M. [00:58:46] Do you perceive being a foreigner, your being Italians in England and foreigners with a strength or a weakness? It doesn't have to be either one. It can also be both.

And if being foreigners you needed--that is, I don't think so, because from what you told me you were already started, because you almost took over a company more than made it start from scratch. Then you changed it radically of course. You work there and you already had an idea of what there was to do.

Your being a foreigner in England, though, was it a hindrance or was it a strength?

I4 [00:59:42] Neither. It was never an obstacle and we had no incidents of denigration or racism. But neither has it facilitated us. This is on a business level. On a social and personal level, being Italian here in the country they are a little more wary, but it doesn't affect me because I'm from Veneto so it's a similar place.

Francesco M. [01:00:23] If sure.

I4 [01:00:25] They are almost beginners here about it. Maybe the older people, but I don't give a damn.

Francesco M. [01:00:45] In my opinion there is a substantial difference: you are England, so the language, English is not a problem. I, on the other hand, am in Germany, and for me, if you ask me what is the most difficult thing, it is undoubtedly the language. I came here and I didn't know any German. I mean now it's been a year, I'm learning it, however the language for me is and has been a big barrier, whereas maybe for you well or badly, a minimum of English everybody knows. Then I would definitely have improved it with your experience, however, everybody should know it at this point in history.

But though maybe there could be some other difficulties not related to the language, some distrust rather than anything else. But that from what you told me, though, was never a deal-breaker for you as a business, as a company.

I4 [01:01:43] No, no.

Francesco M. [01:01:45] Okay, well this is a good thing.

I4 [01:01:47] I never had a particular episode, in fact. Normality, as if I were English.

Francesco M. [01:02:03] Sure, you know in my opinion...

I4 [01:02:07] When the covid story came out, the message passed in Italy that Italians were viewed badly in England.

With a lot of people I talk to, the message came through that we were in a bad way in Italy, and so at that time Italians were seen as anointers. But I have never experienced anything like that.

I stay four days country and three days in London. So I spend a lot of time here anyway, and I've never had any such episode. And actually in Italy it seemed like they didn't even want us anymore, but it made me laugh. I live with an English lady at home, and she never gave me any such talk.

Francesco M. [01:03:72] Sure, I understand very well. Anyway, we had a good talk and I have a lot of interesting information. So I will conclude the recording.

Appendix 8: Transcript of interview 5Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] Okay. So, the first question I want to ask you is to learn a bit more about you. Of course, I can see your path on LinkedIn, but you know. What brought you to be where you are and your experience, study-wise, your work experience... a bit of everything. Just in general, to kick off our interview.

I5 [00:00:34] Okay. So, I'm French originally, so that's where I studied. I did a master's degree in Paris, in biotechnology engineering. Followed by another master in business. Already during my studies, I started a small project, basically a blog about the biotechnology industry there. When I graduated, in 2014, I was with one of my classmates on this project, and we decided to start a business out of this small student project. And that's when we decided to move to Germany, because of personal and professional reasons. And we moved to Berlin. One of the attractive points of Berlin was also the cost of living at the time, as it was very cheap and had foreign potential. It's not the case anymore, but it was true.

Francesco M. [00:02:01] I mean, I live in Stuttgart, which is very expensive. But I've seen a report on the average rents in Germany and I've seen that Berlin grew like 20% in one year only. It's insane.

I5 [00:02:13] It's huge. Every year was increasing very rapidly. But, in the beginning, it was very good. And in comparison to Paris, it was, you know, maybe half the price. So, yeah, we moved here, and also in terms of attractiveness, it was quite attractive for us. We were seeing really a lot of entrepreneurs going to Berlin, and many businesses with success stories. So, it was kind of exciting for us. So that was also part of the decision.

Francesco M. [00:03:00] Okay. Um, and what about your previous work experience before becoming an entrepreneur?

I5 [00:03:07] Um, okay. So, yeah, my work experience before...

Francesco M. [00:03:12] So my question is aimed at understanding if you always wanted to be an entrepreneur or if it's been the result of your experience.

I5 [00:03:24] Yeah. Okay, I see. I think it's been in me for a while, it's kind of my personality of wanting to start stuff and not necessarily work for someone else. However, before starting this company, I had no experience in entrepreneurship, I had professional experience through several internships. I also worked since I was 16, you know, every summer to make some money and stuff like this. So, I had a good idea of the professional environment, but no actual experience in starting your business.

Francesco M. [00:04:14] Okay. And coming more specifically to your current company, you work in the media, and biotech industry. And may I ask you about the job creation? How many people work in your company currently?

I5 [00:04:36] Yeah, okay. We created about ten jobs for our company. So, it's a small business and it's quite a niche. But we are major in biotech, it's very specific.

Francesco M. [00:05:00] And you are two founders?

I5 [00:05:04] Not anymore. My co-founder left in 2019.

Francesco M. [00:05:09] Yeah but you started together with this friend of yours, right? And he's also French, right?

I5 [00:05:18] Yeah. French but he also has a German passport.

Francesco M. [00:05:21] Okay. So he was with you in Paris and then you came to Berlin. I mean, you kind of explained already why you moved to Germany, but did you move to Berlin with the idea to create a company there, or did you move to Berlin because of the cost of living and the more opportunities? And then it happened that you created a company.

I5 [00:05:51] Yeah, it just happens that we created it in Berlin after we moved here. So, we first moved and for a few months we worked without an official structure, I know it's quite common. And when we realized, okay, now we need to make it official. So we checked all our options and making it in Berlin was actually one of the best options, even though I didn't speak German at this time. So, then we just reached out to different people, lawyers, accountants, etc. and we got a lot of advice, in English. So a strong point for Berlin is that you can get services in English. And that's how we

did it, I personally took care of all the administration, and again, I did it without speaking a word of German. But it was possible.

Francesco M. [00:07:01] Impressive. I moved to Germany one year ago and it's a different thing here. I think Berlin is more international than Stuttgart, here it's quite hard to do many things without knowing German. So I've been studying the language, but you know, coming from Italian and Spanish, I've also learned a little bit of French, so I have this neo-Latin background. German is like, oh, what's going on there? I have no idea.

I5 [00:07:26] Yes.

Francesco M. [00:07:27] But anyways, I totally understand what you mean. And so you moved to Berlin, but what was your prior experience with Germany? Just the fact that your co-founder was German, or did you have other experiences?

I5 [00:07:38] My girlfriend was German, from Stuttgart and now she's my wife, so it was a good choice.

Francesco M. [00:07:47] Again, I see myself because my girlfriend is German, from Dortmund. Okay. Okay. So that's of course, quite important. Good point, not just for personal reasons, but also, as my thesis is around facilitators, I think a partner is a facilitator in many things.

I5 [00:08:07] Exactly. The personal side was also very strong, of course. But as a facilitator for, like, even finding an apartment and stuff like this, she helped a lot. And stuff like this makes your life so much easier when you're starting your business. To have someone that knows things well.

Francesco M. [00:08:31] For sure. Even if you just want to move, without her helping me to find websites to look for houses and setting the criteria, I would have navigated into deep waters.

I5 [00:08:45] Yeah, exactly.

Francesco M. [00:08:46] And we will get to the facilitator right after. But I just wanted to understand, how would you describe your access to the ecosystem? The local entrepreneurial ecosystem and from a personal standpoint the ecosystem of Germany and Berlin?

I5 [00:09:13] Yeah. So maybe first, on the entrepreneurial side, it was easy because there are a lot of things going on. If you want to attend events you can do it almost every day. Everyone speaks English and you have a lot of experts also coming in the city to start a business. I don't know anymore if it's so active because in recent years I've been less active on this side. But when they. When we first came it was really easy. On the personal side, I would say it was the same. Like, the city was really international.

Francesco M. [00:10:00] Berlin is a bit of a black sheep.

I5 [00:10:03] Yeah, you have all the infrastructure, a lot of international people, and a lot of things to do. The only thing is that housing now is very difficult.

Francesco M. [00:10:20] Yeah, of course.

I5 [00:10:20] But apart from this, it's quite quick.

Francesco M. [00:10:25] Okay. And coming back to the facilitator, your girlfriend was one. You said you also reached out to lawyers and institutional figures. So, who were these people that helped you set up this activity? So my idea is that when you started right – in 2014-15?

I5 [00:10:53] 2014.

Francesco M. [00:10:54] 14. Okay. And so of course in the first phase of the startup, there's someone that helps you. Then you move to another topic and another need. So maybe your girlfriend could help you in the beginning and then she's like, "yeah, I don't know anything about legal", so you have to find someone else to help you. And for facilitator I mean, of course, someone that – as I specified in my message – does it without having any economic interest in doing it specifically. Because if say, you pay a consultant, then it's a service.

I5 [00:11:28] Yeah. So I would say the first facilitators were other entrepreneurs. Right away we knew a few people because, as a media, we were sometimes interviewing also founders of startups in biotech. We knew some of them in Berlin and one, in particular, helped us from the beginning because they hosted us in their office. From almost day one we had a small office, just one room but we were just three people, and it was very cheap, just a few hundred euros per month. And this connection was very important for us because we also had someone close to whom we could ask questions.

Francesco M. [00:12:28] Were all of you 3 foreigners? Besides your half-German co-founder.

I5 [00:12:37] Yes. We had an intern from France since the beginning. So, yeah, there was this connection, and it really helped us a lot because, even our lawyer, for instance, we got in touch with our lawyer through them. And then when you make contacts like this and you have someone and you need a service, you can ask around for recommendations.

Francesco M. [00:13:15] So you found a lawyer through these entrepreneurs... and then it starts to be like a snowball effect.

I5 [00:13:23] Yeah, exactly.

Francesco M. [00:13:24] So in the beginning, what you needed – well, probably your girlfriend played a role in a more personal level than professional.

I5 [00:13:32] Yeah. Not professionally. Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:13:34] No, but I think finding a house, understanding what documents you have to sign, go to the town hall... It's not that easy. And then, did this figure of of a facilitator... actually, first of all, how did you meet these entrepreneurs?

I5 [00:14:05] We knew them from before we moved to Berlin, actually.

Francesco M. [00:14:08] And before you thought about starting a company?

I5 [00:14:14] Not really. We met them through the first project we started as students, and then we reached out again when we moved to Berlin and they offered us one room in their office. So that was also really helping.

And maybe another thing I have to mention is, that Berlin Partners which is a sort of promotion/economical agency of the city helped us also a bit in the beginning to get an idea of what we needed to do?

Francesco M. [00:15:04] Sorry, I misunderstood. Is it like an official body of the city that helps entrepreneurs?

I5 [00:15:11] The body of the city that is promoting the attractiveness of the ecosystems.

Francesco M. [00:15:18] You know, I talked recently with another entrepreneur that is located in Austria. And she just told me how Austria, and Vienna in particular, is trying to create this tech hub as well as in other capitals in Europe. So there are a lot of incentives in Austria and a lot of help from the government itself, even by putting an advisor on your side that helps you. So it's interesting to know that there is also something like this in Germany.

I5 [00:15:49] Yes, I think you have this in every city big city in Germany. In Berlin they are quite good and present in the industry, they do a lot of events, and they really help even with relocation and stuff like this. So, it was also some help in the beginning to get a clearer idea of which institutions to know and what to do to create a business etc....

Francesco M. [00:16:22] Did they assign a person specifically in charge of helping you?

I5 [00:16:26] Like an account manager or something.

Francesco M. [00:16:29] And it was for free?

I5 [00:16:31] Yeah, it was for free.

Francesco M. [00:16:32] Okay. And then did this facilitator figure change after some time? Did you have to rely on someone else?

I5 [00:16:45] Yeah, I would say at some point our investors became the facilitators. So in 2016, we raised some money. And really, once we had investors, they started helping us a lot when we needed it. So, I would say that the change was at that point. As soon as we got investors.

Francesco M. [00:17:16] And what was, let's call it the trigger point, besides maybe moving to another office, that led you to say, "Okay, these previous people that helped us are not that necessary anymore"?

I5 [00:17:35] We kept a bit of everything, especially the entrepreneurs in our network. Some of them I still speak to regularly. It's just that there was another layer of facilitators, I think, coming from the investors.

Francesco M. [00:17:53] Okay.

I5 [00:17:54] And because they started to know the business quite well, they had access to the data and all, so it became a more privileged relationship and some part of the business belonged to them.

Francesco M. [00:18:19] No, of course. Investors are a bit of a sticky topic for my thesis. I have to see how to categorize them because a lot of people say this, but it doesn't fit the figure of not being involved in the risk and reward of the company.

I5 [00:18:37] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:18:37] But it's still very interesting to understand that for many people, investors were actively involved in the development of the company. They didn't just passively invest. And I think that's common for many angel investors especially, to invest in something they're interested in and want to see the business grow. They don't just put their money in stocks and leave it there.

I5 [00:19:04] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:19:05] Okay. And – even though I can kind of understand what your answer to this question will be based on what you said – but the role of these facilitators, especially the entrepreneurs that did it more for friendship or common interest in seeing themselves some years back... How determinant do you think they have been in the success of your company? And do you think you could have done

without them specifically? Because I believe, especially as an entrepreneur, you said you guys were very motivated and so you probably would have found someone else or something else. But do you think it would have been possible to access Germany and the Berlin ecosystem without these people?

I5 [00:20:03] Mhm. Yes. But very slowly and maybe with more mistakes. I think it's always possible.

Francesco M. [00:20:11] I think so too.

I5 [00:20:13] But I think the speed and the mistakes we made were reduced.

Francesco M. [00:20:20] So it's been an advantage, a kickstart to your venture. I also think as an entrepreneur, if you get stopped by bureaucracy or language or something, probably you're not suitable to be an entrepreneur. At a certain point you will find greater challenges.

I5 [00:20:45] You're right. If you see those issues as a deal breaker, you will not make a successful business.

Francesco M. [00:20:51] Exactly what I mean. When you have to find investors and make your first sales, if you're not willing to go a big step forward it is a problem. And how do you think that your foreignness relates to your reliance and in the importance of the help you received from these people? Do you think that if you started your business in France, you would have needed someone as much or not?

I5 [00:21:30] Not as much. That's true. I think that being a foreigner forced me to reach out.

Francesco M. [00:21:40] Yeah, of course. And maybe I would imagine that even for networking purposes, probably your network was not that developed when you moved here.

I5 [00:21:52] Yeah. So, I mean, we had some network that was not so developed and it was still mostly developed in France, actually. So, we also had to develop new networks in Germany.

Francesco M. [00:22:11] And – this wasn't my list of questions – but I'm just interested in it. Did you rely on your French network and did you go back and used some of the resources you had there?

I5 [00:22:20] Yes. A lot, actually. Both for the media, and for looking for investors, for instance, some investors who were from our French network. So, yeah, it was also used, of course.

Francesco M. [00:22:40] So you leveraged it a bit, you never stopped your connection to France. Okay, that's interesting.

And last question. I think there's no clear answer to this, as think both things are true at the same time. So do you think that being a foreigner was more of a benefit or a challenge in terms of creating a company in another country? How do the investors and business partner partners perceive it? Do you think it's more of a strength or weakness from this point of view?

I5 [00:23:28] No, I think it's both. I think that Berlin also played a role because in another city, it might have been more of a challenge. But because Berlin is so international, it was kind of neutral. But there are advantages and drawbacks, I think. You need to be open because you know you're coming somewhere you don't know and you need to open your awareness, your mind to other people, to other ways or other cultures.

That's very positive for being an entrepreneur and of course a bit of negative because it's always more challenging, like having to deal with a different administration system. Things you don't understand. We lost a lot of time, for instance, with the health insurance. Really a crazy amount of time, because we went into private health insurance, and they decided to sue us because they didn't want us to be in the private system. So that took, I don't know, several years.

Francesco M. [00:24:53] But I know that now is difficult to get into the private system. Right. I mean, I still have EHIC insurance because I'm a student. Yeah, but I will have to change soon.

I5 [00:25:03] Um, yeah, basically when we started was the year when they decided to stop all the entrepreneurs to go into private systems and we were the target. So yeah, we lost time, and a bit of money of course, because of this. But yeah. Then was okay.

Francesco M. [00:25:26] And two more things are: How did you find investors? Besides in France, if you have German investors, how did you meet them?

I5 [00:25:47] Yeah. We have some German ones.

Francesco M. [00:25:49] Did you meet them by searching independently or...

I5 [00:25:53] Of course.

Francesco M. [00:25:54] ... thanks to your facilitators and entrepreneurial network?

I5 [00:25:59] So it's both. I believe that to raise money, you need facilitators, that's for sure. So you usually rely on a middleman. And most of them for us were other entrepreneurs.

Francesco M. [00:26:19] Okay.

I5 [00:26:20] So that's really important for raising money as new business.

Francesco M. [00:26:24] And do you think that from an investor point of view, German entrepreneurs have an advantage over you?

I5 [00:26:38] What do you mean?

Francesco M. [00:26:39] Do you think investors are more prone to investing in a German-owned business?

I5 [00:26:43] Oh, yes, yes, it's the case.

Francesco M. [00:26:48] And that's why you need the middleman?

I5 [00:26:52] Mm. I think that's more because, especially with business angels, it's more related to tax incentives and things like this. They are more prone to invest in German entities because they've got some advantages. It's the same in France.

Francesco M. [00:27:14] Mm hmm.

I5 [00:27:15] But in the end we managed to have investors from France, Germany, and even Switzerland. So, I think you can make it happen is if people really believe in your business.

Francesco M. [00:27:28] Of course. Okay. I think we can conclude our talk. I have a lot of good information.

Appendix 9: Transcript of interview 6

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] Maybe you could start with some information about yourself, obviously something I already know through LinkedIn, however about your academic and career path. What led you to be where you are? In Barcelona?

I6 [00:00:18] Yes we are in Barcelona.

Francesco M. [00:00:19] Great. To start, tell me about yourself.

I6 [00:00:23] So I finished my bachelor's degree at Tor Vergata, and I tried to hurry through the pandemic by taking as many exams as possible, so that I could do as many things as possible then in my third year. In the meantime I also had some work experience at the university in the marketing part of social networks. To start doing something always in the pandemic period. And then in my third year I left for Erasmus. I did my Erasmus in Leuven in Belgium and I was already planning to work on [name], only I hadn't had a chance to meet the right people. And it was still an idea, let's say. There was a willingness to get started, though. Before I left for Leuven I met [name] and who was then the girl I started working with on [name]. Let's say that having the right people by your side then leads you to choose the right paths, right? So probably if I hadn't met her, [name] wouldn't have been there either. And so after this Erasmus in Belgium, I got a job right away in a multinational company here Spain, and I left for Barcelona, where I worked at [name], just to name it-they make electric car chargers, and also the other girl, [name], got a job here in another separate company, in education.

Francesco M. [00:02:27] And was this random or intentional?

I6 [00:02:29] It was quite a random thing. Let's say so then we came to work but personally, from my point of view I was comfortable with the company however it was

not the role I wanted to do. I didn't like it and it wasn't challenging enough, especially the entry positions.

Francesco M. [00:02:54] But not challenging enough the role you were doing or working in a multinational company or otherwise in a company other than your own?

I6 [00:03:02] Let's say both, as an entry position I was in sales. Although it's a role that helps you on many aspects, like learning how to speak, having more confidence in yourself, accepting no's, which are very important anyway, it wasn't a job, fitting my personality. So I didn't feel fulfilled. I was not coming home very happy with the days. Also because then I also had another idea in my mind and I had already shared it with [name]. So we actually already wanted to work on it and so at some point, after a few months, after five months, we decided to start working on [name] and we left our jobs.

Francesco M. [00:03:50] But then, wait a minute. Before you switched to [name] - was your motivation for becoming an entrepreneur related to this idea that you had, or did you always want to do something on your own?

I6 [00:04:10] No let's say I always wanted to. [name] was not the first idea I had. I had another one a long time before, however, it never saw the light of day. Also, I think it's also the character component. It was actually something I enjoyed doing, creating ideas and devoting myself to it. I hadn't had the opportunity before, probably also because of the experiences I had, because of the kind of life I had, I didn't even think it was so feasible. I didn't even think that any person could start, I saw it more as a dream at first. Then, I realized, even seeing the other work realities, that it was what I wanted to do and what I was waiting for. To tell you, when I came back from work, I was waiting for the evening to work on it. Of course, I was looking forward to it, there was no going to sleep to work on it. You understand that what your direction is the moment you know how you prefer to spend your time. Then, while I was at work I started to dedicate myself to it as soon as I had 10 free minutes, anytime. Also because then it is the dedication that makes you get on with what you do.

Francesco M. [00:05:29] So in the meantime I'll tell you that I've had a look at your site. Obviously you are still in pre-launch, however the idea seems good to me because I was also an Erasmus student and still am in a way. In my opinion especially for exchange students, it seems like a very good opportunity. Then in general, it seems to me that it has different functionality your app or your website, right?

I6 [00:06:00] It was actually an MVP until recently. Today we should finally get the application online, and yes, it's a multifunctional platform. Let's say it's not dedicated solely to students who are doing Erasmus or internships, it's dedicated a little bit to all students, whether it's high school students or college students or high school students who are looking for a university and want to ask for information. They have a direct channel to do that. Same thing for students at the university itself, who maybe want to sell information about masters, Erasmus, or Internships. In addition to this aspect, that is, the exchange of information that therefore allowed us to create as a basic social app, we developed many other features that we considered important for university life, which is not just studying and asking for information. In fact, we included virtual study rooms where students can study in groups. That can be motivating. We also included a map of students' most popular places, for example: in Erasmus, you don't know a place? Open the map of places that other students have shared with a description to let you know if it is a good place for students.

Francesco M. [00:07:10] It works like a community right?

I6 [00:07:13] Let's say that basically it works as a community for students. But we decided to provide different tools that could go beyond communities, though:

Francesco M. [00:07:26] Excuse me for a moment.

I6 [00:07:28] Sure.

Francesco M. [00:07:37] Here I am. It seems to me it works like, I don't know if you're familiar with Waze, the traffic app. It's based on a basic functionality, and then users report certain things. So it seems like the same thing to me, since I think it's hard for you to find out what are the most popular places in all the cities. For example, in Brussels if you've never been there. But maybe if someone starts to report you create a map, though. Does it work like that?

I6 [00:08:16] Let's say actually I'd like to show you the app, but unfortunately it's not available yet.

Basically the basic function is being able to connect with other students and create posts. In addition to that, it is also open to the universities themselves and student associations, not just the student. It is very open to the university reality, because we want to be the hub of university education. Over time we would like to get to be that, so we have incorporated all aspects of university life. There's a marketplace where

you can sell books that you don't use anymore, or you want to make available your notes, your notes, defining your university and also the course of study and the subject of the document, making it available to everyone or for a fee. Then there is a function that is instead related to another university aspect, which is events. So you can either create an event for which you are a spokesperson, for which you are a representative or organizer, or a student event for which you can also sell tickets through the platform. Then there's also this feature of sharing the busiest places in a city, where a lot of students are at that time, sharing the location because you want to let others know that this place is busy as well. You can do that and other users can see it and decide to go. It's simply a way to also encourage interaction between different students, even if they are from different universities. And then there is also another feature, which are precisely those study rooms. So studying together, creating a group video call, being able to study and simply people can participate. It doesn't have to be closed.

Francesco M. [00:10:11] Well, when you launch it I will be more than happy to be a user because I find a lot of interesting things. Anyway, back to you, how come you decided to stay in Barcelona and open your business there?

I6 [00:10:34] Because there is a very good environment for start-ups in Barcelona. Let's say that Barcelona also wants a little bit to become the hub for start-ups in Spain; so both tax-wise and policy-wise, the situation for start-ups is very facilitated.

Francesco M. [00:10:51] Okay.

I6 [00:10:52] So now another law has been passed that further reduces star taxation on start-ups. So it was not convenient for us to open in Italy.

Francesco M. [00:11:02] Absolutely. And what about your experience in Spain, and in Barcelona, apart from the work activity that you told me about? Did you know anything before or did you come here to do the internship and it was the first time?

I6 [00:11:17] That's right, it was the first time. We came here for these business opportunities and then we decided to shift our focus to something else, because we saw a perfect environment, full of accelerators, incubators, etc. So the opportunities are many.

Francesco M. [00:11:30] Sure, those are more than valid reasons, probably the most important things. What about your access to the local ecosystem? You came to the

working world in Barcelona through an internship that you found from Italy. Right? But then of course you decided to embark on this new adventure. Was it difficult to find the contacts, the people willing to help you, to find out the information?

For example, if I were to find out which accelerators can help me, I have friends who work in this world and can give me advice. What has it been like for you?

I6 [00:12:21] Definitely we have learned and that only by making mistakes do you get to the right path. Especially in this field where really you have so much information but you don't have it at the same time, and so many people are willing to help you, but in fact often there is not really person. At first we did things a little bit on our own, we got help to make a business plan because we didn't know how to go about it, where to put the first steps, what were the right things to do. Slowly working on the MVP, on our website, we found an incubator that we relied on in the initial phase, but it turned out to be totally unsuccessful, because of some wrong information that they gave us. So it wasn't because we hadn't tried hard enough, but precisely because we had been given the wrong information by them. As a result, I decided to leave the incubator without leaving any advances, since whenever incubators and accelerators require a percentage or however there are always conditions. We need to leave and work with a new accelerator that we are still working with. We got there after months, though. We lost two months for one reason and other months for another; so, it was definitely a difficult path if you don't know the ecosystem.

Francesco M. [00:13:50] Of course, finding the right path and the right square is definitely not easy. However, were you able to settle in and be able to find the first contacts right away or was it difficult?

I6 [00:14:06] No, not right away. It was difficult, it definitely took us a while. Then again, because there are so many possibilities, the difficult part is not finding the people, in this case even the accelerators or incubators, or whatever actor you are looking for. The difficulty is finding the right ones for your startup.

Francesco M. [00:14:28] Okay, and was the language a barrier or not?

I6 [00:14:33] Yes, and still is, [name] fortunately is better at speaking Spanish than I am. In fact less so. But yes, the language barrier we definitely felt it.

Francesco M. [00:14:48] Okay.

I6 [00:14:49] It's still worth it though. This I have to say.

Francesco M. [00:14:53] Absolutely after talking to another founder I was told that anyway if you do as an entrepreneur you get stopped by the language, bureaucratic system and so on, it means you're probably not cut out to be the right entrepreneur. If you have an idea, as you say, you can absolutely go this route. I don't think they are such insurmountable barriers.

I6 [00:15:22] No, no, absolutely not. While in my opinion the key part of the path is really motivation and grit more than experience... although certainly experience helps. And knowledge in this field certainly helps so much. But you're right, grit and motivation in doing things.

Francesco M. [00:15:45] You told me that you are with an accelerator. Let's say the purpose of my thesis, my research question, is to understand the role of possible facilitators, of people who can help a foreign entrepreneur in the first steps. But also in later stages. You guys haven't gotten to later stages yet, so let's talk about the beginning, getting around the local environment and finding contacts. Let's say accelerator and incubators I don't consider them, but simply because, as you also said, they ask for money in return, it's a transaction. Or even a possible investor is not really to be considered a facilitator, because they take some of the business risk. I put in my own money and receive a percentage of equity or any revenues that you generate. So has there been a figure who has helped you in any aspect of your venture?

I6 [00:16:52] Actually they are more and more related to the accelerator. So before that no, we did everything. And now, for example, although it's not the topic of your thesis, through the accelerator we have a mentor.

Francesco M. [00:17:08] But if I don't find the answer I'm looking for, that's okay. That is, I have to confirm or invalidate my research question.

I6 [00:17:14] Okay okay. No, actually there was no external people. Certainly we, working with the accelerator, we have people who help us. They can be advisors that we can talk to and they are part of the accelerator. They give us tot. hours per month.

Francesco M. [00:17:36] But explain to me how this accelerator works. Did you pay a participation fee?

I6 [00:17:41] No, nothing, no payment of equity. We simply have a deadline to achieve certain goals, and after that, through a pact made with the partners, they take a share of equity. So there is no payment, only percentage in this case.

Francesco M. [00:17:58] But that depends right? Different observers have different policies and demands.

I6 [00:18:03] That's right. So they provide us with a mentor who has experience in our field. And then we also have a figure who does the growth part of it just, so they give us advice. We have weekly meetings to discuss how it's going, figure out how to move forward. So really supportive, especially abroad.

Francesco M. [00:18:23] Sure.

I6 [00:18:24] Relying on an accelerator is not so bad.

Francesco M. [00:18:27] Not in fact it can be very positive, however, you have to find the right one. Not necessarily every accelerator can help your specific case.

I6 [00:18:37] That's right.

Francesco M. [00:18:37] Let's say I've always been around the start-up studio and accelerator world a little bit. I mean in my opinion now there is this boom in popularity, but so many people don't really know what they are doing, there are the good ones and then there are the ones that don't have any kind of experience. But still, how did you find it? Through the Internet or through contacts?

I6 [00:19:07] Through contacts, we knew that there was this accelerator because of one person, so we sent application so we could talk to them.

Francesco M. [00:19:17] And who is this person?

I6 [00:19:22] He was the mentor who had given us the other accelerator. Because we had told him about our problems and so we wanted to get away from them. And he explained to us that there are various other realities -- because they had all realized that that accelerator had made a mistake with us. So it was really a direct problem with them and so they also recommended another reality to us.

Francesco M. [00:19:49] Okay, this is an interesting thing -- and so this person helped you and helped you find this new reality. You were telling me earlier that someone helped you develop the business plan?

I6 [00:20:04] Yes, at first yes. But look it was a huge mistake there too. We had to redo it from scratch because it was so badly done. Never rely on having someone else write it.

Francesco M. [00:20:20] And who did you have write it?

I6 [00:20:21] To a business plan agency, for a fee. We decided to do it because anyway an important document has to be done in a certain way, it has to be presented to investors, to whoever then works with us. And we were not able to write it perfectly. Especially the financial part is very complex. And above all there is also the problem of language. So we decided to rely on someone, but it was better that we didn't, because in the end we had to redo it from scratch ourselves, including the financial part.

Francesco M. [00:20:56] Sure. We did, through the university, a project where we had to develop a start-up. And then we had an accelerator who listened and corrected our business plan. So I know how the path is structured, not like you clearly, because it was always a simulation for us anyway. Then there was the possibility to continue if we were interested. But, I mean, it's not easy. The financial part is very tough, in my opinion. Also because then let's say stakeholders sift through it down to the smallest detail. If someone wants to invest in you they have to know everything and why everything is that way.

I6 [00:21:31] Five-year projections when you don't even know if you're going to make the year. I still have to figure them out for years. But whatever.

Francesco M. [00:21:41] Yeah sure, you navigate uncertainty, let's call it that. Sorry for speaking in English, but I did all my studies in English so everything the business world comes naturally to me in English.

I6 [00:21:59] Don't worry, I also did my bachelor's degree in English.

Francesco M. [00:22:02] There, so we are one and the same boat. And by the way, even when you arrived in Barcelona and you had the idea of quitting your job and

trying to do something else. Was there no local contact that helped you in any way? That may not be the answer.

I6 [00:22:31] I say no, because in the beginning you are nobody, finding someone who has the will to help you is difficult.

Francesco M. [00:22:37] He could also be a friend.

I6 [00:22:38] Friends who supported us from a distance yes, definitely family as well. But other than that no, no local friends.

Francesco M. [00:22:48] And the reason why do you think it did not serve you? Because generally entrepreneurs rely especially when they go to a different environment, but not only as an entrepreneur, but also as a person. If I move to another country, maybe a friend helps me in figuring out what I have to do to go to the office, to the municipality, to declare domicile, etc., etc. So generally this figure of a person or a university professor who takes your project to heart and gives you advice is quite recurrent in the experiences of foreign entrepreneurs. It is not necessary though, and rightly so, that is what I try to find.

I6 [00:23:50] Yes, and that was not our case. We had to deal with it on our own.

Francesco M. [00:23:54] But the reason why, do you think you didn't need it?

I6 [00:23:58] In my opinion because we didn't have the right contacts in the beginning. Although we were working in two companies, it's not that we established such a relationship, then it depends. Both in my opinion on how much time you spend there, anyway we had just arrived and we didn't have that much time, and also from the environments, even as much as we were part of multinational companies, we didn't have colleagues who were experts in the startup world, or particularly interested.

Francesco M. [00:24:35] Absolutely.

I6 [00:24:37] Also because maybe I'm a do-it-yourself kind of person. So maybe that's also why we relied more on each other than on other people.

Francesco M. [00:24:46] But already the fact that you told me that maybe also because of lack of contacts... In my opinion anyway you should have done things on

your own, and that is absolutely a very positive quality to have. But you also told me, though, that you tried several accelerators, that you outsourced the business plan to an agency... Maybe a local person could have directed you to the right contacts and avoided the unsuccessful attempts.

I6 [00:25:15] I tell you, we relied only on Google reviews in the absence of a facilitator.

Francesco M. [00:25:20] Sure, sure, but maybe it could have helped to have had a reliable figure.

I6 [00:25:26] But I tell you in the beginning we had some internal problems, initially we were 3 now we are 2. There was also another guy who stayed in Italy, however, this collaboration didn't work out. This was the first case, and from there on every time we decided to accept someone's help it was unsuccessful. That is also why we decided to do things ourselves. Even, for example, the product development we did not commission someone outside, we did it ourselves.

Francesco M. [00:26:07] Anyway, let's say it's from your experience. At one point, as you said, you tried different things, you failed rightly, because this is the path of an entrepreneur.

I6 [00:26:17] But this is normal. In fact, we fell down and then rolled up our sleeves.

Francesco M. [00:26:22] Okay? And so what do you think were the most difficult aspects of doing these things on your own? What was the most difficult thing to do on your own, without the right contact? And what might have been the easiest, having someone who could help you?

I6 [00:26:49] Definitely the absence of a guide who knew the environment, who had experience, who was really inside the project. In the beginning we missed it so much, because at the beginning first of all we had no idea how to move. In my opinion, when you start having someone to tell you what's best to do because they've already had experience, that's important.

Francesco M. [00:27:12] Okay, but move in developing the idea, right?

I6 [00:27:16] Yes in moving in this environment, in getting started and figuring out the first steps to take. As much as you may rely on the Internet or things you've heard, or

things you read, still being in touch with someone who can mentor you, who has had first-hand experience, who knows the environment, who is interested in the start-up, whatever the reason, and who can help you in the development, is very important. And we've missed that so much, and that's probably why we've often gone down the wrong path.

Kind of like a parent or a mentor. Now we have it, however, all the first few months we would have really needed it.

Francesco M. [00:27:58] You found it, by the way. You did a good job, in my opinion.

I6 [00:28:03] Yes yes, for goodness sake. But it would have been convenient to have had a figure like that when we took our first steps.

Francesco M. [00:28:08] Sure. And then I can say a little bit of luck is always needed. Maybe you arrive in Barcelona and the first day you meet a person who knows everything about this world randomly. So let's say that a good level of luck is there in the stories of all successful entrepreneurs.

I6 [00:28:30] Sure. And if you don't have it you build it.

Francesco M. [00:28:33] That's right. Exactly. But then sometimes it happens without looking for it.

I6 [00:28:38] For now anyway we made a mistake, but then we are put back on the right path, which is what matters right? To have had someone to give us some guidance in the beginning though, especially in a country you don't know, would have been the best thing.

Francesco M. [00:28:51] And the fact that the fact that you came from a different background, as foreigners -- you said that this figure would be important. But how related is that to the fact that you were foreigners? Or would it have been important in Italy as well?

I6 [00:29:33] Then certainly it would have been important in Italy as well. But while anyway if you're in your own country it's easier anyway, because you master the language, you know more people, so one way or another to someone in the environment sooner or later you get there. In a foreign country, at least if you don't just talk to

passersby on the street, or you really try to be there and look for them, it's not like guidance is raining down on you from heaven.

Whereas for an entrepreneur working abroad in my opinion it is just critical, much more so for those who stay in their own country. Going to university also helps, as many universities help in this path. Not all of them because mine for example doesn't, however, the argument applies.

Francesco M. [00:30:20] Sure, but they help you meet people anyway. They are places to network.

I6 [00:30:24] Sure. For example, in Rome, for example, there is Luiss, with a huge program for start-ups that lasts five months every year. And already from that you get a good experience and you meet people who can help you. Whereas abroad it is not like that, you don't have that kind of support especially if you are young.

Francesco M. [00:30:46] Yes absolutely, I agree. I'll ask you a couple more things and let you go, that I'm already holding you too much.

I6 [00:30:55] No then can I tell you another thing? Which is another experience we had here. We initially, because in Italy there are often different realities that a little bit support start-ups, which we were aware of as Italians. Even here in Spain they exist, for example the Ayuntamiento of Barcelona, which controls a little bit all aspects of Barcelona, including the start-up area. They have a public accelerator and different aspects for start-ups, even funding. But the not mastering the language, the lack of a guide that could direct us even all these opportunities that are open even at the state level, which are many anyway, was felt. So you who are not local and have no knowledge of the environment ask yourself, but what should I choose here? Even in that sense, certainly the public aid is there. But without guidance to guide you to choose well, you end up not choosing in the end.

Francesco M. [00:31:54] Absolutely I agree. I live in Germany and I started studying German a year ago and certain things, even doing the house contract, like with Spanish you translate it but the bureaucratic and legal terms are difficult.

I6 [00:32:14] Yes although German is much more complex in my opinion. Spanish is similar to Italian.

Francesco M. [00:32:18] It is more complex because we are Italian. But if you were not Italian and you were Danish, Spanish would be completely incomprehensible. And so aside from all these difficulties though, has your being a foreigner also been or still is a strength in some respects or not?

In the sense if I go abroad, come to Germany and want to open a start-up, there are some areas and some fields where being Italian can be a strength, but not all. So I ask, for what you do, in your opinion, even for the accelerator, for possible investors, could it be a strength that you are Italian? Or is it really a difficulty and if you were Spanish it would be easier?

I6 [00:33:23] If we were Spanish it would be easier, for sure. The language barrier, however, is there. As much as one can speak English, the moment we have to speak Spanish the barrier is there. There are definitely positive aspects, though. For example, we have Italy and Spain as our first market. So although we have a language disadvantage, we have knowledge of two different markets; therefore, we have been able to get to know both markets and understand how to deal with both of them. We have relationships with some entities in one country and others in the other. So we carry on two different aspects at the same time. I think this is a good thing.

Francesco M. [00:34:07] Certainly, it gives you diversity.

I6 [00:34:10] Although anyway Italy and Spain are very similar to each other. For example, if you were in Germany you would have in my opinion knowledge of two totally different realities, that of Southern European countries and Northern European countries, for example. So in my opinion this aspect facilitates a lot.

Francesco M. [00:34:28] Sure, definitely. Do you still rely on the resources that you had in Italy, both in terms of contacts and anything else, or not? Do you have frequent contact with Italy or not?

I6 [00:34:44] Yes, of course. Since we are in the field of higher, university and higher education, it is important to maintain relationships both with universities and schools in Italy and with various entities here. For example, we talked to a chain of student residences that was expanding in Italy as well. So to say yes, we maintain relationships with Italy as in Spain. So maintaining relationships with both countries and moving on two fronts is a good thing.

Francesco M. [00:35:17] Sure, sure. Well, let's say I asked you everything and I have a lot of interesting information, so I can close the recording now.

Appendix 10: Transcript of interview 7

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] So my first question is just a general question about yourself. I mean, of course, I saw and followed a bit of your path, academic and professional path through LinkedIn, but just a little bit about you and who you are. What's your previous path, academic and professional and as a person?

I7 [00:00:25] Perfect. I'm not sure your recording is on unless because usually on Zoom.

Francesco M. [00:00:30] I'm recording.

I7 [00:00:30] It is recording. I'm creating a voice memo. I'm not recording the screen.

I7 [00:00:35] Ah ok good, just wanted to check. Ok so perfect, a little bit starting about my background, as you were asking. So, I have a business background. I graduated in Paris I should say that was over ten years ago. In general business management specializing in international business with a degree in CEMS. So, I spent a little bit of time in London as well at LSE. And from there on, I started off in consulting and that was in 2011. So, post-2008 crisis. It wasn't very exciting, it was a strategy consulting field back in the day. So, after six months, I actually found another opportunity which was to join [name]. So, [name] back in the days in 2011, I think, were the most glorious years, were it was the largest incubator.

Francesco M. [00:01:38] I think is a really cool company and they've been leaders in this, in this field for sure. Incubator field.

I7 [00:01:45] Yeah! So, I found it really interesting to go join this program, which was a venture development program. The idea was to basically be rotated across ventures. So, they have ventures across the globe and really focusing on two e-commerce models very similar to Amazon and Sorrento and launching them in basically different countries. The idea was to use young talent and efforts to build businesses fast and with a rotation the idea was to basically share learnings and be able to reinvent the wheel. So, with Rocket, I had the chance to build up three ventures. So, the first one was in Vietnam, and that was a fashion venture. And there I focused on online

marketing. So, building up the whole online marketing team, the strategy, and the execution. And then I went to Egypt where it was a completely different focus there. I actually built up the whole fashion assortment. So, that was a purchasing role where basically it was up to me to build up the whole SKU assortment, of what we were actually going to sell. From 0 to 15000 SKUs in three months. So that meant obviously hiring a team, training a team in this sales and purchasing department and to find suppliers, negotiating suppliers, and onboarding them. So, a completely different venture there. There we started really from scratch, in Vietnam it was already a little bit later stage so already six months in and. The third one was really super entrepreneurial too, to build up the whole..

Francesco M. [00:03:41] I'm losing you a little bit now.

I7 [00:03:44] Sorry, I saw you speaking. I think you're muted. Maybe.

Francesco M. [00:03:48] I was losing you a little bit. I don't know if it's your connection or. But now it's back. Can you hear me?

I7 [00:03:57] Yeah. Should I repeat a certain part or?

Francesco M. [00:03:59] Um, I think it was just a small detail about this past sentence you said.

I7 [00:04:09] I think it was around basically being very entrepreneurial, that we built the company being for, let's say, leads from 0 to 100 employees in three months and so very quick startup growth there. And then I had the opportunity to move further around the globe. So, I went to Colombia where I joined the Amazon model, and there it was really focusing on a later stage startup about building, optimizing everything that was customer experience related, so everything that's [name] and a lot related with processes such as, for example, the reverse logistics which was creating basically returns, creating a lot of unhappiness in the customer experience. So very different experiences. But I think this was something that with these three ventures and opportunities in a very short time, allowed me to basically build a company across three different fields: marketing, purchasing, and customer success/customer experience. A lot also with operations, which I really enjoyed. From there on for reasons of geographical location, I really wanted to stay in Latin America. I decided to join [name], which is the leader in developing markets for C to C classifieds. So basically, the eBay model but for developing markets, so basically everywhere where eBay is not. And

there it was also in a way an entrepreneurial journey because the company was a very big corporation, that was definitely not the startup part, but we actually had the chance to build a “mini-startup” within the corporation, which was focusing on a completely new business objective of gathering customer data. And so, a really interesting big data project. We had millions of users across the globe with [name] and the idea was to basically build a structure and toolset to be able to gather, process, and use the customer data. So, this was more on the product ownership side of overseeing and working in collaboration together with the data science team and the developers to build this out and then the implementation of actually rolling it out in these different markets. But what I really enjoyed once again as being this kind of small self-sufficient team within this large corporate.

And then on a personal level, as you asked personal as well. Oh, yeah. Before that, I actually, having left [name], went into freelancing, which was yet another step towards the entrepreneurial journey, to actually work on these customer lifecycle topics, but for external clients. And there I was very fortunate to work with very different lines from e-commerce companies, to the largest cement players, because basically everybody has customers and everybody has data that they want to use. And on a personal note, my son was born, and then the pandemic hit, so it wasn't a great moment to go back to freelancing right away. And so, for that reason, with the limited time, I actually thought it would be an interesting idea to work on my own startup because in the beginning, I could manage a little bit my time, and decide at which speed I can be going before the little one goes to daycare. So that's how the whole [name] journey started, with on-and-off prototyping during the maternity leave. And then once the little one was in kindergarten, that's two years ago now, actually working full time on [name]. So, the idea behind [name] is really to be part of redefining the future of workspaces. The pandemic has really created a huge disruption in what the office really means. And yet remote working is not a solution, a lot of employers see the importance for employer branding of having people together in a physical space to create this socialization and collaboration, which is very difficult to get in a remote setup, as they have tried over the last two years. And with [name] what we aim to do is to bring a little bit more well-being by creating these private spaces for hybrid work, which is in the form of these boots and meeting pods. And we are highly focused on ergonomics, which is also a very important topic. We don't just want to work in quiet spaces, we want to work in comfortable spaces. We also really work on developing what's inside the box as compared to many competitors which focus on what's just the box.

That's a little bit of my journey. And I'm a solo founder. My husband supported me in the beginning, but just on the prototyping as a sparring partner. He has his own company, he is an entrepreneur. And I've done this solo founder journey and I work with a hybrid team, which is a mix of freelancers, and I have a few. Well, now I had to let go, but just for misfit reasons, they're a smaller internal team and then a mix of freelancers as well. And of course, the production team, which is in Lithuania.

Francesco M. [00:10:08] Okay. Okay. And the production is outsourced or is it your property?

I7 [00:10:18] Yes, yes. For now, it's on a flexible model. So, we work with production partners and this allows us to have the flexibility of, as we grow, choosing different partners. Because when you start off, it's very difficult to go into the large industrial producers with small quantities, and because we really wanted to iterate the product, we, therefore, chose to do it this way, so that we can actually produce in small batches and be able to optimize the product as we get feedback from the market. So flexibility was very important to us.

Francesco M. [00:10:54] And your company is located in Berlin, right?

I7 [00:10:58] Exactly.

Francesco M. [00:11:00] And you are located in Berlin as well?

I7 [00:11:03] Exactly. And that is only now that I do a little bit of remote work from Fuerte Ventura. This is more because the winter is very tough in Berlin, and we tried to do this for a few months last year. I did a lot of flying back and forth to clients from here. But yeah, we're testing out to do a couple of months here to escape our bases in Berlin.

Francesco M. [00:11:28] I think it's a pretty good plan. And you are, what nationality are you, if I may ask?

I7 [00:11:37] I'm Lithuanian. So that's why the production is in Lithuania.

Francesco M. [00:11:40] No because you have absolutely zero accent in speaking English. So, it's a bit difficult to understand. And you studied in France. So I initially thought you were French.

I7 [00:11:53] I have a little bit of an identity crisis from now and then. I actually was very fortunate to have the challenge to grow up in different countries. And actually my family moved to China when I was eight years old and there is no Lithuanian school. And especially in 1995 China, there were not many options. So, we had to choose from what was there, and that's why I started in an international school at first. And then very quickly, after three years my parents switched me to a French school, due to mainly budgetary reasons. The French education subsidizes their international schools, which makes them very affordable. And therefore, I had to learn a new language. And that's how I ended up in France, because basically when you start in the French system, you're kind of stuck in it.

Francesco M. [00:12:51] Also a lot of people aspired to go into a French system. I had the pleasure to spend some months of my university career in Paris in ESSEC. So, a little bit of rivalry there.

I7 [00:13:03] Ah yeah, I see.

Francesco M. [00:13:05] Yeah, it's a really good schooling system and university-wise, some of the best universities in the world are, HEC itself, in France.

I7 [00:13:14] Yeah, I think it's, I mean, I love the French system, but I think it's very discriminating against people who don't fit into the stream that they want. So, if you are smart and you're good at math and sciences, then all doors are open to you, which was my case.

Francesco M. [00:13:41] Sorry I lost you again.

I7 [00:13:43] Sorry, I lost you.

Francesco M. [00:13:47] Yeah, it was your case. I stopped at it was your case.

I7 [00:13:51] Yeah. And I think for me the maths and scientific side was a little bit easier. And I think so, I managed to power through the system and the whole prepa. I don't know if you ever looked at it. And so, I personally really enjoyed it. But at the same time, I know that as a person I am very perfectionist and resistant to pressure. But I know that's not the case, for example, for my sister, who absolutely hated the system and after high school went back to Lithuania. So I really love it, but I don't

know if I would recommend this, for example, for my son. It's a rough system. It's really rough.

Francesco M. [00:14:36] I see what you mean. And I've experienced a bit of it. So, I totally understand your point. But there are also some really good options in other countries. I mean, Europe is home to many, many different options for students.

Anyways, let's not get lost on this because we could go on forever. So yeah, I mean, you answered me really extensively to the first question, so many of the things you've covered already. From your professional path, I can understand where your entrepreneurial motivation and interest in entrepreneurialism came from.

But why did you decide to start your own venture? Well, you already answered to this again by saying, that with the birth of your son you wanted to have a bit more time and maybe move a bit slower in the first months. But of course, you got into a very specific industry. And I mean, why start in this industry and why start an entrepreneurial venture?

I7 [00:15:44] And so maybe why I started my entrepreneurial activity. I think as I was going through my background, I think the red line is a little bit, the red thread as you say in French "Le fil rouge", is that I what I enjoyed really the most from my experiences is having this autonomy, having this capacity to build things to see things grow and having an impact if it is not controlled, but an impact on the way things go. And I think this really excites me and I think through the experience I have had with [name], which was basically entrepreneurship, just only with no need to get the financial part figured out. Without the risk. And so, I think I really enjoyed this part, the speed, the pace of building a company versus, for example, the more corporate background, which I had the experience of. But I found my way around it even in that corporate experience. So, I think my takeaway when my son was born is that I truly enjoy that part. And I would have been up for, I think, joining a company or starting up a company with somebody else. It turned out that I started this alone, and it wasn't the case. Now I kind of regret it. It is a really tough solo founder Journey.

Francesco M. [00:17:15] It really wears you out, I think, but it also pays off in the long run if you manage it. But not many people manage it.

I7 [00:17:24] So yeah, I'm kind of facing this, this constant burnout. So, when you were saying to get more time, the inverse actually happened, that this is more, more time than a corporate job, which sometimes I even regret. But I think that is a little bit the entrepreneurial motivation, that I think I had this wish to really take it myself, and

the risk as well. Yeah. And the other part I think is really opportunism. Why? Because I think the pandemic was something that nobody expected, and it is definitely not something I would have projected myself building when I graduated from university. But I found the topic really exciting, because I think it's not really about boxes and boots that you're building, but this really contributes to a completely new topic of future workspaces. And, I always enjoyed a little bit this, my mom's an architect, and I always enjoyed a little bit this design topic. Not that I have any experience in it, except for DIYing our own house. But I think I...

Francesco M. [00:18:44] Um. I lost you again.

I7 [00:18:45] Tangible.

Francesco M. [00:18:46] Sorry, I lost you again.

I7 [00:18:48] I was saying that I enjoy this architectural design, interior design points. And then I think I also found it really exciting to work on a physical product as contrasting to digital products that I had worked with before.

Francesco M. [00:19:08] Yeah.

I7 [00:19:10] And I think when you put those together, it was a kind of "why not" tested. And I think a lot of companies also started like that. Right. It's opportunism, there seems to be an opportunity.

Francesco M. [00:19:26] Sorry to interrupt you. May I ask you: did you see the opportunity in the idea? Or did you see the opportunity because, say, you had the right contacts and the right resources to go down this road?

I7 [00:19:45] More because of the market opportunity. Because I think it's something that I believe, and we see this, has a big growth potential. So, I think that is mainly what motivated me. And the contacts were actually more on this really opportunistic side. We had a kitchen delivered, they were produced in Lithuania, and then all of this put together was like "okay, how about we ask this producer in Lithuania?". Because I'm Lithuanian, it is probably a good cost to make a product. And so that's kind of how it ended up.

Francesco M. [00:20:27] And so. Why did you decide to start this business in Germany? I mean, I know that Berlin offers many opportunities for startups, especially in the tech area. But why are you in Germany? And what was your prior experience in Germany?

I7 [00:20:47] So prior experience. I had actually moved to Berlin three years before starting my company, with the [name] company. They had shifted the whole team to a more central time zone because we were working from customers in Indonesia to Argentina. So, it makes sense to be somewhere in the middle. And I, therefore, was located in Berlin at the time. And then I think just generally it's a great startup ecosystem. There is quite a bit going on and I think generally the German market is, first of all, a big market of its own. It easily extends to what is called the DACH market, so Switzerland and Austria. So just market potential-wise, that's also something that makes sense in terms of volume to test out a product, for example. And for example, right now we, mainly for reasons of just not finding people at the pace that we're growing, have to limit ourselves to just the German market. Because of our operations, we do have ***inaudible*** that need to build the products and all of this. So, we really even reduce our focus to Germany, even though we have requests from France and from other countries.

Francesco M. [00:22:09] What do you mean, not finding people at the pace that you're growing?

I7 [00:22:15] This is more of an HR topic. I think that I found it a bit difficult to hire the first employees. So, I had mainly bad experiences when I first hired a year ago my first internal employee. So, I'm very happy with my freelancers.

Francesco M. [00:22:35] Okay, yeah. I mean, my dad is also an entrepreneur. He has his own company. And I have to say that I think Germany and Italy are similar in this sense; when you hire, it's very difficult to fire after. So, you have to be really careful with whom you hire. And it's difficult to understand if a person is good or not beforehand. I don't know if this is the reason, but I think it's a hot topic for entrepreneurs.

I7 [00:23:09] Fortunately, in Germany actually, what is I think is really good for startups, is that it's quite flexible because these rules of labor market inflexibility do not apply to companies under ten employees.

Francesco M. [00:23:25] Ohhh, okay.

I7 [00:23:26] So under ten employees you have the right to fire people within 4 days. So, it's really flexible until you get to your 10th employee. Which is I think is also really good because this allows startups to test out their employees without this commitment, of course, for life employment.

Francesco M. [00:23:54] It's super important for sure. I thought there were maybe some special rules, but I never really asked, so. Good to know.

I7 [00:24:05] The hiring was more that, after one year on the market, you don't have specifically an employer brand image. It's very difficult to get to the right talent. The problem is not the interview, the problem is actually getting quality applicants. Because a lot of people go through friends and family, and network that is the number one thing. But if you go through official sources, then definitely people will go for the big name first and then it's a little bit more difficult to even attract the applications of acceptable talent. Which I think that was my main difficulty.

Francesco M. [00:24:52] I think in Germany that point is extremely relevant. I mean, I'm located in Germany myself and of course when I do job applications, now I'm finishing my studies, I'm working as a student and I am also doing job applications and have done them in the past years. Always these big names come up as you say, and you kind of get attracted to them. Mercedes, Bosch for me, being in the Stuttgart area. So, these are the companies that are around here. But for sure I see what you're saying.

I7 [00:25:30] Where are you? Are you in Stuttgart, in the city, or are you around?

Francesco M. [00:25:34] I'm in Stuttgart. The city, yeah.

I7 [00:25:37] Okay. My husband's family is from Tübingen.

Francesco M. [00:25:41] Tübingen is a beautiful place.

I7 [00:25:42] Very close.

Francesco M. [00:25:43] Yeah. It's a beautiful town. Small but really nice. And there is a really good university, a lot of young people. Uh, yeah. This area is pretty populated with internationals, I would say, because of this company pool. Well, Germany

in general, in a certain sense is kind of built on, the foundations of the German business ecosystem are built on foreign immigrants in a certain sense. And so how was your access to the German business ecosystem, in fact? So your husband is German, right?

I7 [00:26:21] Exactly.

Francesco M. [00:26:22] Okay. Your husband is German. And did you learn the language prior to moving to Germany or how was it?

I7 [00:26:29] No, and I think this is one of the difficulties, but this is also one of the advantages and why I was located in Berlin. Because Berlin is one of the few places in Germany where English is still acceptable as a working language, which is a bit more difficult when you go down south to Stuttgart and all the rest. And I started learning German when I arrived in Berlin, so my German was very shaky when I actually started the company. So, it was one of the big difficulties which was doing all of the paperwork and all of that signing up. I had to ask a lot of support from my husband to do the submissions of the company, documentation, registrations, and all of that, because it always comes in a super long letter and is super complicated to read. So, I think that's one complexities for the German market when you're a foreigner is that there is no way around doing it in German.

Francesco M. [00:27:33] I agree. I see myself a bit in this situation because my girlfriend is also German, but I did not know German before moving here. So, it's the same process. I've been helped a lot. Now I'm trying to walk on my own legs and I'm taking classes, but coming from a Latin background, neo Latin languages, it's quite a rough shift to German, to be honest. Yes, and so the language was, let's say, a bit of an issue, but maybe with your husband being German, there was a mediation, but how was in general the access to the startup ecosystem and to the country ecosystem of Germany? As a founder.

I7 [00:28:22] You mean more like sales, opportunity, and network development?

Francesco M. [00:28:27] Pretty much everything that comes to your mind if I ask you how it was. Yeah, of course. I think sales and networking are two of the most important things to do in the beginning stages of a startup. Right?

I7 [00:28:43] I think. Yeah. In Berlin, there are quite a bit of startup networks that help with the startup part. In the beginning, I was not part of a lot of networks just for the reason that I deprioritized them because I was working on sales. But there's I think the advantage that, if you can take the time, you can access various networks. So, let's say the builder's network, which is for start-ups, is one, for example, that my husband is part of, but I never took the time to go through the application process and just couldn't bother with it. But there are lots of other networks, for example, industry networks in my case, for example, women in furniture or **inaudible**, which are women networks, also did not take the time to go through that. So, I've been really bad as on the networking side. Which is one thing I definitely should push a little bit more on. There are other networks like, for example, the factory is a network, it looks like a co-working space, but they actually have 3000 members, which I was part of more for the co-working side. So just to have a place to work from time to time. And there is more, the idea behind the whole system is to aggregate and bring together people, freelancers, startup founders, and all of them, and to connect them via Slack channels, events, the physical space, and all of that. So, there is really a lot to access in Berlin specifically. I'm not really aware of other places in Germany, so I'm very much focusing on Berlin, which is, I think for startups also really positive if you take the time to enter these networks. Yeah, there's, there's quite a bit on offer, of course. So, the access is there. Then as a founder, if you prioritize, which parts you prioritize or you don't, then that's another question.

Francesco M. [00:30:57] Yeah, of course. And to a certain extent, I think Berlin is a bit of its own ecosystem compared to the rest of Germany. So, as you said, the English part is really important if you don't know the language, and also all these networking opportunities. But I mean, of course, you still have to hustle and especially when it comes to finding potential investors or the first clients. I'm sure. I don't know. Is it easier in Berlin without knowing German or without being German to find potential investors or clients? Does it facilitate the foreignness of your I mean, your foreign nature?

I7 [00:31:44] It's all, once again, I think with as you're saying, Berlin is such a black sheep. So, I can't really answer for Germany. I think Germany would be very different. But the advantage of Berlin is that there is quite easy access, I think, to try. And so as if take that as an example, I mentioned this factory network, I was part of it and they were my first clients actually. So that's how I actually got it, I use them as a showroom as well because I don't want to have a showroom and to maintain it. So, I actually have my boots in this really beautiful space. Through the network, I was able to place

a booth over there as the very first piece, and from there little by little I actually worked on the network effects and the clients that are called [name], you probably know them, moved in and they were there. So I used the opportunity to jump on board.

So yeah, definitely once you're in there, then I managed to develop a lot of partnerships and a lot of clients from that network, and they also are a big real estate player. They rent out their entire floor to companies, which is for me a perfect kind of target for growth-stage companies who then move out, like [name], and then get their own offices, and then there are recurring sales. So yeah, there's, quite a bit to access in Britain I think client-wise. Yeah, if we talk investor-wise, I'm going to be really bad to answer your question because I'm bootstrapped. So, I actually have not reached out to investors.

Francesco M. [00:33:26] Okay, I understand.

I7 [00:33:29] I think my husband, on the other hand, is a bit different and I think from his point of view, he's always been telling me it's really not super complicated. In Berlin once again, there is the whole ecosystem with the startups, there's also the whole investment, angel investor and the whole VC crowd, which is located so easily accessible. Have I tested that? No. So I would not be able to tell you how these opportunities are.

Francesco M. [00:33:59] Okay. So how much time do you still have? I don't want to steal your time.

I7 [00:34:06] I have until 3pm. So, 15 minutes. 17 minutes to be precise.

Francesco M. [00:34:12] I'll try to be as as fast as possible, actually we're at a good point.

And so you so to come to the main point of my research, my research is on the role of facilitators or figures that help you in setting up and developing at the later stages of your business venture, mostly local people or at least people that know more about the culture, the business culture and the regulations of the country. So, for me, after hearing about your story, about your life, I'd say your husband is probably the number one, the first facilitator that I see in your path as a founder in Germany. Because you told me as well that he helped you a lot with the bureaucratic part, especially. Right? So, correct me if I'm wrong because maybe you say "no, in reality, he didn't really help me at all".

I7 [00:35:12] No, you're very right. He is my number one facilitator. I gave him 10% of the shares of the company to thank him for that. And I definitely would have not even started this whole journey if I knew that he was not there to support and back me up. So yeah, he's been a key role and I know it's also where I can get advice, a sparring partner on a business side. I'm fortunate that we both have similar backgrounds. We actually met in HEC. And we have quite a business mind, so he is my sparring partner and my board of directors when I need support, but also because he is German, it is my number one support. And if you're saying, for example, investors, the way that I would probably look for investors is I would ask for his support, to do introductions, and if he doesn't have those, he would be able to introduce me to somebody who has those connections. So definitely without this facilitator, this would have not been possible.

Francesco M. [00:36:19] Yeah of course. I mean that's an awesome, let's call it resource to have for sure. And I'm sure you are a big resource for him as well, from a business standpoint, of course. And so he helped you with these legal and bureaucratic aspects. He helped you maybe with developing, I don't know, some sort of business plan of the company or some sort of first idea? And what else did he actually do in your venture, or helped you with?

I7 [00:36:54] And so yeah, at the beginning with all of the German paperwork, the notary meetings where literally everything was in German. So I had to have him there because you have to agree to all the terms of actually building a company and there are points such as understanding the different structures and the setups, and with share structure and who will own the shares and etc... It's a lot of complexity and all the information is available only in German, so it's mainly in German at least two years ago. Hopefully, that has improved. So, this was really helpful. Then it was at the beginning a sparring help on the product development side too. He also really enjoys DIY, so it was actually a hobby for him and he helped really a lot in bringing this first idea to the market, just giving feedback, kind of the sparring and review partner in these different iteration phases. And he obviously has his own company, so on the day to day of the company he's not able to support. He supports me, let's say, a couple of hours every 2 to 4 weeks depending on the need. More to help with more strategic topics, being a solo founder it's sometimes a little bit annoying to make all the decisions yourself, or think about how to solve brainstorming, how to solve frustration, and, for example in operations, which kind of processes can be improved. So, on that side, on the business side, it was pretty helpful. To literally, you know, we use that

time to talk to the smallest details like for example, the VAT returns and this is something that you have to do every month as a small company before you hit a certain revenue. I actually have to check what that is exactly. And yet it's literally asking how to classify the specific bills that you get, how does it technically work. Because the software that I also use is also in German and the specifications, which is specific accounting terminology that is a little bit unclear. So, he literally helps me to sometimes I have just questions, how do I pass by these bills? I get a set of those to him. I send him what I need to do because I can't. So, it's also business related because when I drive, I drive too fast.

Francesco M. [00:39:38] Of course. So, it's business related. But him being German, of course, it's a huge help to your case of. I see. And it's really understandable.

I7 [00:39:54] And so maybe another point is also that on the networking, sometimes I need support on getting an introduction, and he thinks about the right introduction for me, something that could make sense. So yeah, on that part has been also a lot to also help me access the network. Which has helped a lot on my business development side. And dealing also with specific partners, for example, leasing partners is something that some clients really need. So for leasing options and rental options, this means the whole going into the topic of the financial services, and he also helps to develop the business relationship, checking the details, helping me through the calls, helping me actually make one or two phone calls to get the first contract set up. Because I don't feel confident to make decisions without understanding the nitty-gritty details.

Francesco M. [00:41:05] Of course, I understand. And so, you started the company one and a half years ago. Was it almost two years ago? Right?

I7 [00:41:16] The registration was a year and a half ago, on March 21st. But I already started working with my first clients earlier in September. That's kind of my starting point. Yeah. So, two years ago.

Francesco M. [00:41:33] And so he has been your first and still is a big facilitator for your company and for your entrepreneurial journey. And do you have any other person that comes to mind who really helped you in certain aspects? Usually, my question would be, did this reference person change over time? Because some people, for example, rely on a friend or someone to help them with the beginning, in the early stage, and then they meet someone else later on and it switches for them. It's a bit

different of a case, because being your husband, I don't think you will switch, I hope for you both at least. And so, is there anyone else that comes to mind, or has he been the only or the most determinant person in all this and still covers this role?

I7 [00:42:29] I think it is stable, and that's good. I think it's descending, kind of reducing with time. In the beginning, it was a lot more help. Now with a couple of hours, per month, every couple of weeks when it's a little bit more crisis mode. But I think this is also related to the fact that I'm a solo partner. I think the local facilitator part is less than a sparring partner, which is my growing need right now. And I think this is just very specific to being the only decision-maker. I would love to change this reference just for the fact that we have a child together and it's a lot to put on each other's plates, because I also supported him from time to time with it, now less and less because I just don't manage. But it's a lot. So, I'm hoping that I can also find, so I'm right now looking to find not really a co-founder role, but maybe a lead role to help out on the COO & CFO side. If that person could help the German side as well of this, let's say the bureaucratic side and dealing with authorities and things like that, that would be ideal, which would alleviate my need to always refer to my husband. So, ideally I would like to change it. Not for reasons of him not being good. He's been fantastic.

Francesco M. [00:44:02] But it's not easy.

I7 [00:44:03] But it's really about just, I think this is a necessary role and I hope that I can internalize it in the company within the next quarter or so.

Francesco M. [00:44:16] Okay. So, I asked you the last two things. Then I let you go. You dedicated a lot of time to me already. Overall, would you say that your foreignness, would you see it as a strength or as a weakness for your venture? And I think the answer is not absolute. I mean, there's pros and cons probably, but perhaps you have verified that being a foreigner, having contacts abroad, leveraging on resources of your home country, as you said, for Lithuania in particular, for production, it's a point that helped you in your case, right?

I7 [00:45:01] So then specifically, the question is about being a foreigner in Germany, right?

Francesco M. [00:45:05] Yeah. Being a foreigner in Germany. A foreign founder? A foreign founder, is it?

I7 [00:45:11] Yeah, I think yeah. That's a good point. So, I would have forgotten to mention this production side. I think that we do have a cost advantage which helps us in the whole business model that we have. Definitely. And especially at the beginning and the flexibility that I have with the capacity to communicate in my own mother tongue helps a lot in this specific case, I would say. But generally, if it would be as a founder I think it's maybe a bit more of a disadvantage just because of this complexity of the startup setup part, of getting it running, and of course, then you still have to do those returns, VAT returns every month, for example. So, it is a significant overhead which is annoying to deal with as a foreigner. And I think that language skills are quite a barrier timewise. So, if we take, for example, developing partner relationships, I actually, so your question about my German level, it was very poor starting the company and now it's, I would say 80/20. And just because I've actually pushed myself to speak with clients in German. So, I had to really, really challenge myself because there the business connection is better when you speak German, especially when you go outside Berlin to create trust for long-term partnerships. I saw the benefit of actually making the effort and apologizing for my German, but then making the effort to speak it anyway. So, I think this is a big disadvantage because it is a complicated language to learn. And it's kind of a necessity if you want to grow big or grow fast. Yeah. Then other than that, I think this being a foreigner is a bit neutral in Berlin in the sense that, you know, it's so international with its Berlin bubble that the whole network effects, you will very easily develop networks as a foreigner. There is no disadvantage to that.

Francesco M. [00:47:36] Okay. That's, I think a very extensive answer. So, let's say, my last question would be, I didn't ask it because you kind of mentioned it, but maybe there's more to I don't know. Do you still have ties with your home country?

Well your home country is a bit difficult to locate considering you lived in many different places. But besides this production and manufacturing in Lithuania, do you still leverage the resources that came from your background, or from your home country or one of them?

I7 [00:48:19] Yeah. Maybe just actually going back one step to the previous question, good that you mentioned the background network. I think, for example, one thing that I really don't benefit from which other foreigners could benefit from, is the university network, right? So, I think if you're a foreigner who studies in Germany, which is probably your case right now. Yeah. You will have the starting point of your university network in that country. Right? So this is something which with my French network, for example, I have a really good network in France. But I don't take any advantage of it. This is such a shame because I do not apply it for the reasons that right now I

just don't have the resources to focus on the French market. If not, it would have been much, much easier with my university background with HEC to start this whole up and use my network. So, I think this is also a very big difference, which doesn't come from the foreign side, it comes from where you studied. I think having studied at a German university, you would probably start off with a much better network.

Francesco M. [00:49:35] Yeah, well, I agree. I agree. My case is a bit different. I mean, I'm doing a double degree, so I'm still enrolled in Italy and in Germany. But unfortunately, Corona has made networking extremely difficult for my master. Let's say 75% of my master's has been online. So, in a certain sense, I haven't met so many people, local people, I would say. I think foreigners always bond over different things. Maybe you do some group activities, or you do some projects and it's easier for foreigners to end up together. But with Germans, it's been a bit more difficult than I think it usually is. But yeah, sure, I agree. The university network is extremely important also on the professors' side, in my opinion, because for instance, if you have some and interesting lecturers with people that have contacts with potential investors or potential customers of your company, then it's so much easier to have this really admirable figures, as university professors, that can help you out with this. And actually, another entrepreneur that I interviewed and is also in Germany said that, in fact, his first facilitator was in fact one of these academic figures.

I7 [00:51:10] Yeah, that's actually a good point. So, to answer the last question about if I still have ties in that sense. Yeah, I do have a big network in France, which I, unfortunately, do not leverage at all, which is really a fantastic network. And just an anecdote: there was one booth that we delivered to Paris to one client that I had to move it there and then find a solution for another client, because of X, Y, Z, and the original deal didn't work out. So, I did leverage that network, I actually very easily sold that booth on the spot to somebody that I found through the network. So, I know that I could do much better with that part, but I don't use those ties enough. And yeah, with my home country of Lithuania, I didn't live there that long, just until I was eight. And those ties are very weak. But definitely I, for example, was able to use this to set up my first prototype and production, which can be kind of difficult. So yeah, I do use them when necessary.

Francesco M. [00:52:26] Okay, that's great. Thank you so much, I have really a lot of interesting data to analyze, so I will now stop the recording.

Appendix 11: Transcript of interview 8Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] So. So first of all I mean, I did some brief research on you and your path. And of course, the information I could find on LinkedIn is quite limited. So maybe I would just like to ask you a bit more about yourself, about your path as an entrepreneur and also as a person, like what you studied or what led you to start now of course.

I8 [00:00:30] Yeah. So, I guess I'll start off by telling you about the business and then we can talk about the more personal stuff. Of course, the two are related though. The business is an AI proofreading platform for book publishers, and authors, but then also research report creators. So, think about like financial reporting and insights. It's the market that's generating, you know, consultancies that are generating research reports with their insights, for example, as Deloitte does. So that is what our product is aimed towards. What's unique about us is that we are supporting PDFs and ePubs, which are the final format. And we also support texts at a scale that's like much larger than what Grammarly does. Grammarly is only doing four megabytes. We have, you know, up to one gig. So, you can upload the very final product, the PDF that you're going to send to your clients. And that could be quite big into our system. And then in addition to doing the kind of typo detection that Grammarly does, we're also looking for design mistakes. So, for example, if you have a paragraph and there's one word of that paragraph that's on the following page and you have the rest of the paragraph on the previous page, we'll find that and direct people to make those changes. From a user perspective, the platform basically looks like Adobe Acrobat but it's completely in-browser and it's bringing these AI checks that currently don't exist elsewhere.

Francesco M. [00:02:21] Okay, that's really cool. Yeah, it's really interesting. And thank you. Not that my opinion is that important, but if it weren't I wouldn't say it. So, you're from the US, correct?

I8 [00:02:40] Yes. I was born in the US.

Francesco M. [00:02:42] Okay. And you are currently located in Austria where your company is, right?

I8 [00:02:47] Yes, we're living in Vienna.

Francesco M. [00:02:48] Okay. And so, what about like a bit about you? What led you to be where you are now? Why are you in Austria? Like you, I've seen that you studied, of course in universities. And just a bit more about yourself?

I8 [00:03:09] Yeah, of course. So, I was born in the U.S., but my mother is an immigrant from Poland, and then my father's parents immigrated shortly before he was born. So, I have European citizenship and I wanted to start this business, and it felt also like a good time to get out of the U.S... I sort of made this decision during the pandemic, which was awful in the U.S., and then after the Capitol riots in January of last year or two years ago, two years ago... or was here last year, I can't even remember. And so anyway generally there I had this desire to try living in Europe and I wanted to work on this business because I had worked in book publishing, for a variety of publishing houses, magazine publishing, I had also done a bit of journalism. So, I know the content space really, really well and I had suffered because I didn't have a tool like this. And there are so many typos in books and like I love to read and I'm working in this space. And then, you know, for example, I bought like a \$50 hardcover that was just like littered with typos and it was like simple things. And I was like, this is horrifying. And so, I talked to my co-founder, who's the technical one, and he said that it would be possible to build something like this. And then we proceeded to think about a few different cities to be based in. And in Europe, obviously, Berlin is a huge tech hub. But one of the things that we really liked in Vienna was the availability of public funding and just how easily accessible it is. And then also, you know, to the point of your thesis, we received an incredibly warm welcome from administrators. I guess they kind of offer themselves as like almost a concierge service to people who want to settle and incorporate their businesses in Austria. It is really, really remarkable. And so that was one of the main reasons. Vienna was also not that expensive compared to other European capitals. So, there were just a lot of things. But I would say the public investment and then also the kind of infrastructure they built to help people like us who, don't even know German, to navigate this system.

Francesco M. [00:05:46] I feel you, I've been learning, but it's quite a tough language to be honest.

I8 [00:05:51] It is a tough language. I agree. Even if it's sort of like English, it's harder.

Francesco M. [00:05:56] Much harder. I'm Italian and it's also sort of like Latin languages, but much harder.

I8 [00:06:03] Yes, yes.

Francesco M. [00:06:04] It's a weird mix.

I8 [00:06:05] It's much. I agree.

Francesco M. [00:06:08] Anyways, we could talk about this for ages.

I8 [00:06:10] Yes, we could get off on this.

Francesco M. [00:06:11] Yeah, exactly. And what about your previous work experience and then you, you know, did you always want to become an entrepreneur, or was it something that happened later on?

I8 [00:06:27] That's a great question. I think for me, I really like solving problems and I saw a lot of problems in content creation, just like the lack of technology. And if there is technologies like the lack of updating like you see like Adobe just bought Figma for \$20 billion and I've been using Adobe, so I'm 31 now and I've been using Adobe since I was 15 in design specifically. And they've added some bells and whistles, but the core product like the way it is delivered, the way you're using it hasn't changed. And so, because of that, they have to go by Figma, you know. So, I just thought I just saw a need for it. But I also think like, so all of my grandparents that were in the US were entrepreneurs. And so, like I grew up helping my grandfather in his bakery on Sunday. So I think it just came very naturally to me. So, I saw a need, and then like the lifestyle or the way of thinking or working, I had already seen and felt natural. So those were the two combinations. I'm not someone who was saying, I want to be a tech founder someday. I did work at a tech company in 2015 and I started with them part-time in 2015, and then I was full-time from 2016 to mid-2017 I think, and they were financial technology companies, and I was doing, you know, I was working on their reports, I was proofreading their reports but I sort of got acquainted with the ecosystems, so I understood how tech works. But even then, I was not like, oh, I'm going to be a founder someday. It's just an accumulation of experiences, I would say.

Francesco M. [00:08:17] And I also see that you're a freelancer writer, right?

I8 [00:08:23] Yes, I am. I have not written and published anything in a very long time because this business has been very consuming. But that is another aspect. And like

that is something I've done my whole professional life and will continue to do once Proofcheck is, you know, more set up.

Francesco M. [00:08:45] Of course, I mean, I've seen that the company started just this year, right?

I8 [00:08:49] Yeah. April 2022 was when we incorporated. We've been working on the technology since the beginning of the pandemic, but now is when we're doing all the business development. So, like the product, when we incorporated the product was pretty close. We're going to be shipping to our first clients in early January. Actually before you called, I countersigned our first sales agreement, which is pretty exciting. Thank you. Thank you.

Francesco M. [00:09:21] Always a big step. I mean.

I8 [00:09:23] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:09:23] Yeah, as yourself my dad is an entrepreneur so I know how it is. Life is chaotic, it's exciting, but also it could be really bad at times.

I8 [00:09:39] Yes, highs and lows.

Francesco M. [00:09:42] Yes, and hopefully the highs are more than the lows and it seems like a really good idea.

I8 [00:09:46] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:09:48] And so, you already told me why you're in a different country and why in that specific country. But what was your previous experience with Austria, if any?

I8 [00:09:59] Completely none. None. I had never even been to Austria. So, as I told you, I have family in Poland and family in Ireland. And I've traveled, I think, almost every other country in the EU except Austria. So, it was like we were going in blind. Yeah. But we got a good feeling, we had a lot of Zoom calls with a specific woman who's the head of North America for the Austrian business agency. And she gave us a lot of like context and information about what funding is available. And then we also looked ourselves and we saw like, for example, the Vienna Business Agency. It also

has a name in German, but I'm not going to try to say it. It has these grants that, you know, every quarter you can make an application for €75,000 equity free. And there's just nothing that I could find that was really comparable. Berlin has some of that, I think it is pretty close, but it just seemed like there was such an abundance in Vienna.

Francesco M. [00:11:12] I mean Austria is as you said. I'm European and I went through Austria about a million times while driving. But it's not a country that you think of for business and startups. You do for skiing or this type of activity.

I8 [00:11:28] Exactly. Exactly, exactly.

Francesco M. [00:11:30] Yeah. Yeah. It is incredibly beautiful. So, it's also a plus to your case anyways. Yeah. So, you had no experience... and first of all, I forgot to ask you, your co-founder is also from the US?

I8 [00:11:46] Yeah, he's from the US. But [name] has a French passport and I bring this up partly or mostly I would say because we were able to relocate very easily because we didn't have to go through the immigration services. And it's my understanding, I don't know how interesting this is to you, but it's my understanding from the people I talk to like administrators in the government who are helping us, they said it's extremely hard for startup founders to get the visas, even if they're super well-educated and they have a great idea.

Francesco M. [00:12:25] Having European citizenship and passport makes everything so much easier. A lot of my friends here are from South America. It's so much more complicated for them. I just took my car and drove here, you know, like literally that's what happened. So, I can understand what you're saying and you even more if you want to start a business.

And, um, we can go back to this person that helped you later on because that's the whole point of my thesis, to understand if there is a role of these types of facilitators, of people; what is the role in the success of or failure of a venture.

Um, but you mentioned briefly that your access to the local ecosystem and entrepreneurial ecosystem was easy, right?

I8 [00:13:19] Yes.

Francesco M. [00:13:20] Okay. Even from a cultural standpoint and a language standpoint?

I8 [00:13:26] Oh, I would say so from a language standpoint, t's been okay. It's been workable. Everyone we talk to is willing to speak English with us, their English isn't always perfect, but it works. And then also the one thing that can be a little bit hard is that the legal applications application forms have to be made in or are in German. They're presented to us in German, but we're just doing a lot of Google translating and we can write back in English. So, like, we fill out a form online for we did another, so we did one grand that was for €75,000. And then we've just another grant to support going to like the Frankfurter Book Messe and London Book Fair. And so, I just Google translate everything on Chrome. and I can write back in English.

Francesco M. [00:14:26] Yeah. Of course, if, if it's written I think it's okay. Germany is very similar to this, but the problem is that in Germany, at least when you have to go to an office and speak to people, it's very unlikely that they will speak in English. So, in that case, it might be a bit challenging.

I8 [00:14:43] For this entrepreneur administration and entrepreneurship administration or tech administration, whatever you want to call it, Startup Administration. They are all willing to speak English and write in English. But I would say, more generally, the bureaucracy in Austria, in Vienna is like what you're describing.

Francesco M. [00:15:02] Yeah.

I8 [00:15:03] But that's like for other things, like health insurance or whatever, you know.

Francesco M. [00:15:07] And, but as a founder, as an entrepreneur, this entrepreneurship administration has made your access easy to, to like to set up your company.

I8 [00:15:21] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:15:22] Yeah. Sorry, didn't mean to cut you off.

I8 [00:15:25] Just maybe you wanted to talk more specificities about what they've been able to do later. So, we'll talk about it later.

Francesco M. [00:15:32] But I just want to see. The next question would be, did someone help you in setting up and developing your activity? Is there one or more

figures? Because what I have verified is that normally this facilitator figure changes based on the different stages of the startup, on the different needs of the founders. But what I'm looking for is not someone that does it because it's their job or does it because of interest, economic interest. But some people that helped you in any way, to go ahead with this idea or to understand better the culture of Austria or to understand better the bureaucratic system of Austria or whatever the case is, you know, anything.

I8 [00:16:25] That's interesting. So, people who are doing it almost in like a pro bono or just like a social way, um, let's see.

Francesco M. [00:16:35] I mean, we can also talk about this, this, uh, entrepreneurship, body that you talked about. But first, I would like to see if there's anyone like that.

I8 [00:16:48] I don't think so. I don't think so. Not specifically in Austria, in a localization sense. Like being here in Vienna, there's an accelerator, but we've just joined it, that's called [name] and it's based in Vienna, but it's virtual and the participants are Europe-wide and like they've helped but not about acclimating to Austria. They've helped in other ways. So, I don't think.

Francesco M. [00:17:17] And anyone that pushed you to pursue the specific activity you're currently doing, maybe even in the US, I don't know if there is anyone without which maybe you would have not been so convinced. But from what you said, you, you had a lot of experience in this field. So, you knew about it.

I8 [00:17:39] No, I'm pretty strong-willed. So, it was pretty much just me. We did do demos of our prototype in the U.S. with like potential customers and that was helpful to prove the product market fit and that there's a need for it. And so it wasn't just me saying this. So, like we demoed for like friends, but there wasn't anyone whom I would say was super pivotal and pushing us to do this idea, except that I was really into it.

Francesco M. [00:18:15] And, regarding this entrepreneurship advisory board or whatever it is called, can you expand a bit on it?

I8 [00:18:27] Yeah. So, I would be happy to send you the link to a couple of these agencies that I'm talking about. So, our main contact has been a woman called [name] who's as I mentioned the head of North America. She's the North American outreach

for the Austrian business agency. And what she primarily is trying to do is get either startup in the U.S. or businesses in the U.S. to create a branch or incorporate in Austria or get U.S. investors to invest in the Austrian ecosystem. And I get a very strong sense that Austria and Vienna are trying to catch up with other European capitals and create a tech ecosystem here because the tech ecosystem is much poorer than what would exist in other capital cities. Like, I think Stuttgart probably has a stronger tech ecosystem than Vienna does.

Francesco M. [00:19:37] Yeah Stuttgart is a big hub for business and large companies, but not so much for startups as Berlin, besides for, of course, the automotive industry here. Any type of startup related to automotive goes really well here. And this board, this... I keep forgetting the name. Forgive me.

I8 [00:20:02] Austrian business agency.

Francesco M. [00:20:05] Austria business agency. Did you have to pay them for this type of service?

I8 [00:20:10] No, completely free.

Francesco M. [00:20:12] So Austria makes this service available for people that want to move to Austria as entrepreneurs to facilitate and grow this entrepreneurial ecosystem and tech hub.

I8 [00:20:27] Yes, exactly. We were thinking about a few different cities and I found the ABA's website. I think I emailed [name] or one of her colleagues. I got in touch with [name] and we did a zoom call, within a week or two. And she was super helpful. Like I would say some of the main points where she's helped is that she has introduced us to Business Tax Advisors. She introduced us to the lawyer who helped us incorporate here, she's been really good at connecting us with services. There's also a woman at the Vienna Business Agency who has helped us to some degree as well to get acquainted with their services. But we mostly work with [name].

Francesco M. [00:21:19] Okay... It's an interesting case because normally entrepreneurs rely on these figures of mentors or someone that helps them with this kind of things. But I've never of a country that offers this kind of service. Berlin to a certain extent, but it's just a part of Germany. But it's not as easy, I think, as you described it.

I8 [00:21:42] I think it's unique to Austria. I feel like there's something about the Hapsburg mentality around bureaucracy and there's real pride in bureaucracy here. Some of the smartest people I've met in Austria are working in the bureaucracy. And so, they try to really like be a service and do this kind of really good bureaucracy. I don't know. It is very unusual.

Francesco M. [00:22:13] Of course. But I mean, of course, I had a chat with another person who told me that if you have entrepreneurial motivation and you get stopped by the bureaucracy, it means that you are not suitable to be an entrepreneur. Because it's part of the challenges. But having something like this that helps you so much is a great advantage for sure.

I8 [00:22:38] Yeah, so timesaving too.

Francesco M. [00:22:40] Okay. And how did you get to know about this? On your own? Or did you have someone that told you about this? Maybe an Austrian that knew about these possibilities?

I8 [00:23:01] Just Google a Google search. And that was it. Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:23:03] Perfect. No need to expand on that. Okay and so they help you with different aspects of your business and especially with setting up your business. And now that it's been six months, are they still supporting you in any type of way?

I8 [00:23:35] Um, so I would say... there are the public grants which are ongoing, but the administrators are acting more like facilitators or concierges, the way that they approach this is that they respond to us. They don't check in with us. But when we ask for something, they do. So, we're going to be meeting with [name] again next week, for the first time in six months, because there's a federal-level grant that we're going to be applying for.

Francesco M. [00:24:03] Okay.

I8 [00:24:04] And so she helps us when we ask for help, if that makes sense.

Francesco M. [00:24:09] It totally makes sense. And referenced persons has always been this [name], right? It's not like she was the legal expert and then you move to another one for financing. It's always been her?

I8 [00:24:20] Okay. She's always our touch point and she will connect us to services and there will be someone who gives us some advice or a service, like a tax advisor that we'll work with, but she's our main point of contact.

Francesco M. [00:24:36] But [name] is from the US, right? I mean, the name sounds like it.

I8 [00:24:40] Oh, no she's fully Austrian.

Francesco M. [00:24:46] Oh! I didn't think it was an Austrian name.

I8 [00:24:48] Yeah, it might not be pronounced this way, but I just called her [name], and she seems to go by [name] with Americans.

Francesco M. [00:24:58] Got it. And so how much would you say that this [name], this facilitator has been for the success and the successful launch of your venture? Like, do you think you would have been able to do the same without her? Of course – I think you would have found another way – but how much easier did she make the transition to Europe?

I8 [00:25:25] I think she made it a lot easier and having that contact made us feel a lot more comfortable. Because when you're moving to a new culture in a language that you don't understand, it can be difficult, I felt pretty overwhelmed. So just like the fact that she connected us with a lawyer, so we didn't have to find one, was really nice. And she tends to connect us with high-quality people. So, it just shaves off time and brings a level of comfort. So yeah, I would say that's the main thing that she's done.

Francesco M. [00:26:09] But I think because she, I think that the figure of a mentor or someone that helps you – well, not a mentor in your case but passed me the term – is extremely important for everything, not just for setting up a company. I moved to Germany one year ago and my girlfriend is German, and I have German friends now and it's really helpful to have people that help you with no interest. You know, they don't want anything back. So, facilitators could present themselves in different forms.

You know, it could be a friend, it could be a more official figure. But I think the reason why it has been so important relates to your foreignness, right? I mean, if you knew German, probably it would have been much easier... in general if you had some ties to the country.

I8 [00:27:21] Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:27:21] Actually you maybe wouldn't even have needed it, right?

I8 [00:27:25] Yeah. And I think like in small ways there's no person who has been a mentor but like going to the meetings for Austrian startups, which are in Vienna like every month – we haven't gone every month – but just going there helps and like you talk to people and they have similar problems or frustrations, like with this element of bureaucracy, and that has been really helpful. But there hasn't been a specific person besides the government concierge.

Francesco M. [00:27:54] And so you never felt like you needed a local person besides this government concierge to help you with anything in your personal and entrepreneurial life in Austria?

I8 [00:28:08] Oh, no. I would love to have a local person, but I think we just haven't been here long enough, or we haven't found that person.

Francesco M. [00:28:16] For what would you need or like to have one, if I may ask?

I8 [00:28:19] Yeah, of course. I think it's just something about like bonding, or you could even say sometimes commiserating. Things like "Hey, I'm finding it really hard to understand these guidelines on the Vienna Business Agency's website, do you have a hard time understanding them too?"... these kinds of things.

Francesco M. [00:28:43] Of course. Okay, I get it. And maybe could it be also for networking purposes, or to reach investors? Or due to the fact that there is this business agency in Austria to get grants and to reach potential investors, you wouldn't need a local person that helps you or gives you advice?

I8 [00:29:10] Yeah, I mean, we could use that, but I think it was not...

Francesco M. [00:29:15] It's not fundamental.

I8 [00:29:17] Yeah, it's not one of our focuses right now. Most of the investors we're talking to are international. Like, Daniel is one of our investors.

Francesco M. [00:29:27] Oh, okay.

I8 [00:29:30] So yeah, we haven't focused on the local market. But like if someone came to do it, of course, we could use that help, but it just hasn't been of primary focus for us and that person hasn't materialized.

Francesco M. [00:29:45] Okay. And the last thing I ask you is a question that could be quite ambiguous because I think there's not a clear answer to this. But in general, do you perceive your foreignness to the country and to Europe – I mean, you have European roots, but you are American – as more of a strength or more of a weakness? Because I think both points are valid. It's a strength in some cases and it's a weakness in others. But maybe one of the two is dominant over the other?

I8 [00:30:27] Yeah, I would say from a professional standpoint, being American and having gone to Harvard for my undergraduate and my co-founder went to Wharton for his undergraduate... These things have all helped us a lot. I think also our mentalities around work have helped us because I think we are used to putting in a lot more hours than the average, certainly average Austrian, but maybe the average European is. I would say that foreignness from a more personal perspective has been difficult because Austria is a pretty culturally isolated place. In the same way, you were talking about "oh, no one thinks of Austria" I think has had an effect in some ways. Well, it actually is very diverse, I think it's one of the most diverse cities in Europe numbers-wise. But there's like a very strong xenophobia here. So, I think on a personal level, like in day-to-day interactions, it hasn't been great. Um, I have a really cute puppy now and I bring the puppy with me into the bureaucracy offices and the people are much nicer. I have found this solution. But yeah, strength and weakness, as you say.

Francesco M. [00:31:55] Okay I certainly understand that.

So, I think that I can extract some really interesting information from this chat we had, so I will stop the recording now.

Francesco M. So, the first question I ask you is general information about yourself, who you are, what you do, where you come from, your age if you want to reveal it.

I9 My name is [name], I was born on 13/02/1976, I am a Greek citizen and I have lived in Italy since 1996. I graduated in industrial design from IUAV in Venice. I do two activities right now, I am an interior designer or architect, and since 6 months I opened a restaurant business.

Francesco M. And you told me that you moved to Italy for university studies then?

I9 Exactly.

Francesco M. Previous work experience?

I9 Like all young people in Greece I worked in the summer, to save some money to take a vacation.

Francesco M. After you graduated I guess you had some experience before you became a freelancer?

I9 So I did several jobs in the beginning to be self-sufficient. I did several odd jobs as a student, pool maintenance and consulting for cooperatives, however very soon I started working in my field, which is interior design. I was lucky enough to collaborate from the beginning with a university professor, with whom I started working on some projects already during my studies.

Francesco M. And after how long did you take the step and open your business?

I9 Let's say as a freelancer, with a vat number, almost immediately as soon as I graduated. I started freelancing.

Francesco M. While on the catering side, have you recently launched yourself? And how come?

I9 Yes recently. It was a challenge between friends, we wanted to open a Greek restaurant in a place that didn't have any. We identified an opportune place and time and took this as a challenge, not an opportunity or need for work.

Francesco M. Okay. And the reason why you decided, at the time of the VAT number, to go freelance instead of going to work for a company?

I9 So at that time there was a very big demand for interior designers, it was actually much more convenient to be a freelancer and do consulting on other things. Companies like OVS, Coin, Benetton, Segafredo, etc. needed consulting, and I was working as a freelancer.

Francesco M. So was it a matter of convenience because you thought it might bring you more job opportunities or were there other reasons as well?

I9 Yes just because of that. There were no other reasons but I wasn't closing the doors to anything at that time. But from 2000 on, it was more convenient to be on my own or at least in collaboration with other professionals to do bigger projects.

Francesco M. And now how is your reality structured? As an architect and restaurateur.

I9 As an architect I am in collaboration with another professional, Italian, with whom we do various jobs. As a restaurateur I have a restaurant with other Greek guys.

Francesco M. As an architect, did you start out on your own and then only later join this person?

I9 Yes, but joining with other people is very common among people who have VAT numbers, it's not that you open a company or group with a common VAT number.

Francesco M. Sure it was just to understand the path.

I9 Initially, I worked with several contractors who assigned me various projects. I started as an art director for one and then got to work with 2-3 at the same time.

Francesco M. Clear. You told me about your experience in Italy and why you came there. But how come specifically to Italy? And how come you then stopped to work independently there?

I9 So initially I wanted to go to Japan. Only the exchange rate was not favorable and you needed much more budget. Whereas to live in Italy the cost was very similar to

Greece, and it was much more affordable for me. When I was a student, my parents helped me financially and I did odd jobs to supplement my income. Then from my second year of college I started to be almost self-employed working in my own business.

Francesco M. So you chose Italy for pure economic reasons and proximity?

I9 No, also because at that time Italy was one of the most important players in the world.

Francesco M. And is that also the reason why you stopped later?

I9 No, the reason I stopped is because I already had contacts set up and was finding work without problems. Going back to Greece I would have had to start from scratch, the path I had made in Italy would have been lost. I thought about coming back a few years later, between 2005 and 2008, but then there was the crisis and I decided to stay since I had more security here.

Francesco M. So you developed a network during college and after. And how would you describe, both personally and as an entrepreneur, to the Italian ecosystem and society? Did you struggle with certain aspects, for example, language?

I9 Yes it was like that, to work here in Italy I had to understand how the system worked. I started completely on my own, not having the luck like other local colleagues to have supports in existing family realities and networks. So I started working and looking for clients on my own. How to describe this reality? Obviously very difficult and with a lot of competition, but it didn't scare me because I had opened my own channel and was creating acquaintances, either by luck or skill, through whom I was able to find valuable clientele.

Francesco M. And instead did you encounter any closure to the fact that you were not Italian?

I9 Sure, even as a student. As soon as I came to Italy there was a trend of being racist between north and south. After that it kind of waned a little bit, and they started to be a little bit racist toward foreigners, for example not allowing us to rent houses, even though in the end we were students bringing money to the country. However, after

the Twin Towers bombing this changed again. Everyone became very heated toward Muslims and left other immigrants alone. They saw us as much closer.

At the labor level also it was always difficult. When a foreigner comes to a place for work, he has to deal with his native peers, who do not like the fact that he is trying to take work away from them. The competition was very cut-throat, however, in the employers I did not notice this same tendency. In fact, they almost saw diversity as welcome.

Francesco M. Understood. Another entrepreneur told me, however, that this depends a lot on where you are. Larger realities see it better than smaller realities.

I9 That's true. But I was working with contractors on a national scale, so I was not dealing with overly small realities.

Francesco M. And did you learn the language instead while you were studying? How long did it take you?

I9 Yes. Time is very relative, as a foreigner you initially group with your compatriots or other foreigners. As you expand your knowledge, you can see that it is much easier to learn the language. To speak fluently I was pretty well along after my college years, but since I finished I have improved a lot through work. I have adapted and learned.

Francesco M. Coming to the main question of the interview, was there a figure who helped you, both as a person and as an entrepreneur?

I9 Let's say that as a person it was mainly a talk of a student going to a foreign place, with a culture completely different from his own, so it was not easy to understand how it works here in Italy, and I had to learn it at my own expense. I can't think of anyone who helped me except older students who gave me some guidance.

Work-wise, there was the professor who chose me and gave me the opportunity to be his assistant and work with him on various projects.

Francesco M. Could you expand on that? How did it happen and what kind of relationship did you have?

I9 Mah I tell you, we were 60 students in the course and he needed a figure to help him. He drew from this pool and chose me, for various reasons. Initially we started collaborating and I was his assistant, and he paid me.

Francesco M. But were you a teaching assistant or in the work environment?

I9 I was helping him on his work, in the area of design.

Francesco M. So it started out as a need on your part to have an assistant, and then that led you to form the basis for your career?

I9 Yes, it has helped me to expand my network and progress professionally speaking.

Francesco M. So do you feel that this person has been instrumental in your career?

I9 Yes, that was my beginning, that was crucial. He called me into his office one day and told me that he liked my projects, and he would like me to work with him. It started with one project, which led to another and so on, and then we continued to collaborate after college.

Francesco M. And did that lead you to know a network of people in the environment?

I9 Yes, it was a foundation on which I then built my personal network.

Francesco M. **Has there** been a change of this facilitator figure? You told me that your wife is Italian right?

I9 Yes, but I met my wife in the last 10 years. I've been in Italy for 25 now.

Francesco M. So it does not qualify as such.

I9 No. I was already working and had already started my own activities.

Francesco M. And after the professor, you started the business on your own. Was there anyone who helped you, such as meeting professional figures or anything else?

I9 Look, when you are freelancing you are very careful in choosing the people you work with. After a while you start surrounding yourself with people with whom you find work mutually. Fortunately I got into a circle of honest people who didn't just think about work in terms of money and transactions, but it was a very united and strong team. In fact, I was doing a lot of off-site work even abroad, always with the same

group of people. So I had many collaborators, but no one who helped me in the way you mean it.

Francesco M. As for the restaurant?

I9 In the restaurant we are all Greeks, and it was more a vice than a necessity.

Francesco M. Which you realized after so many years that you were already here anyway, so it's not considered on par with the beginning of your design business right?

I9 Exactly, it was very different. By now I knew how it worked and it was basically like I was native.

Francesco M. So the professor is the only figure who really helped you in your career?

I9 Yes, that was the actual beginning. Then we went our separate ways but continued to collaborate sporadically on various projects.

Francesco M. Did it also help you understand the right modus operandi for setting up your business?

I9 No, I did it all by myself.

Francesco M. Also in terms of finding accountants, lawyers, etc.?

I9 Yes. Maybe a little bit by word of mouth, but mostly by myself.

Francesco M. But did you have local friends who gave you advice?

I9 Yes, other freelancers with whom we exchanged ideas and contacts, but no one in particular.

Francesco M. Do you think if you didn't have this professor would you have been able to start the same way, or would you have had to rely on someone else?

I9 Most likely I should have gone to some office or agency and taken a different kind of route. That's what happened to me, maybe I could have even gone back to Greece.

So many times these decisions change depending on the moment and what happens to you.

Francesco M. And for both activities, do you perceive your foreignness as a strength or weakness?

I9 I never perceived it as a weakness, I always saw it as a strength to differentiate myself from others.

Francesco M. Although diversity can also be seen as a negative thing in some cases.

I9 I wouldn't say it was a bad thing, but it's definitely not easy. It is very difficult because you have to prove so many more things than the locals. So on the one hand diversity is good because it stands for novelty and innovation, on the other hand it makes the path more difficult and longer.

Francesco M. For both activities? Even though you opened the restaurant basically as a local person after so many years.

I9 Yes, by now I knew the pitfalls and difficulties.

Francesco M. But does being different from the average restaurateur in northern Italy bring you different success?

I9 Yes, because we brought our own thing here. It would have been different if we had tried to open an Italian restaurant.

Francesco M. The last thing I would ask is do you still have contact with Greece and do you use the resources you had there?

I9 On a business or personal level?

Francesco M. Working. For example, did you do work in Greece through the network you already had there?

I9 More no than yes. Mostly foreigners and Italians I met afterwards who trusted me to do work on houses or private properties in Greece because I am Greek.

Francesco M. What about catering?

I9 For catering definitely not. But even for design work the venues I know didn't contact me that much, because they already saw me as Italian.

Francesco M. Not even in the early years?

I9 No, I was not even able. Although I had some not insignificant contacts, since my uncle is one of the few real designers in Greece. I happened to work a couple of times doing smaller jobs, but I wasn't interested in exploiting that network to work there.

Francesco M. While your partners in Italy did you meet all of them here? Or did you bring someone from Greece, for example the cooks from the restaurant?

I9 Most immigrants drag people from their places in order to cooperate. So for the restaurant it was convenient for us to do that than to train Italian cooks to cook Greek. Through contacts we were able to get cooks from Greece who were doing this by trade.

Francesco M. All right, I understand everything. I would say we had a good, informative talk, so I can end the recording.

Appendix 13: Transcript of interview 10

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] So first thing I ask you is some general information about yourself. Where are you from? I know what job you do, though. I mean your path at the school level, at the work level. What led you to be who you are and where you are?

I10 [00:00:16] Okay? Can I talk?

Francesco M. [00:00:21] Yes, yes, please absolutely.

I10 [00:00:24] So I am Italian. Born in Naples, at the age of 18 I moved to Rome. I studied as a surveyor. Then I moved to Rome for love and I started doing this job through my ex-husband who was doing this of work. I got into the company, the old structure of the company, through him and then slowly over the years I was running pretty much all of it and he was completely out of it. So eventually when we separated

I bought the company. On this company I worked there but it has existed for many years, because precisely it was my husband's and even before that his father's. In short, quite an old structure. I worked there for thirty years, but at some point I moved to live in Spain, three years ago.

Francesco M. [00:01:28] Okay, but repeat for a moment, just to have it in the record, what kind of company is it?

I10 [00:01:34] So we do textile furniture, everything related to furniture even in the home. Hotels, boats, public facilities, private facilities, etc. Textile furniture means from sofas to curtains, carpets, rugs, armchairs, beds. Everything textile, wallpaper, everything textile in a home. We manufacture it and sell it.

Francesco M. [00:01:59] Okay, okay. So this is your business that you always had in Italy and then you moved to Spain. And so you studied and after that you always worked in this business, right? Which after that became yours, you started just like that. Well, then a question of mine would be, how come you decided to, let's say the question I'm asking you now I don't think can apply so much to your business in Italy, because you told me that it's a business that you didn't start but you took over.

I10 [00:03:00] Yes, but it's been mine for 20 years already. First with my husband and then mine.

Francesco M. [00:03:05] Whereas what you did in Spain instead is something that you started, you created it, right? And how come you felt the need and wanted to launch into this new, entrepreneurial activity? What were the decision factors?

I10 [00:03:26] So the main factor was the fact that here, Formentera being a small island, everything is kind of lacking in this aspect of decor. Because there are instead very nice houses and very important villas, so the aspect of decorating particular things is very lacking and so, let's say a little bit talking, he befriended us. By now it seems you two dogs are a bit with a lot of people on the island. They finally convinced me, it would be.

Francesco M. [00:04:08] Okay. Okay this this business that you have in Formentera and he told me that it's kind of a room where he takes the products that you produce in Italy. Right?

I10 [00:04:17] Exactly. I met Rome with an exhibition as well as national. You will also have to choose the fabric and then we make it in Italy with that fabric, rather a sofa rather than an okay.

Francesco M. [00:04:32] And you don't see other people's products of other, let's say other companies or just useful.

I10 [00:04:39] We buy from the other companies and then we make produce the sofa with the fabric of many European and international companies. Okay.

Francesco M. [00:04:51] If yes yes the raw material. Sure, but I say then your final product is only yours of the company in Italy what you sell in Formentera if you're okay and you told me repeat your experience for a moment. Well, let's say in Spain. But isn't Formentera maybe a little bit a separate sale from Spain, because being an island like Sardinia can be from the Italian, so? The experience I had, the experience I had in the first team is repeated.

I10 [00:05:29] Let's say that here there is then a government apart from the government of the Balearic Islands that under the Spanish government of the central government Okay.

Francesco M. [00:05:37] And what was your experience at this place? And why did you decide to stop there? Then it is first, something already said because it was missing, There was a lack. You identified an opportunity right. But what experience did you have? First what brought you to get there?

I10 [00:05:58] No, just for personal reasons. A quiet past.

Francesco M. [00:06:03] So you had a certain time of the year. It's a little bit novel there.

I10 [00:06:09] That's right.

Francesco M. [00:06:10] Okay. And how would you describe access to the local ecosystem and society in Formentera? Dani, full-fledged immigrant as I am? How was the beginning, especially both on a personal level and then. I mean, entrepreneur.

I10 [00:06:31] If on a personal level it was very, very quiet, because anyway I knew, I got to know easily people both from the island and a lot of people who come from France rather than from Italy who live here on the island and from a professional point of view and it works very much word of mouth that they have to know. And then because it's a very small island, it works a lot on the word of mouth of the people and the locals who live here.

Francesco M. [00:07:08] Okay? Regarding, for example, language, onomastics is already.

I10 [00:07:14] I took a one-year course in Spanish in Italy before I came here.

Francesco M. [00:07:22] Okay and so I took a course in Spanish. So the language and specifically Spanish. Not that it's easy studied when you get to study grammar. Not easy though maybe to start speaking from Italian. A little bit easier for me Spanish than German that I'm studying. Now there is just another world.

I10 [00:07:42] Simple though. Here anyway, everyone understands Italian very well because there is so much Italian tourism and so that they understand very well and they also speak from who Spaniards speak Italian.

Francesco M. [00:07:57] Okay, clear. On the other hand, tourism brings like at our place in Jesolo everybody speaks German because they are the ones who bring the money. So instead, at the level of let's say bureaucratic, legal in creating a subsidiary or otherwise entrepreneurial activity there how did you find yourself to be?

I10 [00:08:25] Much more streamlined? Now I don't know if it's because it's an island, so everything is much more controlled. A small island, moreover it's really small and it's 22 meters and 22 kilometers longitude of the island and so being a small island it's all very streamlined. The bureaucracy is quite long, it was very easy to open a business.

Francesco M. [00:08:49] This is a very positive thing and there has been somebody. That is the main question that you have already partially answered. But I'm also told now that you don't know much about word of mouth, so there has been someone to help you. Let's start from the legal bureaucratic point of view to let's say legally create your company, your, your store, even if it's not.

I10 [00:09:18] I went to a local accountant.

Francesco M. [00:09:22] That you met. Are you then found yourself? Did you recommend somebody.

I10 [00:09:28] The store owner recommended me.

Francesco M. [00:09:31] The owner of the walls. Okay, so the one to whom you pay rent recommended this person to you? Okay. And instead for any other aspect, for example merit that works so much of word of mouth. Can you elaborate a little bit on what? What has word of mouth worked for?

I10 [00:09:53] This didn't really help in finding clientele, because through friends, precisely, you kind of spread the idea of this project that I was doing and on the island and so and so basically definitely through friends and friends and friends did it help a lot in finding clientele? Definitely yes.

Francesco M. [00:10:18] But also friends, friends, colleagues from the island. There are people who lived there or friends friends from the usual Visitors.

I10 [00:10:30] The one and the other. There are some people who live right here. There's one particular family, again Italian, but they've been living here for 30 years and they're in the business of real estate houses and so through her I've met a nice, nice circle of people and also through friends, friends and Italian friends who have houses here and so they've introduced me to people who have houses as well. There was no mechanism here.

Francesco M. [00:11:00] So I would say that in short, although maybe it wasn't, it's a given to identify it. But it seems to me that precisely there was a certain someone who helped you mainly to expand your network. Because after all, when you get to a new place you either go and talk to people you don't know randomly, or you have somebody to introduce you right, okay? And so aside from these people here aside from let's say the function of expanding your network of contacts, you immediately called a hand with something else that you couldn't do on your own or anyway that having had someone tell you no. Look this might work better in this way. Or is this person more competent than another, as may have been the case with the accountant, that is, with your, as they say in online Italian? Whatever, that this stuff here that.

I10 [00:12:06] No, in that respect no. But in the end it all went quite. In a very natural way.

Francesco M. [00:12:19] So, and except in the beginning there was no contact. You needed these people, maybe in the initial stage. When you decided that I settle here and try to network, I try to find some professional figures who are trusted. But there wasn't someone at a later stage, maybe after the foundation. After the first few sales that helped with anything?

I10 [00:12:49] No. Okay, but no.

Francesco M. [00:12:53] Okay, okay, but still it doesn't have to be there. So it's not like if you tell me don't.

I10 [00:13:01] It's because everything here is really very simple. Because it is.

Francesco M. [00:13:05] Let's be clear, it's not clear that it's a special case. Of course, there is, in the sense that once I think you stay a year you know practically everything about the island while moving to Spain.

I10 [00:13:17] Meaning no? Exactly, it is comparable to a small neighborhood.

Francesco M. [00:13:23] If you are precisely in Rome, for example, you can be there for a year and still not know even half of what is around. Okay. But what about instead? So in your opinion what was it? Were these people who put you in the right contexts crucial? Or looking back? You say but maybe you succeeded even on your own, Surely you would have succeeded at that. You have no doubt. Because I think if it doesn't go, when you're determined to do something, an alternative way is found.

I10 [00:14:00] But they were definitely crucial from the point of view of timing, because I started working right away, even on the first job. And also very important one that I took, which was to completely furnish a hotel that was opening, that opened this year this summer, and certainly thanks to these people I broke down all the barriers of time, in the sense that I had already taken a very important job and the store was practically opening at the same time. So a lot of people definitely helped to give it a good initial push and it usually takes a little bit longer. I mean, if you are good your professional work is such, however in any case you need some time to get better known. These people have been from the standpoint of timing crucial.

Francesco M. [00:14:59] Sure, in the end in version and anyway you have to get your name right. I mean it's not that people rely only on trust having a person, maybe local or anyway a trusted person who tells you this happens in everything, I think not only professionally. But I want to go to a dentist I maybe ask some of my friends and get some advice rather than just go randomly. I say I do an army. Silly example though. And so according to you I think your need to have these people is also is definitely due to the fact that you are a foreigner to the island right? Except I don't know when there are so many local Spanish people living in Formentera or are they mainly people from other countries.

I10 [00:15:52] But there are many, including Spanish and many just from the island.

Francesco M. [00:15:56] So many native islanders.

I10 [00:15:58] And a lot of people just from the island Isolani.

Francesco M. [00:16:01] Who work mainly in tourism, I guess because.

I10 [00:16:04] There are our main owners of.

Francesco M. [00:16:08] Real Estate.

I10 [00:16:10] Of course, there is a lot of money, although okay.

Francesco M. [00:16:16] And so, precisely, the fact that you are Italian required this this input of somebody to advise you. I guess because clearly if you are born in a right place, then you develop the network slowly, in the sense living right?

I10 [00:16:38] Sure, absolutely yes.

Francesco M. [00:16:40] Okay. And so I think your case is a little bit particular. So this question I don't know if it can be applicable, however you perceive your being a foreigner. And in Formentera as a strength or a weakness, in the sense in selling, in creating that a name is there or it can also be neither, in the sense then of me, but in my opinion I had the same. In Italy the same difficulties and ease that the local people or at least someone native Spanish had.

I10 [00:17:19] No, there is to say that for my work, so using the advantage that made in Italy here is important is very much in demand and is, in quotes synonymous with further guarantee on a product that you both for taste and quality. No, an advantage is important instead. Definitely from a professional point of view.

Francesco M. [00:17:49] Sure, but certainly then for the industry you work in, why design? We know they go crazy abroad, the Italian one right rightly though if it's engineering in Germany or that just maybe they trust the local gods more. Okay anyway and. You had to learn the language to be able to sell. Do you think even maybe they speak in English or you say well knowing that so many people speak Italian? Maybe it's also had to learn. It is not a difficulty.

I10 [00:18:33] The language was needed, but it was needed because it's a very good game anyway, mainly with people who speak Spanish.

Francesco M. [00:18:42] Sure.

I10 [00:18:44] Especially from a technical point of view, it is important to have a minimum command of the language.

Francesco M. [00:18:50] And as a last thing I ask you well, I already know that you have very close relations with Italy. Rightly so because your parent company is in Italy and it's run by your daughter. Now she told me right. Okay also so you now separated, I mean you do this in Formentera, but it doesn't contribute what okay. But you obviously have very close relationships though, I mean you use the resources that you had in Italy. What about the network of people I guess in Italy?

I10 [00:19:26] Yes, yes, yes, absolutely yes. For production we do everything in Italy, with the same labs that we also use for the Italian company.

Francesco M. [00:19:36] Okay, but you only sell Formentera. Let's say from this forum.

I10 [00:19:44] For the moment and for the moment there are jobs here on the island.

Francesco M. [00:19:48] And then come. I mean, you do international work with the Italian company.

I10 [00:19:53] I guess it is.

Francesco M. [00:19:56] Okay. Well, so let's say it was a short talk. But rightly your particular reality, because being such a small island, also the difficulties that you may have maybe are a little bit reduced.

I10 [00:20:14] And true.

Francesco M. [00:20:15] You gave me a lot of interesting information, though. And how do you see? Certainly there was someone, in my opinion also that was important, maybe not as important as others. In other cases though let's say if there has been.

I10 [00:20:34] As you say, however, especially in the initial phase, it was very helpful to have contact with people who had previously made contact with people and to have met people who live here, people from the island, people who have moved here.

Francesco M. [00:20:53] And this picks up on something I said earlier. He told you that you moved there out of a personal desire for tranquility, for a change of air. But it was also, let's face it, without so many, driven by the fact that you had contacts there or you would have done it regardless.

I10 [00:21:13] It's not done regardless. I was already of that idea even from the beginning, since I was not in the early years that they were known.

Francesco M. [00:21:22] They are however open the doors, open the show room there was due to the fact that.

I10 [00:21:29] No need to be.

Francesco M. [00:21:32] Okay. I've got it all figured out. Shall I stop the recording?

Appendix 14: Transcript of interview 11

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] Okay, I got the recording going. In the meantime, the first thing I want to ask you is a general question about yourself, who you are, your educational background. What led you to be where you are and who you are.

I11 [00:00:27] I am [name], born in Albania on November 9, 1977. This is my second time out of Albania because I was in Greece before. It was a short period though, a few months and then I came back home. And in 97-98, when the regime changed in Albania I came here, by rubber boat. In 97 in Albania the regime changed and there was war, so I came to Italy. I had difficulties in the beginning because I had to pay to emigrate, although thank God I come from a family that has always worked in construction, even my mother. My father was a bit famous, he was an engineer, but he was a communist and as soon as democracy was established he didn't want to give up the libretto, so they fired him right away. And they wouldn't let him work. So slowly he started to work on his own by creating a team of people, since at that time there was no need to form a company. From 14 years I started working with him, I only did 8 years of schooling but my family was poor so I didn't want to burden them. As soon as I got here so thank God I knew something because precisely having worked with him I had entered the construction business. We are 7 children, I have 4 sisters and 3 brothers.

Francesco M. [00:03:16] Clear.

I11 [00:03:17] And of all of them the one who got some experience is only me. My brothers were going after my father but they couldn't find work seriously. I struggled in the beginning in Italy because they wouldn't give me papers, I was a non-EU person and they were always giving me a hard time. As soon as the first amnesty came out I couldn't get the documents as I couldn't find anyone to hire me, but at the second amnesty I found someone who did the documents for me. So after three years of applying for documents I started working. I wanted to open a VAT number from the beginning, as soon as I got the documents, however, it took some money, and I had no resources. So I slowly went on working until I reached my goal. And this is my beginning, kind of summarized.

Francesco M. [00:04:55] Okay, meanwhile it's a good start, a very interesting story.

I11 [00:05:01] Then I came here and got engaged to my wife who is Albanian, and we have 3 children.

Francesco M. [00:05:11] Well compliments!

I11 [00:05:12] Male, female and male.

Francesco M. [00:05:15] Male, female and male, a nice variety also.

I11 [00:05:20] Heh heh.

Francesco M. [00:05:21] At least you have a chance to try a little bit of everything. Having the female and also the male is always different.

I11 [00:05:28] Yes, the female is very attached to the father.

Francesco M. [00:05:32] But how old are your children?

I11 [00:05:36] The first one is 16 years old, then 13 and 10 years old. I did the math every 3 years basically.

Francesco M. [00:05:44] Well, you were really very scientific.

I11 [00:05:51] Eh yes, every 3 years I had a child.

Francesco M. [00:05:52] Well done, you did well. Well, certainly better that way than having two children ten years apart.

I11 [00:06:00] Yes, then eventually with the work I carried the whole family on my own.

Francesco M. [00:06:09] Congratulations.

I11 [00:06:10] Because my wife who didn't work, because unfortunately with pregnancy every 3 years she couldn't at that time.

Francesco M. [00:06:21] But did you meet your wife in Italy or in Albania?

I11 [00:06:25] No, in Albania.

Francesco M. [00:06:37] And you came to Italy afterwards subsequently?

I11 [00:06:41] Yes, she went on a trip while she was pregnant, and she went on a trip when I unfortunately still didn't have my job in order, so I couldn't make the request

for my wife to go. So she left from Greece and I paid a lot more money than when I came. She went to Greece and from Greece she came to Italy.

Francesco M. [00:07:09] Well, what a story in short. You have had some special experiences I must say.

I11 [00:07:15] Yeah, then me being a man I was more relaxed, but you know for women it's always different, especially in pregnancy.

Francesco M. [00:07:17] It's different yes, of course. But you had a good time, too, though.

I11 [00:07:28] Because I told him to wait, but she wanted to be with me.

Francesco M. [00:07:35] But in the end things turned out for the best and that's a good thing, the most important thing. And listen by the way, you opened a vat number after that, but did you start by working for somebody, or did you start right away with a vat number?

I11 [00:08:01] I closed my VAT number because I didn't have clients, however, I worked when someone called me. I used to work under [name] when he passed me something, as well as with others, friends and architects who had to do work.

Francesco M. [00:08:24] I understand, so you told me that you work in construction, and right away you wanted to open a vat number, right? But how come you had this desire? Instead of trying to go and work for somebody else, a company or something like that?

I11 [00:08:49] Because I was confident, however, unfortunately I lacked resources at the beginning. But I was sure from the beginning that I wanted to start my own business.

Francesco M. [00:09:02] So you were sure that working alone would bring you...

I11 [00:09:08] It's not so much the alone, it's that what I wanted to do was to create a group, a company to work in construction, like my father did.

Francesco M. [00:09:21] No, no, But it's not alone, there's my alone, it wasn't meant as not wanting to work with other people, it was meant as setting up your own business.

I11 [00:09:30] Yes I understand. Anyway my father was a handyman in this area and when we worked with him we were able to practically build a house from the ground up.

Francesco M. [00:09:44] So you had an example. A reference point that led you to make that decision?

I11 [00:09:51] Yes, because I came here and I was already able to work, and especially I don't like to work under others. I say it sincerely, I never liked it, being under a master. Of course, then some special situations came up and I had to close my first vat number and be an employee for a while. You definitely have to incur quite an expense for a vat number, because after a while you would have to hire other people. I used to work on my own instead, partly because I didn't have all that much work and what I did I could do on my own. At first I was doing mainly parquet-related things, and then I met [name], who also taught me how to work marble. But at some point doing everything by myself had become difficult.

Francesco M. [00:11:10] And the reason you decided to come to work in Italy was because of the unstable situation in Albania and Italy was, along with Greece, the most easily accessible country? Or was there also another reason, for example, connections, or any other reason that made you say, okay Italy is the right place?

I11 [00:11:53] In Greece I used to go to work during the fruit seasons. We would go to pick the seasonal fruit but it was only in the beginning when I was young. In Italy, on the other hand, I came through a friend who was already here, who had guaranteed me the opportunity to work. As soon as I arrived I stayed a little bit at his house in Formello, also around Rome. And he got me some work but there wasn't a lot of work, so I started going out to the square every morning to look for jobs. One time I worked together with a person who made me go all the way to Ascoli, and he lost me a lot of money because he was unreliable. So the beginning was a little turbulent let's say, I was living hand to mouth. It was definitely not what I was looking for and what I had hoped for, however, I created a path for myself with patience.

Francesco M. [00:13:39] That certainly does you credit. Then again, you have to make mistakes, by making mistakes you learn. Right?

I11 [00:13:47] That's right, if you don't make mistakes you never learn.

Francesco M. [00:13:51] And in general how would you describe your access to the Italian ecosystem and Italian society? Has it been difficult? Both on a personal level and on a work level. On a work level already a little bit told me, but did the fact that you were an immigrant also complicate things on a personal level?

I11 [00:14:19] Let's say that from people's point of view I had some difficulties. For example, I worked 3 years together with an Italian guy who had a VAT number, who I even sued, who had to do my documents for my residence permit. He had reassured me of this and then at the last week he informed me that he would not do them. So that complicated things a lot for me, even at the state level.

Francesco M. [00:15:13] So both at the bureaucratic level and at the personal level?

I11 [00:15:17] Yes, at the state level but not only.

Francesco M. [00:15:24] Sure.

I11 [00:15:27] Honestly, there are some people who err much more than the state, unfortunately we are not all the same. There are the problems of the state, at the level of bureaucratic slowness for sure, however also the physical people who create a lot of problems for you and lie.

Francesco M. [00:16:05] But and you say they lied to you because you were an immigrant or because they were fake people? From a cultural and societal point of view, did the fact that you were an immigrant penalize you in your opinion? Would these people have tried to fool even an Italian?

I11 [00:16:29] These people I worked with in the beginning were also trying to cheat the Italians. But certainly the immigrants were viewed by them with a bit of a crooked eye. But they were not trying to cheat only us. 70% of their target audience were immigrants but 30% were Italians, probably it's because it was easier with us, I don't know.

Francesco M. [00:17:05] Sure. And anyway, the theme of my research is to understand if there are people, in any country, that I define as facilitators and helping immigrants. And so we come to this point.

I11 [00:17:32] There are definitely. They're not all the same, most of them are good people trying to help you.

Francesco M. [00:17:33] That's right.

I11 [00:17:34] Then there are people like some of the people I met, who try to take advantage. But they are maybe 10%.

Francesco M. [00:17:49] No, of course, but I tell you, I am right now for all intents and purposes an immigrant, because I live in Germany, I am Italian, now for a year and a half. Obviously I can't compare the experience I have to the experience you have had, first because of a question of work permits or residence permits. Since it is now all Europe, it is much easier. And second also because of a question of situation, you were coming from a difficult environment where there was a regime change, all the different things. So I don't want to compare at all, but I'm telling you from my experience, though.

I11 [00:18:26] Sorry to interrupt. With my first son, [name], he was born in 2006, at St. Peter's Hospital in Rome, with a leg problem. I did not have to pay all the medical expenses, however, I did not receive too much help from the state because I could not apply for a residence permit and I was not from a country part of the European Community. So exactly, for certain things I had to suffer a lot and carry on the family alone because there was not all this help from the state.

Francesco M. [00:19:29] You certainly did well and you struggled a lot. I must say it is to be admired this.

I11 [00:19:37] I had to work, otherwise the other options for people who arrive like this in Italy are stealing or dealing. But I wanted to create something for my family as well.

Francesco M. [00:20:02] Sure and let's hope it goes on like that. Then again you've also been good and it means you're good at what you do if you've made it this far. Anyway, and so what I'm asking you is was there anybody, Italian or non-Italian, anyway somebody who was in Italy who helped you? For example when you opened

your VAT number, to start working. But who helped you not because there was a financial interest behind it, but out of friendship or kindness, without wanting anything in return in short.

I11 [00:20:49] Only one person helped me a lot, that is [name]. He helped me to work but he didn't want a percentage or anything in return, I opened my vat and he helped me to find jobs. Other people always wanted money.

Francesco M. [00:21:14] But this friend of yours, for example, this friend of yours who convinced you to come to Italy, did he help you with anything even though he was Albanian?

I11 [00:21:26] He helped me get the word out to find work. However I had to go out in the square, however he recommended me to others.

Francesco M. [00:21:49] So question of expanding the network, creating opportunities for yourself. That's okay, I mean, I think it's quite normal and it's still an important help. But what about [name]? What did he help you with? How did you meet each other? And then what did he do for you?

I11 [00:22:18] [name] did so much. I was coming from a difficult period after working with what I was telling you before, and a friend introduced me to [name]. [name] took me to work right away because he saw how I worked. I had a tough head because, as I said, I liked to be under a boss, maybe I would respond badly and things like that. But as far as the actual work was concerned, [name] never said anything to me because he saw how I worked. So he took me under his wing and helped me grow, in whatever aspect, including family.

Francesco M. [00:23:11] Okay. And also, let's say for example, for the VAT number, did he also help you understand how it worked at the bureaucratic level and at the legal level?

I11 [00:23:21] Yes, he helped me a lot. He had already advised me to go to his accountant to ask for information.

Francesco M. [00:23:34] Okay, and then I guess by having you work, it introduced you to a lot of people right?

I11 [00:23:43] When I didn't have work he made me work, and that means a lot.

Francesco M. [00:23:46] It's a lot and then...

I11 [00:23:51] It's also a lot because it's not like I had that much clientele. And you don't find somebody like [name] was, who would let me work when I wanted and needed. If I had to go and do a week's work on my own, then I could come back and he would take me back and give me other jobs.

Francesco M. [00:24:14] Sure, and so afterwards giving you this opportunity to work clearly introduced you to people, and because you are good then these people introduced you to other people... I mean that's how it works, right?

I11 [00:24:31] Eh yes it works like that. You go to work on a construction site, get to know him of the people, your other countrymen and word gets around. When I arrived in Italy, I opened my VAT number but I didn't know the architects, the inegneri and the costruttori. I only knew people from the country where I was staying.

Francesco M. [00:24:55] Sure. But you were working with [name] and so you were giving a portion of what you were taking to him? Or is it really a personal matter?

I11 [00:25:04] No, [name] never asked me for a euro.

Francesco M. [00:25:09] So he was really mentored, almost a local mentor.

I11 [00:25:15] Yes. But they're not all like that.

Francesco M. [00:25:19] No, absolutely.

I11 [00:25:22] When you go to an architect, builder, etc., everyone has a price.

Francesco M. [00:25:27] No, no, absolutely absolutely absolutely.

I11 [00:25:30] Everyone wants something in return.

Francesco M. [00:25:33] Sure. Then I had the pleasure of meeting [name], I know what kind of person he is, I even went to eat at his house. And listen, do you think that being an immigrant, a foreigner in Italy, without having had a person like [name],

things would have been different? I'm sure you would have been able to find a solution anyway. But I would imagine that the role of these people was instrumental in getting to where you are now, right?

I11 [00:26:17] But it was too crucial, alone I couldn't have done anything. Especially after becoming a father.

Francesco M. [00:26:33] But also as a matter of credibility? In the sense that having a local person to recommend you made people trust you more? I don't know if that makes sense. That is, the fact that [name] from Rome recommended you, versus you going without a local person to refer you, in your opinion did that make clients feel more comfortable? Did they trust you more?

I11 [00:27:22] Yes, yes, [name] used to advise me a lot in the construction sites and gave me a lot of compliments. Although the way I am made of compliments I don't want any. But he used to recommend me and give me a lot of compliments, even now he continues to do that with clients.

Francesco M. [00:28:04] Well, yes, but maybe because you deserve them also. And anyway, in general, do you perceive your being a foreigner as a strength or a weakness in your work?

I11 [00:28:25] As a weakness.

Francesco M. [00:28:26] And how come?

I11 [00:28:35] Because if I had been Italian they would have seen me with a different eye. But not because I was a foreigner in general, but because I was Albanian. There is a Frenchman, a German they would not have had the same treatment, but Albanians were seen that way, we came from the war and we had a difficult character according to them.

Francesco M. [00:29:05] Unfortunately, at the end of the day, people remember a lot more people who do wrong things than people who do right things. There can be 100 good people and one who does disasters and people only remember that. It is also for us Italians, how do they regard us in the world? People who don't pay taxes, who don't want to work, who are in the mafia, those are always the things.

I11 [00:29:40] Then it's not like that, those who want to work put in and do it.

Francesco M. [00:29:47] Exactly.

I11 [00:29:52] They are not all the same.... There are a lot of Italians, like [name], who comes to the construction site and even having five, ten workers he starts working hard. Then there are others, I give an example of one thing because I didn't like it. Today on a construction site we are doing 3 resinam baths, and one of the workers is Albanian like me. The main one is Italian, he stands there all day, he doesn't do anything and he exploits the foreign workers. He just stood there and waited for the workers to finish to go home. And he didn't even lift a finger. These things make me angry, and that's also why I never wanted to be under anyone.

Francesco M. [00:31:40] No of course, the leader should always set an example. That is the main thing.

I11 [00:31:45] Sure, but what I'm saying is that the boss sends the worker to the site and goes away, not that he stands there and is seen doing nothing.

Francesco M. [00:32:06] I understand. And listen, do you still have any connection with Albania? On a contact level... Not personal, working ones I say. Or are you totally distant now?

I11 [00:32:15] No, if I were to leave tomorrow for Albania I would not have the contacts to work, because the contacts I had were related to my father.

Francesco M. [00:32:30] So you have no resources that you can exploit?

I11 [00:32:33] No, they know me through my father but I wouldn't have any resources or contacts to exploit.

Francesco M. [00:32:49] Okay, I got it. I would say we had a good talk so I can end the recording.

Appendix 15: Transcript of interview 12

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] So my first question to you, just to kick things off is just a general question about yourself, who you are, what you do, what your path was in

terms of academic path, in terms of professional path. And a little bit also, what brought you to be who you are now and where you are now?

I12 [00:00:28] Well, it's a very broad question.

Francesco M. [00:00:30] So answer as you wish.

I12 [00:00:32] Where should I start?

Francesco M. [00:00:32] As you wish. Just background information about you.

I12 [00:00:37] Okay. I come from Bulgaria, from Sofia, which is the capital city in Bulgaria. There I went to high school and did math, and then decided that maybe computer science would be an interesting field of study and then I did this in Germany. So I moved to Karlsruhe, near Stuttgart and I studied there computer science then bachelor masters.

Francesco M. [00:01:36] And did you start did you study in English or in German?

I12 [00:01:41] No, in German. In German. Because I studied German back in Bulgaria. It's cool. In the two schools I have been studying German. And also my mother, actually, she's a teacher in foreign language in German, in Bulgaria.

Francesco M. [00:02:09] Interesting information, because this already tells me something about you that is relevant to my topic. And so you've studied in Germany and which means you spent, let's say, 4 to 5 years in Germany and then what was your transition to the working world?

I12 [00:02:37] Yes. Well, the position I was working also during my studies, actually, as Werkstudent, in a company in the city and then also at the university. There were some jobs there. After finishing my studies, I started looking for a job as a programmer. And I said, I'm going to have a change to see a bit of from the world because Karlsruhe is not exactly the center of the world. And I was wondering where can I go? And I applied to a job in London with a big company and I went there for two years and a half. And I was working there as a programmer or software engineer.

Francesco M. [00:03:58] That sounds cool.

I12 [00:04:02] And then I decided to make some change and the next step was that they wanted to try to work as a freelancer to work for myself, I started to understand how to build a company. And that the easiest step to go in this direction would be to start to work for myself as a freelancer, because there are projects where people look for programmers as freelancers. Since then I'm a freelancer. Yes. This was in 2017. And I went back to Germany because I found freelance projects here in Germany.

Francesco M. [00:04:59] Pretty much a good summary of your path and so can I ask you your age?

I12 [00:05:06] Yeah. I'm 33.

Francesco M. [00:05:20] So, what is the structure or company you have in Bulgaria that you're transferring now to Germany?

I12 [00:05:27] Well, there are different legal types of companies. And if you're a freelancer, you are liable with your own possessions because you don't have a company really. I'm sure in your thesis you probably are also looking into this. So I guess, you know, like if you have different types of companies and I decided to create this company where you are not liable as a person. So in Germany is called GmbH, in Bulgaria it's the same idea. And and you don't need to invest so much money as in Germany.

Francesco M. [00:06:30] Is this the reason why you founded in Bulgaria instead of Germany?

I12 [00:06:36] Well, it was part of the reason I didn't have so much money back then to plan. But actually, I was trying to build the company in Bulgaria. So I moved back to Bulgaria and I was working remotely for a client in Germany. So I was located in Bulgaria, I was planning to build it there and therefore I founded it there

Francesco M. [00:07:01] So you went to London, then you came back to Germany and then you went back to Bulgaria.

I12 [00:07:07] Exactly. Exactly.

Francesco M. [00:07:08] And then came back one more time.

I12 [00:07:10] Exactly. I know it sounds a bit.

Francesco M. [00:07:14] Sounds like a journey.

I12 [00:07:16] Okay.

Francesco M. [00:07:19] So tell me a bit what your company does and.

I12 [00:07:33] So it's software consultancy. As you know, I am doing mostly programming software engineering for clients and for companies and there are a lot of projects like that. And this involves as well, some sort of consultancy around how should we structure our architecture? I mean not only coding or programming, the software, but also, conceptualizing how the different parts should work together and also involves sometimes some consistency around the process. Usually my clients, they have programmers in their teams and I'm working with some of them. So it's not that they cannot program something but the thing is that I am helping with programming, but I also help them with consultancy around how can they have a better process. And it seems to have moved a bit from coding before, towards more consultancy about process but still coding. Okay. So it's software, it's consultancy, a mix of coding, consulting, training.

Francesco M. [00:09:25] Comprehensive portfolio of offering. And I think, I mean it's a good, it's a hot topic in any case now, right? So.

I12 [00:09:38] There is competition.

Francesco M. [00:09:39] It was a lot of I imagine. Right? I see that a lot of maybe smaller companies are trying to move to a more digitalized way of working and I think it's a good field to be in, in any case. What pushed you to decide to open your company? What was the is your entrepreneurial motivation? I mean, there there's been a point where you were working in a in a big company. And then why instead of finding another big company, you decided to freelance?

I12 [00:10:26] Okay. I think, somehow I wanted to experiment with this. I wanted to just do it and see how it works. Somehow it was it just felt like a natural decision at this point.

Francesco M. [00:11:05] To be on your own?

I12 [00:11:06] To be on my own.

Francesco M. [00:11:08] From my perspective, there could be different reasons for a person to go solo or fund a company. Let's say we become liable for our actions. And that could be monetary reasons. That could be reasons of creativity, reasons of not wanting someone else to control what you do and feeling kind of closed in a box. So that's just some of the reasons I've heard. And as you say, you wanted to explore a bit. Maybe for you it could be more of a creative, type and also trying to learn something new? Correct me if I'm wrong.

I12 [00:12:04] Yes. Yes. So for me it was also connected with personal development. I thought that combining projects and establishing a company and then to be responsible, then it will help me grow as a professional and as a person as well. And I felt that, you know, somehow for me, it was interesting to have to go into this process of growing. Basically, I saw this opportunity to go to learn something new.

Francesco M. [00:12:50] Sounds like a very good reason to try something.

I12 [00:12:55] Yeah, I mean, it's kind of also a mixture of the other things you said as well. So usually as a freelancer, you would get a bit more money but in the long run, it's not a good motivator, it was also not the main motivation for me.

Francesco M. [00:13:17] I think in anything you do, the money comes if you're good at what you're doing. So I think to create a company means also potentially losing a lot of money. So if with the money is not worth enough, considering most of all. Well, big companies in Germany pay is not worth, in my opinion, if that's your motivation. But that's very personal. You know, I don't want to argue if someone thinks things are differently but I think we're on the same page this. I am looking for an entrepreneur. So for me you are a special case in terms that you started a company in your home country, but then you always operated with clients in Germany and now you're moving your company to Germany. So why in Germany? Like what pushed you to want to move to Germany?

I12 [00:14:18] Yeah, well, it's a mixture of two things. My clients have been in Germany. And the second thing is that my girlfriend back then was living in Germany. And, so then my clients were here and it's a much bigger market than in Bulgaria. And also, my girlfriend was working here. She had a job, and I was asking myself, Okay, is it wise now to stay in Bulgaria? And therefore I got back to Germany.

Francesco M. [00:15:09] And, your girlfriend is German?

I12 [00:15:12] No, she comes from Bulgaria.

Francesco M. [00:15:13] Okay. And you met her when you were studying? Or you met in Bulgaria, and then she moved to Germany, and then it was not, let's say, planned.

I12 [00:15:26] No, we studied together in Germany and we knew each other from for a long period of time. So she was staying here already in Germany.

Francesco M. [00:15:46] My next question would be, what was your prior experience in Germany? But you already answered to this so we can skip it. You came here to study, and how? So both from a personal point of view and also as a founder point of view. How would you describe the access to the local society and local business ecosystem of Germany, like as an immigrant first and as a businessman second?

I12 [00:16:19] Well, as an immigrant, I would say that, well I can compare it actually, because I was an immigrant also in the UK, in London. Um, so, in my experience, the, the society is a bit more closed in Germany than in the UK. But this is my personal experience, right? [00:16:55] [0.0s]

Francesco M. [00:16:56] Of course, and I think t's very area dependent. If you go to Berlin, maybe it's more comparable to London, but elsewhere and the south of Germany. I'm from another country. I'm an immigrant and I also agree that this society is much more closed. And London, it's an incredible melting pot of people. Maybe also the fact that you already knew the language compared to me, let's say, could have facilitated a bit your situation?

I12 [00:17:32] The language definitely is very important but I don't know it that well. And I found that it was easier in London because it's more international and people are used to it. Tthere are so many factors but that's one thing.

Francesco M. [00:18:10] Yeah.

I12 [00:18:11] Other than that, actually everything seems to seem to work.

Francesco M. [00:18:22] Well from the personal standpoint, right? And from the business, how was it? You said you find most of your clients are in Germany. How was that?

I12 [00:18:32] For the business? It's. It has been good. I have managed to find clients for now five years and a half. Of course, if you want to grow, I think you need more and more personal connections. But I think it's everywhere is like that

Francesco M. [00:19:13] I mean let's say if I imagine in England, right, I speak for myself now, my level of English is significantly better than my level of German, so for me probably would be a bit easier. Well, I know that in Germany, especially in the south of Germany, many companies are very traditional, So they kind of expect you to communicate with them in German. So maybe I don't know if that has been your case if you find also this situation or not.

I12 [00:19:49] Okay. Got it, yes. So many of my clients communicate in German. They've been communicating in German in these six years that they have worked. And even if I didn't know German, probably I wouldn't have gotten the job.

Francesco M. [00:20:13] That's what I mean. And like, do you think that you were a bit disadvantaged because you are an immigrant or do you think that's with the fact that you knew at least a communication level of German, you kind of didn't have a lot of problems compared to a German counterpart that would do the same job as you?

I12 [00:20:43] I can't say that I have had any problems with that. I mean, I have managed to find projects, if I didn't manage to find project, then yeah, you could think that is a problem.

Francesco M. [00:21:10] And in the end, the result is what matters. And you have been successful. So I understand what you mean.

I12 [00:21:17] Yeah. The thing is that there is a lot of companies are German language first. So if you're offering consultancy services to these companies, you need to offer them the services in German. And they won't buy the service in English unfortunately. Yeah, that's that. There are some companies which I work at, which are working in English.

Francesco M. [00:21:56] Okay.

I12 [00:21:58] Yeah. But the majority actually are not.

Francesco M. [00:22:09] From the bureaucratic point of view, considering Bulgaria is a member of the European Union, there are many less barriers in terms of immigration compared to people that are non EU. And this is also from personal experience. So at least myself, I never felt like there's a big disadvantage in being a foreigner. Didn't really change much compared to Germans, besides some small things that are not really relevant. So maybe the same is for you?

I12 [00:22:58] No, it has been pretty smooth. Yeah. No, no real problems.

Francesco M. [00:23:06] I mean, without the need of the visa, it makes a big difference. I mean, you were in London before Brexit, but right now a lot of people are having problems and going to London and London is kind of losing the attractiveness that it had. But I won't get into this discussion. Coming to the focal point of my thesis and the whole reason why we're doing this call. So again, my idea is to verify if key people, native or non-native, in the host country where you are right now and when you're were setting up your company, helped you in any way also from personal perspective, but mainly from a business perspective, in developing your activity and setting up your activity. It doesn't mean necessarily they helped you, like it could be a person that helped you connect with a certain person or gave you a suggestion in terms of which form of legal entity to create or any any type of help that you received from someone. And of course, I don't mean paid services because then it is a mutual interest rate of service.

I12 [00:24:45] Yes, I can think of, for example, a person from Bulgaria and he was offering the same services. So I was chatting with him sometimes for some some questions. Like how much do you pay for accounting services or do you use insurance for the company? How much do you pay for it? How does your business work this year? So we catch up every six months or so.

Francesco M. [00:25:42] So it's sort of a mentorship of a person that is a bit ahead on the path you're taking. Could it be described like, he is suggesting some things, some details that might seem small, but in the end are not that irrelevant?

I12 [00:26:08] Well, it's not so far as mentor mentorship, because mentorship is more involved, but he's more advanced in his path, more senior than me. Interesting to get information from him how it works.

Francesco M. [00:26:31] I understand, but let's say a figure that gave you some tips. And these tips you said are from a financial perspective. Did he help you in a legal way, or did he connect you with some professional figures that he refers to, like accountants or lawyers?

I12 [00:27:04] No, he hasn't. Currently I found an accountant. So he hasn't given me connections to something, but gave me his experience basically, which is also very valuable to me to know how they work in his company.

Francesco M. [00:27:32] Before going to other people, this person has been mainly from this tax perspective?

I12 [00:27:41] I think so. I asked him about the fees he pays for accounting, insurance for the company. How does he do it? General, how is the business going with his company?

Francesco M. [00:28:25] I get it. So how did you get to meet this person?

I12 [00:28:33] Well, we met through mutual friend.

Francesco M. [00:28:48] Makes sense. And this friend, made you meet or was it indirect?

I12 [00:29:18] No, no. It was just accidental.

Francesco M. [00:29:35] And of course, you say this relationship with this facilitator is ongoing, right? So you keep in touch. You haven't stopped communications with this person?

I12 [00:29:50] Yeah. Yeah.

Francesco M. [00:29:52] And so was there anyone else you were thinking earlier before I interrupted you?

I12 [00:29:59] Okay I think. So people who I don't pay money.

Francesco M. [00:30:11] You said you found some clients in Germany. Did you have any anyone help you with that process or introduction? Introducing you?

I12 [00:30:25] Well, those are the recruiters, but these people get money.

Francesco M. [00:30:28] Okay.

I12 [00:30:29] So, they are recruiting companies. They are paid. So there's an accountant. But for example, our client recommended me to another client. Because that's the best thing you can have for the service company that someone recommended another. It was great help. And this is connected with the services you provide. I mean, you provide a good service. Therefore this person recommends you to another company.

Francesco M. [00:32:00] I mean, you don't have to necessarily find other people. Like, I get that maybe remembering everything is also not easy, but I don't want to force anything out of you in terms if you would have said no one helped me, it would have still been valuable information for me.

I12 [00:32:18] So yeah, sure. I am renting a coworking space. Okay, so there's a coworking space here and there. I talk to people and we see each other every day and one person was able to find a notary to open the company. And I just ask this person because he already has a company and I just asked him for advice on which notary to use. The guy recommended me one and I was there today.

Francesco M. [00:33:07] And this was a German?

I12 [00:33:10] Yeah this is a local person.

Francesco M. [00:33:12] So that's valuable I would say. So an entrepreneurial ecosystem that helped you. There's many cases of people I've talked to that had other entrepreneurs as facilitators. I mean, it's people in the same situation as you. So why not share your experiences.

I12 [00:33:44] Yeah. So that is one very good example for what you're asking.

Francesco M. [00:33:51] Do you recall any facilitator or any person who helped you at a different stage, maybe also when you were studying here? Over anything of your life in Germany or as of your business career?

I12 [00:34:28] Probably, but I can't remember the exact.

Francesco M. [00:34:46] Don't worry.

I12 [00:34:48] Yeah, I guess there are such occasions but I think it depends on the connections you have. I mean, if you have more connections, there will be more occasions where people will tell you something and just help you if you have problems with something.

Francesco M. [00:35:16] I also think connections and exposure are important. You said you met this person in a co-working space. Maybe if you would have worked from home, then you would have never met this person that would have told you to go to this notary or something. You know, it's just a stupid example, but it builds on what you were saying.

I12 [00:35:38] Yes, exactly. And since I didn't know so many people in Germany, but it's quite well organized. I mean, people talk with each other constantly. So if you have some something, you talk with people around you and you absorb this information even without noticing it.

Francesco M. [00:36:20] So you can't put a face to the person that told you something, but then you absorbed it from a social context. That's also what has happened to me in many cases. Let's say for me, I didn't know German when I came here, so I have a German girlfriend. And from the bureaucratic perspective of doing the papers to set to to move here and everything to find a house, she helped me a lot. But in your case. Of course, you knew a little bit of German, so maybe you don't need it much because when you go to the office, book a bureau or something.

I12 [00:36:57] Mm hmm.

Francesco M. [00:36:59] And if you don't speak German. It can be a problem.

I12 [00:37:06] Yeah, I imagine. I imagine it could be a real problem. Yeah. Yes, definitely.

Francesco M. [00:37:10] If anything else comes to mind, you can maybe text me. Let's. I don't want. Nothing comes to mind now. It's okay. We can add any information, but it's not necessary. I mean, you already told me some three interesting people that can help you in different ways. I mean, your of course, your venture has not started yet, as is not born yet in Germany. Right. So asking you how much you think the actions and the help of these people have impacted you in terms of success of your venture is not relevant right now, in my opinion. But maybe I can ask you, what kind of figure would you be looking forward to have to help you with something in the future? Now that you've sorted, a notary thing, maybe some tax thing? And you would it would be great help to have someone contributing to this process?

I12 [00:38:25] So it would be great to find a partner. Like, co-founder. It would be great. Yeah. Or also an investor, who is very well connected. Someone who can find business, who can find clients. Of course, this would be also great, but those are people who get something in return.

Francesco M. [00:38:59] Like the co-founder I wouldn't say so, but for angel investors I extended my definition to include investors, because many people that maybe are at the furthest stage of the company compared to you, said that their main facilitators have become indeed investors. They are involved, but they do provide great help in connection with people. So I see your point. And do you think that you being a foreigner, it requires more to rely on, or it will require you more to rely on people, compared to a German? Or because of the fact, that you lived already in Germany and in general, how the society is structured here, you think there's not much difference compared to a German founder?

I12 [00:40:33] I would like to make an experiment. Basically, a German is to open the same company as me and then do the same thing, and then see if, for example, for me it was much harder than for his company did. But how can we do this experiment? It could. It could be that it's exactly the same. It could be that it's easier.

Francesco M. [00:41:12] The only way you could understand it is by meeting other founders that are German, that work in your same kind of business. And then you see if an investor is more willing to invest in their company just because they're Germans. But this has not happened yet. Or maybe will not even happen. So we don't need to spend much more time talking about this if it's. There hasn't occurred any situation that allows you to answer this.

I12 [00:41:43] I agree. You need to have, if you're in equities and want to have clients from this, if you want to find clients from somewhere, you need a group to connect with these clients somehow and find a way to connect in my field of business. I'm not sure that if you're perfectly speaking German here in Germany, you have somehow a huge advantage. Then if you are not perfectly speaking German. But maybe there is a difference. It is a difficult question.

Francesco M. [00:42:41] But in general, do you perceive your foreignness as a strength, as a weakness, or you don't perceive it as any in a certain sense.

I12 [00:42:56] I don't perceive it as any.

Francesco M. [00:43:00] I make you an example. I'm Italian. I'm sure that if I were to go into the food industry or design industry. It could be an advantage for me. But if I were to go into automotive and the Germans, the German automotive industry is much better than the Italian one, so it could be also a disadvantage. They would rather get a German engineer, you know what I mean? It's a stupid example again, but is just to give a context. But again, you were working into, let's say, software consulting, and it's not like Bulgaria or Germany is better than one of the other. I think it's really dependable on the human capital. Right. So I know how good you are.

I12 [00:43:47] Yeah. So you mean like stereotypes about countries and they're good at? Well.

Francesco M. [00:43:56] It's not a stereotype. Sometimes it's true, because if I were to open a restaurant as an Italian. And if a German opens an Italian restaurant, maybe the fact that I'm Italian could be an advantage compared to the German opening in Italy. And also because maybe people trust the Italian to know better cuisine than the German opening a restaurant. But this is just, again, really abstract examples that I'm making just to give context. But you said that you haven't perceived any strength or weakness and like, it's been pretty neutral for you, so that's good enough answer for me. And the last thing I ask you is do you still leverage, in any case, in any way the resources and the network you have in Bulgaria for any aspect of your business? Of course, your company right now is Bulgarian, but you're transferring it to Germany. Do you think once that is done, you will leverage any of these resources you have back there or connection? Yeah.

I12 [00:45:10] Absolutely. Absolutely. I have done some projects with people who are in Sofia, in Bulgaria, and I will want to continue working with them. So basically I would want to continue working with these people. Also, other supporting roles like accounting in Bulgaria. If I want an accountant, I will go to the same company. If I want legal advice, I will go to the same legal advisor.

Francesco M. [00:45:47] So you said that you're transferring your company to Germany, even though you have been able to live and work in Germany with a Bulgarian company because you want to avoid double taxation, right?

I12 [00:45:59] Yeah, it's a little complicated because it's a small enterprise and I'm having two accountants in Germany and in Bulgaria and it doesn't make sense. Like extra money and it's more time consuming. And I need money for accounting. But if I again if open a branch of the company in Bulgaria, then I will use the same accountant in Bulgaria and the same legal person.

Francesco M. [00:46:34] I got it. So I'm pretty satisfied with how his talk went. So I will stop the recording now. I have a lot of information. Thank you.

Appendix 16: Transcript of interview 13

Source: *Own work*

Francesco M. [00:00:00] Nothing. The first question I'm going to ask you is a general question about yourself, who you are and where you come from, your age, your experiences at the educational and work level before you started this entrepreneurial activity. Kind of your background.

I13 [00:00:30] I was born in November 1986. In a peasant family. In little substance, with what we went through after the post-Soviet community, our country had really gone very down. I am from Moldova, Mihailovca to be precise. After I reached a certain age, I wanted to detach myself from my parents and decided to emigrate to Europe, when I was 19. I took including my heart in my teeth, as they say, and left on my own.

Francesco M. [00:01:34] And before that you did compulsory schooling?

I13 [00:01:39] I basically finished high school and that was it. Then I didn't go to college anymore because there was a need to support myself in the family and so the problem was really with money. I was the oldest child among the males, because we

are three children, one female and two males. I was the middle one, that is, the one in the middle, and so I decided to go with dad as well. When I was 16 years old already I was going to St. Petersburg in Russia to work with him, who is a plumber, both plumbing and electrical. So we were doing installations and from there anyway there was some vocational school. Like to say to work independently. That's it, that's all. And then I did this one until I was about 19 years old with the thought of going to college. That's why I used to go and make money to go to college, because I wanted to do microelectronics myself once. From there then I went back to Moldova in the month of July 2005 and I came home to submit the documentation to the university, because the month to be able to file the folder and the documents to get into the university. And at that time I got a proposal to go to Europe, and so I closed the page for the university and went to Europe for the minimum of one year to be able to buy an apartment, or something with the capital, because at that time an apartment cost practically \$6,000. That thought, always when you're away from reality and think that in Europe money is easily made. I don't see it that way now, but when I was 19, I mean, I used to see it that way and I used to say, "I'm going to go do a year's work, get an apartment," then I come back and do I keep studying. And actually it was like saying cheating for himself. Because certainly the agony of both learning things and another culture that was very interesting at that age. To actually see how another people live, another concept of life that didn't share that concept of having an executive always behind you, always giving you directions on what to do. It has to be said that on Italy I found just this way to see that still working independently and having your own way of thinking was possible.

Francesco M. [00:05:30] I got it. Before we get to this part here, which may be that it's a little bit further. I wanted to ask you, to go to Europe you got an offer. But who made you this offer?

I13 [00:05:48] Actually it happened like this: that I have an older sister, who is from '85. She had already tried several times to emigrate to Europe and every time she basically got deported out. She couldn't get visas anymore, because we didn't have a visa requirement to enter Europe anyway. So we would basically do a "transit" visa and you could go to Poland or Hungary. And all these visas here he couldn't do them anymore because he had a black stamp. He tried four five times, and so he asked me if I wanted to try, since he had a place to emigrate. You went with your eyes closed, though, there was no one waiting for you. Anyway, I left practically from Moldova and in three days I was already in Italy, without papers, without a visa. I had a visa as a

tourist up to Poland and then from Poland to Italy I came as an illegal immigrant and so for four years I was illegal in Italy. That was the offer I received.

Francesco M. [00:07:33] And so Italy was, let's say it could have been Italy as it could have been Germany, Spain. You were going to go anyway, right?

I13 [00:07:42] No, I then actually I for Italy did not say no. I never liked Germany, even on a linguistic level, because it is a very difficult language and so I didn't feel like it to emigrate to a country where the language to communicate is a really difficult language. Whereas Italian I learned at a very high level, and I don't think in all these years maybe I could learn a German language as well as I learned Italian, because in short it's more a logic than a language.

Francesco M. [00:08:30] Anyway I understand. And anyway let's say you came to Italy and then what was the step, what did you start doing?

I13 [00:08:44] So I actually arrived in Italy, then after a couple of days of orientation I basically started thinking. From the beginning I found a person who basically gave me a roof over my head, at least for a week. So I lived, I lived a couple of weeks by this person.

Speaker 3 [00:09:21] But was this person local or Moldovan?

I13 [00:09:24] Moldovan, always Moldovan, through Moldovan acquaintances. I mean, I went around a little bit and found basically this acquaintance who was from our country by the way. And I managed to get two weeks or so, about 20 days from them, because there was a place that became free and after that I had to do two weeks sleeping on a panhina in a park. But in the meantime by then I was working through another person, also Moldovan because there was a Moldovan community and also illegal immigrants. Because in those days only 1 out of 10 had a residence permit. All of us really were considered the same as now those who come from Africa. In fact, these ones here are much better cared for and they give them a bed, instead I used to have the park ranger come and bring me a sandwich every night. In the meantime I started working in a cooperative that was sending people in the companies to work basically in the warehouses. I did basically 11 months on a warehouse in Quarto d'Altino as a warehouse worker with a forklift. Basically everybody would finish at 5:30 p.m. and I would stay there with the manager but I didn't even speak Italian. His name was [name], and he taught me a lot. Everybody said that he was actually a

very racist person, but that was not really the case. He resented foreigners for a simple reason, because the foreigner who had a few years in Italy was very smart and tried not to work and didn't have the will to work. He only had the thought of earning money. He only saw exploitation from these people. So I would stay with him or in free hours because the cooperative paid up to 9 hours of work.

Francesco M. [00:12:23] But this cooperative was Italian?

I13 [00:12:25] Yes, it was Italian cooperative, from Treviso.

Francesco M. [00:12:33] Okay. And so you were staying with him, teaching you how to work?

I13 [00:12:38] I would stay with him and he would teach me how to operate forklifts, because at that time there was no need to have a forklift license and you could do it. You just needed to know how to operate things afterwards. If you knew how to operate it there wasn't a problem, having a residence permit or a European document that you could work on Italian territory, you could get the "license" without any commitment, not like now that you have to practically do a month of practice and then also school. At that time it was much more simplified, a technician would come and follow you while you worked all day, and decide whether to give you this license. However, I didn't do it because I didn't have the ability to do it, or they would have found out I didn't have the papers. But in the company they knew we were illegals and they were not mad at the people or the cooperative. They cared about having the manpower, and the legal responsibility was absorbed by the cooperative.

Francesco M. [00:15:54] I understand. So you did this thing, and then what?

I13 [00:15:57] And then, after eleven months, basically it happened that in the Padua plant of the cooperative two guys died, and it got in the way, the prosecutor's office doing investigation. And so I was called by the manager, the owner of the warehouse where I was working, because I always remained fixed, even though I was with the cooperative. I always remained as an employee of this warehouse but paid through the cooperative. I went to the office, and she proposed that I get a residence permit. I refused, though, because warehousing was not what I wanted to do anyway, even though I was capable of operating. And anyway after eleven months of work I was already an expert. Because after three months of work, with everything that the manager [name] taught me, I had the skills that people didn't have after three to four years.

Because if you are willing to learn you learn. I refused, and in the meantime a little bit of Italian I had learned, although it was quite tiring still for me, because anyway we were in a community of foreigners in which people spoke, Moldovan, Russian, a little bit of everything and so there was not that direct contact with an Italian person. With [name] I always talked with my hands in these contexts gestures. If I couldn't explain to him what I had to explain though, we didn't have internet at the time. Anyway, I refused to be hired by them and to have a residence permit because in life I am not one to take advantage, they call me Swiss/German and so consequently you can understand that even in this case I didn't like the idea of taking advantage of these people as well because although they had made me the offer, it was not my path. I wanted to try in another area because that was an area that had no growth. And because I'm also quite an energetic person, I have to find something different, something that stimulates me and I enjoy.

Francesco M. [00:19:20] So what?

I13 [00:19:22] And so, after 11 months of living in the country, I had made various acquaintances. Through a guy, also from Moldova, who worked for a wood flooring and carpentry company, I met the owner of this company, [name]. He was basically looking for young people who want to work, of course he knew that we were undocumented and had us do jobs off the books. He would go and do the jobs in the inner cities, which were the most challenging jobs, where you needed to have papers in order. But at that time there wasn't this control like now, so we could still do a lot of work. So I got into wood flooring and carpentry. From there my passion for craftsmanship started. I started making wood floors, and I worked 8-9 years for this company. I don't remember exactly how long because it was a very long time ago. Anyway, the company was just doing wood flooring and high-level carpentry. We were doing window assemblies, window frames, and interior doors of any kind, while at the furniture level we were doing basically just special things, what you couldn't find on the market. From there I started to like this field because it was a niche trade and it was satisfying.

Francesco M. [00:22:37] And so you worked in this company....

I13 [00:22:42] I worked three years in this company as an illegal immigrant. After which my owner, [name], submitted our documentation to get a residence permit, given as a business owner, he could apply for illegal immigrants, depending on the turnover. So he had the possibility to apply abroad, he had to make a proposal here as well and send it to Moldova. And then the Italian embassy would decide whether

to approve. He made this application for all 3 employees, including one who behaved very badly and also stole equipment from us. So there were two of us left and I was afraid he would block the process. But throughout the years I had always been fair with this to the owner and he had full confidence, so it didn't stop. But the fear was there since we were countrymen and it's easy to lump everything together.

Francesco M. [00:24:45] Sure I understand, it's a very common thing.

I13 [00:24:53] Exactly, exactly. Italy unfortunately also suffers from this, like all nations. After that I went back to Moldova, I stayed for eight months but I couldn't even work. I had to come back for documentation, though. During this period by the way [name] came to him to visit me. Then in the meantime, in the past years, I had met my future wife in Mestre, although she is Ukrainian. Moreover while I was at home, I also applied for Romanian citizenship since they brought out a decree in Moldova in which everyone born after 1939 could apply for it, since the countries were united once. Anyways past those 8 months, I returned to Italy with the visa. [name] then made us the work contract, which although low, we could afford to be legal, no longer an illegal immigrant. After a month back in Italy, confirmation came from the Romanian state that I could get dual citizenship, so I decided to go home again for a short time and take it. This is to say that even though in 4 years I had nothing, I resisted and everything came at once, both on one side and also on the other side, and it was a very positive period for me. Both for the job in Italy, and for the family since in the process I got married, and with all this documentation making me legal I could go back to see my family whenever I wanted. Then I always suffered from not going to college, and that was always something that kept me a little bit down. But at some point I said to myself that by then I was already 24 years old and I had to let go of these thoughts and concentrate on accomplishing a little something, at least on a personal level, both for myself and for my family. At that same time my boss, [name], started having financial problems and could no longer pay us. I stayed with him until the last, however, I finally submitted my resignation letter reluctantly, with tears. As I said before, he was still like a brother.

Francesco M. [00:32:37] I understand. So we come to you opening your vat number and becoming self-employed?

I13 [00:32:47] And so we come to me. I by now after working for this company and knowing [name] situation, the last few months I had started to do some small jobs here and there, I was doing a little bit of everything because anyway I have the skills

even in electrical and plumbing, because anyway I learned so much from dad. So I was doing handyman in almost all of Viale Garibaldi in Mestre, I had more than 40 retired people calling me very often.

Francesco M. [00:33:31] I understand.

I13 [00:33:50] And so it was a first approach to working on my own, and I was able to support my family in those difficult times for the company. After I resigned, another chapter of my life opened, and I opened the VAT number. After years of working, as soon as I quit my job, I decided to take a vacation and take my wife to Paris and take my mind off things. I still remember now having a square party with my wife wondering what I was going to do from there on. Fatality my former boss had started a job in Venice just before closing, at the home of an architect from Venice, [name], with whom I had bonded since my first year with the company, when I was underground. She trusted me a lot and, although I did not speak Italian well at the time, she could see that I always carried out her requests. My former boss had started this job and then left it halfway through, already collecting money but not finishing. So she asked me to finish the job for her, and knowing that I had quit, she offered to let her accountant husband open the VAT number for me at no cost. So they allowed me to work the first 3 years of the vat number paying only taxes, without asking me for management costs from the accounting point of view. In the meantime we became very close, and although I asked to pay every month they didn't want to hear about it. It was only after 3 years that I was able to impose myself and start paying her husband, because I did not like the idea of receiving a service for free, even if from friends. And so this step in my life started.

Francesco M. [00:38:50] And wait, sorry to interrupt. Just in two words, what is your business now?

I13 [00:38:59] Basically, I started off by opening a company as industrial and also residential finishes of any kind, in the sense not just on the flooring or on the doors and windows, or cabinets, but all the complete work. In a nutshell the design, furniture, everything. So I did.

Francesco M. [00:39:34] So construction?

I13 [00:39:37] Light construction. Let's put it this way.

Francesco M. [00:39:40] You don't build the foundation but do everything else inside?

I13 [00:39:44] If someone builds me a house, I do all the light construction part, we don't do heavy construction.

Francesco M. [00:40:17] But let's say the big industry is construction, home design if you can call it that?

I13 [00:40:26] Yes, that's right.

Francesco M. [00:40:29] And so, coming to the focal point, my thesis is focused on understanding how foreign entrepreneurs in developing their own business have had figures that we can call facilitators, who are figures that help them both on a personal level and on a business level afterwards. In developing their business, though being pro bono, that is, not being a paid service, like an accountant might be. But he just told me that, and in fact it could be a first case, through this friendship you had a chance to keep the vat number without paying, so this can be. So that is the focus of my argument. First though, another question I wanted to ask you just in two words is how would you describe in general your access to the ecosystem and Italian society? From a personal point of view, but also from an entrepreneurial life and work point of view. Were there any difficulties?

I13 [00:42:02] No, I actually didn't have any difficulties because, as anticipated before, I come from a peasant family, but my family comes from a very wealthy and very intelligent family. So therefore we have a fairly strict school of education in our family. So anything that I have encountered on a personal level in Italy I have not confronted with the burden of communication on a personal level. In fact for me being an educated person, not everything has to be done for the money. I live this concept here, and since they helped me, I wanted to get back what I had been given. It helped me so much the strict upbringing I had at home, plus the personal upbringing I had over the years. Because anyway let's think about it, being a person who at 16 years old already starts working on construction sites and the people next to me were 35 or 40 years old, there is a difference. And so you start thinking already as a big person. You don't think like a child anymore. Because at 16 we are still children, but I unfortunately didn't have this childlike mentality anymore, and so this maturity helped me to integrate politely and see things in a positive way. I don't know how to explain it better.

Francesco M. [00:45:05] But, but in fact it was just a very general question. All of this is a background that I need to understand you as a person and that's why I let you talk quite freely. But my main point is just that, which is to identify any figures that have facilitated your activity and also your life as an immigrant in a country. So summarizing what you've told me so far: the first person was this [name], your former owner. He was the first person who, from what he told me, taught you things without any real reason behind it. Am I wrong?

I13 [00:45:55] It is true, it is true. The truth is that he had no specific reason.

Francesco M. [00:45:58] So this was a facilitator who taught you fundamental skills for the future, and that's the first thing. The second thing, you told me that there was another employer.

I13 [00:46:18] Yes, that would be [name]. I personally never considered that I worked for the first company as a warehouse worker, but I always considered that I only worked for one employer. In which that is, I'm proud to have done all these years with him. Here and he taught me craftsmanship. And by the way on construction sites I was always autonomous. He would introduce me to the construction site, and even though I was an employee, he would send me to the construction sites and he wouldn't even come to check the work, because the work was done properly and without any problems and without any hiccups. So I would go to the construction sites and he would basically just do the office work. I was really just doing the boss, the inspection, and then he would hand everything over to me.

Francesco M. [00:47:13] I understood, he trusted 100 percent.

I13 [00:47:16] Yes. And so it was already there a start that helped me to get into the craft as a freelancer and be self-employed. I just have to thank him for that.

Francesco M. [00:47:41] I understand. So reconstructing a path, because it's interesting to understand when there were changes, you had this first person, this [name] who helped you from the skills point of view. Then when you wanted to change jobs, you had this friend who directed you on the new path, right?

I13 [00:48:05] Yes, [name], who took me with him to work and had already been working for a couple of months by this [name].

Francesco M. [00:48:13] So the second facilitator, it might have been this other guy.

I13 [00:48:16] Yes.

Francesco M. [00:48:17] And then there was [name], who was the most important one, the one who took you under his wing, right?

I13 [00:48:22] He took me under his wing. There, that's right, we went on together.

Francesco M. [00:48:27] It facilitated both from the bureaucratic point of view, because it allowed you to get the residence permit, and from the labor point of view I guess. I'm sorry if I'm talking, but I'm trying to summarize to build what I'm going to write next, and you correct me if I get something wrong.

I13 [00:48:49] Sure, but everything correct so far.

Francesco M. [00:48:50] Then the moment comes when with [name] for various reasons you stop working, and through this contact that you met through him, this architect from Venice, you decided to open a partita iva. Because this contact, that is the third facilitator, introduced you to the husband who, in fact let's say we can put these two together as a couple, allowed you to open a vat number and not pay the accounting fees.

I13 [00:49:46] Sure, and I have to be honest, it facilitated me a lot. Because in the beginning when you have these people who trust you and give you confidence then yes, it made it a lot easier for me. Because it wasn't those expenses of 3,000 a year. But it was really the gesture, which helped me a lot and I continue to reciprocate as much as I can whenever they need something in my field.

Francesco M. [00:50:25] Sure, I understand it well. Definitely very much agree with that idea.

I13 [00:50:32] Always remember that you don't do everything for the money, there is also the human part in between. And this will always have to remain on a personal level. I personally, even now that I no longer have any need and have made my own way all the way through my life, have never changed my mind that a person must always remain humane and polite until the end.

Francesco M. [00:51:15] That sounds like a very good mindset to me. And so then you stopped depending, not depending, but using the help of this facilitator once you decided to pay for services.

I13 [00:51:26] Sure, but I didn't push them away from my life.

Francesco M. [00:51:32] Sure, but it is not necessary. I notice that so many people then continue with friendly relations. However it also remained your accountant right?

I13 [00:51:44] Sure, and it still is. Although the things to be done have become more complicated since my company has grown, so it's taken care of by its employees.

Francesco M. [00:52:03] Clear. Then, let's say going on through the years, has there been anybody else that comes to mind like that?

I13 [00:52:29] So once I opened my vat number, this morning architect offered me a job. Okay, it was the first and only job I had. And right after that she handed me a specification, but I didn't know anything about how to fill it out, the right prices to ask, etc. So she helped me, gave me basically three different specifications to take as examples, since I knew absolutely nothing. I was in the mood, though, so I put a little bit of study into it. I called after a couple of guys that I knew, that I had in some company and I say frankly they all turned their backs on me or gave me bad advice, since they were not interested in it. So for a while I went about learning the prices and other details until I was able to complete this specification and only then did he introduce me to the client. This can also be understood as a facilitator in my life. This client was a very high-ranking person from the Guardia di Finanza, who had two apartments in Venice. He was my cliente initially but now he is really my friend, we have maintained relations and we see each other quite often. I must say that I'm pretty good at creating and maintaining relationships. Anyway, I managed to get these two apartments, and I remember even now that with the help of my wife, who was painting and helping me in various aspects. We did practically the whole house for him, a lot of work, but mostly I did my first personal closet for him. It was very special, a very handcrafted job that I'm still very glad I did. And for that he was very impressed. In the meantime, while I was doing this work, I'll explain how it practically passes my name in the Venetian market, which is a very particular and complicated market. When I was still employed, I had met a guy, a gondolier, who everybody thought was a very complicated person, but to whom I had done more than 3 houses together with [name]. One of his co-workers wanted to do a job, and this gondolier contacted me saying that the co-worker

who wants to do the house in Lido, most of the carpentry and everything I was doing. The owner of this house, Stefano, he also became an important character in my life, he's really a friend, and let's say even more than a friend, because in the end when I had financial problems with the company, he was the one who helped me financially. And so he was also a facilitator for me, and he was my second job. So he facilitated me financially, but after the job he was impressed and introduced me to various other clients.

Francesco M. [01:01:25] There have been various facilitators in short, and this is a very good thing for what I need. And then your clients became facilitators. Basically one client started word of mouth.

I13 [01:01:41] That's right.

Francesco M. [01:02:12] I mean, these are the main people that come to mind.

I13 [01:02:48] Yes. The architect helped me a lot and afterwards she passed me even more than the other jobs. I still consider her already an important facilitator. That then opened doors for me to many other clients and through word of mouth I started to afre work outside of Italy as well, in many European countries. The last one abroad we did in London.

Francesco M. [01:03:55] But do you have employees or is it just you at the moment?

I13 [01:04:00] So a while after I opened my vat number, I was approached by this company in Venice that was looking for other smaller companies and craftsmen to do maintenance on all the apartments, with a fixed annual contract plus on-call bonuses. In that year we grew to nine guys under me, plus a boat and two vans, because we were doing a lot of maintenance. We took over pretty much all the maintenance as well, and I went on with this contract for a year and a half, but then at some point they wanted to stop paying me, and so not wanting to go bankrupt and run out of money, I broke away from this company and parted ways with the nine guys. I paid them but I asked them to resign because I couldn't support them anymore. Then for a while I took a partner, I didn't take employees anymore, but I only work with artisan people and also my brother who is an artisan. So I wouldn't call them employees but they are still people who only work with me, long term. By now we are we are a team and we have been working together for more than four to five years.

Francesco M. [01:08:44] I understand everything. The last two things I want to ask you are, first of all, I think certainly you would have found an alternative path, but I think these people were very instrumental in your path right?

I13 [01:09:15] Sure, that's right. We are not born learned, so for better or worse you have to make mistakes to learn things.

Francesco M. [01:09:32] Clear, but without going into specifics, in any case I think these people gave you help and you definitely gave back to them, even if not financially.

I13 [01:09:52] Sure, because they open up so many other avenues for you anyway.

Francesco M. [01:10:03] And do you think that the fact that you are a foreigner, has fomented the need to have people like this? For example, to create a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of clients, rather than anything else.

I13 [01:10:36] So here we touch on a topic that is to be said like this. As an immigrant it is a little bit more difficult to work here in Italy. Not for me, but for most people it is a little bit more difficult. Because then I understood how the Italian people think, and I found it necessary to integrate myself completely into the nation to fully understand how things are, because otherwise then you can't move forward. Definitely if you are a local company with Italian employees, you can afford to be more free since you have more possibilities. Now this trend is changing because so many construction companies are foreign, but you used to have to prove a lot especially in terms of quality. I always had to do perfect jobs, as I liked to do, but other Italian companies could afford not to do the job so well and still be accepted. There was slightly that discrimination. Although I personally never saw it as discrimination, I knew my place and my goal, so I would still do all the jobs to the best of my ability. But that may not be the case for everyone.

Francesco M. [01:12:56] Clear. But maybe, apart from your work, where I think it depends a lot on how you get it done, without needing anybody. But maybe, for example I'm still an immigrant with a different story than you but that's the way it is. I haven't had the same difficulties as you but for example I notice that having a local girl has helped me in so many ways. Not knowing the culture, not knowing the language and starting to integrate is not easy, not a given. Some do it better and some

do it less. But in my opinion, not having a network, having a person who recommends you directly and having direct word of mouth helps a lot.

I13 [01:14:15] Sure, sure absolutely it's very important. Then during the annin you make a name for yourself based on how you work and how you perform. If you believe in yourself you go on.

Francesco M. [01:15:08] So basically to summarize, you're telling me it wasn't a matter of ethnicity or background?

I13 [01:15:23] In my case I didn't hear it. In my opinion the rules apply to everyone, if you behave a certain way you reap the benefits later.

Francesco M. [01:15:51] Okay, that's clear enough for me. If I perceived this I could go inside the details. However, if you didn't perceive it I wouldn't go any further.

I13 [01:16:05] I say that I personally I personally did not feel it. Then even when I started doing work all over Europe, I'm always a stranger but I don't feel these feelings. However in the 4th year I was doing, so much work abroad. Anyway, in my opinion it all depends on the character of the person and how they want to integrate.

Francesco M. [01:16:54] I got it, clear. Well I would say we talked a lot and I gathered a lot of interesting information, so I can conclude the recording.

Appendix 17: Representative quotes for the first aggregate dimensionSource: *Own work*

Second-order theme	Representative quotations for "Choice of host country"
Financials	<p>"Resources, true. The kind of founding round that they make in Germany can't be made in Spain and Italy" (I3)</p> <p>"It has these grants that, you know, every quarter you can make an application for €75,000 equity free." (I8)</p> <p>"One of the attractive points of Berlin was also the cost of living at the time, as it was very cheap and had foreign potential." (I5)</p>
Network ties	<p>"My girlfriend was German, from Stuttgart and now she's my wife, so it was a good choice." (I5)</p> <p>"My clients have been in Germany." (I12)</p> <p>"Because in Italy I had friends, many friends from my country, who worked in Rome." (I1)</p>
Opportunities & market	<p>"I got an offer from automation company in Germany to automate high-tech plans for the industry, like for Siemens, VW, etc. It was a small company but the clients were and we had big projects. So it was very interesting and they offered a German course and a flat, everything together. It was a good opportunity and I had enough of Poland, so I decided to go and I worked for two years there" (I3)</p> <p>"and also in terms of attractiveness, it was quite attractive for us. We were seeing really a lot of entrepreneurs going to Berlin, and many businesses with success stories. So, it was kind of exciting for us." (I5)</p> <p>"Also in the great diversity of the customer base, among different ages and nationalities, one can still select each nationality and understand what they are looking for." (I2)</p>
Ease of access	<p>"My co-founder has a French passport and I bring this up partly or mostly I would say because we were able to relocate very easily because we didn't have to go through the immigration service" (I8)</p> <p>"Yes, because again, going to Canada was not very easy. You had to go to the embassy and it was very different and very very very difficult." (I1)</p> <p>"Well, first of all because I already knew the language anyway. And that was one step to start" (I4)</p>
Other motivation	<p>"If I made it here, I could make it everywhere. Spain would be easier for me." (I3)</p> <p>"So prior experience. I had actually moved to Berlin three years before starting my company, with the OLX company." (I7)</p> <p>"Anyway, I didn't go to England because I couldn't find a job in Italy, but really by personal choice and because I wanted to get the experience." (I4)</p>

Appendix 18: Representative quotes for the second aggregate dimensionSource: *Own work*

Second-order theme	Representative quotations for "Access to local ecosystem"
Bureaucracy/institutions	<p>"Mostly because with Brexit it has become much more difficult for us to do B2C. because of all the bureaucracy behind the sale." (I4)</p> <p>"it was one of the big difficulties which was doing all of the paperwork and all of that signing up." (I7)</p> <p>"I struggled at first in Italy because they wouldn't give me papers, I was a non-EU citizen and they always made a fuss." (I11)</p>
Culture	<p>"Actually, it was very tough at the beginning to sell new technology innovations to Germans, not being German" (I3)</p> <p>"On the personal side, I would say it was the same. Like, the city was really international." (I5)</p> <p>"I remember in Rome. it's not that we were so loved because there were so many of us and so many did bad things and the good people paid for the first ones as well." (I1)</p>
Network	<p>"It was difficult. Extremely difficult because you don't have a network, right? So in your case in Italy or in Spain for me, you always know someone that knows someone" (I3)</p> <p>"on the entrepreneurial side, it was easy because there are a lot of things going on. If you want to attend events you can do it almost every day. Everyone speaks English and you have a lot of experts also coming in the city to start a business" (I5)</p> <p>"As soon as I met the right people, though, I got myself unstuck and integrated quite well, going out and meeting people." (I4)</p>
Market	<p>"In the beginning, the first few years, I wasn't on the books however there was a lot of work and you could always find da. manual jobs to do, especially in construction. Then after that what others thought of us I don't know." (I1)</p> <p>"So there is crazy competition and most importantly there is high expectation." (I2)</p> <p>"At the labor level also it was always difficult. When a foreigner comes to a place for work, he has to deal with his native peers, who do not like the fact that he is trying to take work away from them. The competition was very cut-throat, however, in the employers I did not notice this same tendency." (I9)</p>

Appendix 19: Representative quotes for the third aggregate dimensionSource: *Own work*

Second-order theme	Representative quotations for "Entrepreneurial motivation"
Dissatisfaction with previous jobs	<p>"I need to take on some challenges. And in working for another company doesn't compare to this." (I3)</p> <p>"I think I really enjoyed this part, the speed, the pace of building a company versus, for example, the more corporate background, which I had the experience of." (I7)</p> <p>"I wanted to try to work as a freelancer to work for myself, I started to understand how to build a company. And that the easiest step to go in this direction would be to start to work for myself as a freelancer" (I12)</p>
Opportunity identification	<p>"especially in our case or in my case, you couldn't find a real solution, right? What I just mentioned. So, everything is there, and we have the infrastructure, but nobody is taking action fast enough and we need to take a decision." (I3)</p> <p>"I had worked in book publishing, for a variety of publishing houses, magazine publishing, I had also done a bit of journalism. So, I know the content space really, really well and I had suffered because I didn't have a tool like this." (I8)</p> <p>"The pandemic has really created a huge disruption in what the office really means. And yet remote working is not a solution, a lot of employers see the importance for employer branding of having people together in a physical space to create this socialization and collaboration, which is very difficult to get in a remote setup, as they have tried over the last two years." (I7)</p>
Intrinsic motivation	<p>"I think you have to like the creation and foundation of a new project and the excitement that come with the risk. I am a person feels comfortable in very uncomfortable situations for 99.9% of people. So I am a fish in the water in under-pressure situations" (I3)</p> <p>"I really like solving problems" (I8)</p> <p>"So for me it was also connected with personal development. I thought that combining projects and establishing a company and then to be responsible, then it will help me grow as a professional and as a person as well. And I felt that, you know, somehow for me, it was interesting to have to go into this process of growing." (I12)</p>
Host country integration	<p>"I have to tell the truth, from the economic point of view I was earning more, however, the owner was not a person let's say of his word, because he had promised me a permanent contract but he only made a fixed-term contract for 8 months. However, I needed a permanent contract because after 2-3 years of living together here in Italy, my wife had been convinced to stay and for that we had to buy a house and it was not possible without permanent." (I1)</p> <p>"and having made friends with so many people on the island, eventually convinced me to take this path." (I10)</p> <p>"I thought, "If I'm going to fit in this country, I have to do something more. I don't want to just be an employee."" (I1)</p>

Appendix 20: Representative quotes for the fourth aggregate dimensionSource: *Own work*

Second-order theme	Representative quotations for "Liability of foreignness"
Cultural differences	<p>"there's like a very strong xenophobia here. So, I think on a personal level, like in day-to-day interactions, it hasn't been great" (18)</p> <p>"I think. You need to be open because you know you're coming somewhere you don't know and you need to open your awareness, your mind to other people, to other ways or other cultures." (15)</p> <p>"For most people it is a little more difficult. Because then I understood how the Italian people think, and I found it necessary to integrate myself completely into the nation to fully understand how things are, because otherwise then you can't move forward." (113)</p>
Venture growth	<p>"For example, when I was in Thüringen, ex DDR, and had to present myself in front of all white men, being a foreigner was not helpful." (13)</p> <p>"I think that's more because, especially with business angels, it's more related to tax incentives and things like this. They are more prone to invest in German entities because they've got some advantages." (15)</p> <p>"So, I had to really, really challenge myself because there the business connection is better when you speak German, especially when you go outside Berlin to create trust for long-term partnerships." (17)</p>
Social embeddedness	<p>"And top decision makers like to speak in German." (13)</p> <p>"I think, for example, one thing that I really don't benefit from which other foreigners could benefit from, is the university network" (17)</p> <p>"we had some network that was not so developed and it was still mostly developed in France, actually. So, we also had to develop new networks in Germany." (15)</p>

Appendix 21: Representative quotes for the fifth aggregate dimensionSource: *Own work*

Second-order theme	Representative quotations for "Facilitating practices"
Financials	<p>"they hosted us in their office. From almost day one we had a small office, just one room but we were just three people, and it was very cheap, just a few hundred euros per month." (15)</p> <p>"Although I asked to pay every month they wouldn't hear of it. Only after 3 years did I manage to impose myself and start paying her husband" (113)</p> <p>"As soon as I arrived, I spent some time at his house in Formello, always around Rome." (111)</p>
Host country integration	<p>"But as a facilitator for, like, even finding an apartment and stuff like this, she helped a lot. And stuff like this makes your life so much easier when you're starting your business. To have someone that knows things well." (15)</p> <p>"we had a lot of Zoom calls with a specific woman who's the head of North America for the Austrian business agency. And she gave us a lot of like context and information about what funding is available" (18)</p> <p>"my employer, [name], submitted our documentation to get a residence permit" (113)</p>
Mentorship	<p>"I was chatting with him sometimes for some some questions. Like how much do you pay for accounting services or do you use insurance for the company? How much do you pay for it? How does your business work this year?" (112)</p> <p>"So he took me under his wing and helped me grow, in whatever aspect, including family." (111)</p> <p>"this connection was very important for us because we also had someone close to whom we could ask questions." (15)</p>
Networking and endorsement	<p>"The professor presented me to the president of the building where we installed the first prototype" (13)</p> <p>"introduced us to Business Tax Advisors. She introduced us to the lawyer who helped us incorporate here, she's been really good at connecting us with services" (18)</p> <p>"He used to recommend me a lot at construction sites and gave me a lot of compliments. Although the way I am made of compliments I don't want any. But he used to recommend me and give me a lot of compliments, even now he continues to do that with clients." (111)</p>

Appendix 22: Representative quotes for the sixth aggregate dimensionSource: *Own work*

Second-order theme	Representative quotations for "Trigger points"
Development	<p>"Then the issue that we had this collaboration for 4-5 years. Then he took a different path and tried in every way to go the extra mile." (I1)</p> <p>"Because they had all realized that that accelerator was wrong with us. So it was really a direct problem with them, and so they also recommended another reality to us." (I6)</p> <p>"I wanted to try another area because that was an area that had no growth. And because I'm also quite an energetic person, I have to find something different, something that stimulates me and I enjoy." (I13)</p>
Business phase	<p>"From the moment that we had to build the first prototype and we and we got to install it into the building, then we were able to present ourselves to competition and have some results.. And then from this moment, EON laid their eyes on us and we applied." (I3)</p> <p>"So, I would say that the change was at that point. As soon as we got investors." (I5)</p> <p>"Yes, that was the actual beginning. Then we went our separate ways but continued to collaborate sporadically in various projects." (I9)</p>

Declaration of Originality

Erklärung*

Hiermit erkläre ich,

Name, Vorname Mian, Francesco

Matrikelnummer 931924

dass ich bei der vorliegenden

- Bachelor-Arbeit Master-Thesis/Master-Arbeit
 Seminararbeit

die Regeln guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis eingehalten habe. Ich habe diese Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt und die wörtlich oder inhaltlich übernommenen Stellen als solche kenntlich gemacht.

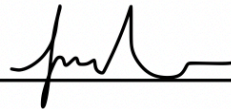
Betreuende/r
Dozent/in Univ.-Prof. Dr. Andreas Kuckertz

Thema der Arbeit
The role of facilitators in the legitimization of foreign entrepreneurs

Semester 5

Ich erkläre weiterhin, dass das unverschlüsselte digitale Textdokument der Arbeit übermittelt wurde, das in Inhalt und Wortlaut ausnahmslos der gedruckten Ausfertigung entspricht. Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass diese elektronische Form anhand einer Analyse-Software auf Plagiate überprüft wird.

Stuttgart, 13.03.2023



Ort, Datum, Unterschrift

* Diese Erklärung ist der eigenständig erstellten Arbeit als Anhang beizufügen. Arbeiten ohne diese Erklärung werden nicht angenommen.