

Report

Roundtable Organized by GRITIM-UPF in the framework of **Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània (IEMed)** Seminar Series “Aula Mediterrània” entitled *Hacia una nueva agenda mediterránea: dinámicas y Actores en juego*

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Moroccan Transnational Entrepreneurs: new social patterns, new policy narratives



This report has been written by Luisa Faustini and Zouhair El Hairan (GRITIM-UPF researchers) under the supervision of Ricard Zapata-Barrero.

The roundtable is an activity linked to the EU Horizon 2020 project Diaspora Link (<http://diasporalink.org/>)

Background of the roundtable

There is an emerging field of research on Migrant Transnational Entrepreneurs (MTE) developed basically from business studies, which analyses this trend as one specific attribute of the globalisation process, linked to the increase of human mobility. Migration scholars have already discussed migrant entrepreneurship for long, but mainly in the country of residence and as part of the integration process. The transnational dimension of the migrant entrepreneur, which involves a cross-border business activity relying on resources and opportunities in the countries of origin, has remained widely unexplored. This emerging profile is capturing the attention of scholars working on transnationalism and on entrepreneurship aspects within migration studies. Until now, little has been done in linking both fields of research, and when it has been done, the focus was mostly on analysing patterns and defining hypotheses on the favourable and non-favourable factors promoting these new dynamics in the country of residence. There is less research, however, on how countries of origin are capturing this new trend within the migration/development nexus policy framework. MTE are seen as a resource and an opportunity both for the country of origin (which develops a new focus, adding to the traditional one of remittances management) and the migrant (who develops a new activity perceiving his or her country of origin as a resource rather than as a constraint, as was the case of his/her parents). This is being discussed in terms of explanatory variables to understand this new dynamic, the distinctive features of its profile (sharing two cultures and social and cultural capital), but also in terms of the effects on countries of origin (social, economic, political, cultural effects). There is also a new research trend of brain gain policies for countries of origin who attract the skilled migrants, but less on how this brain gain operates as a policy for the home countries and targeting their own diaspora. This gap represents the focus of this roundtable, taking Morocco as the main case study.

The main purpose is to discuss the main trends and governance aspects that follow this concrete profile of Moroccan migrants living abroad: those who take an entrepreneurship initiative and decide to focus on Morocco. Current research shows that factors that relate to generation, education and their sense of identity shape how enterprises are created, as this is an essential part of fully comprehending the benefits of migrant transnational entrepreneurship. We are also interested in discussing how to justify political intervention in these new dynamics, and how to frame this intervention beyond legal and administrative services and assistance; what are the main programmes, policies and structures that are being developed; the main policy focus; the network of actors involved; the intercultural aspects of these initiatives linking economically, politically and culturally both the country of origin and the country of immigration.

The concrete idea is to discuss how this profile is being incorporated into the external policy agenda of Morocco, what programmes, structures and policies are being developed, and what policy narratives are being constructed within the already existing Moroccan approach of their migrants living abroad. We would like also to promote an open debate on the main favourable and constraining factors involved, and the first outcomes (if any) of this new migration dynamics. Some issues to discuss:

- 1) *Methodological issues:* Even if Morocco is incorporating the MTE trend into their policies, how much is this policy evidence-based? It seems that this policy and scholarly discussion is based on the assumption that this phenomenon is emerging, but what are the key-data we have to found this claim? Are migrants becoming transnational entrepreneurs to a larger extent or are these transnational entrepreneurs, rather than returning migrants, part of a mobile elite in their countries of origin? Exploratory research in Morocco based on interviews indicates that migrant transnational entrepreneurship is combining formal and informal channels. Some policy-makers who were interviewed say that support policies were developed following complaints of MTE. Moreover, we are interested in what relationship there is between experts and policy makers on these issues. Some stakeholders assert that this is a growing and relevant phenomenon, and advise policy makers, but without strong evidence. It seems that policies are

- targeting potential trends rather than actual ones, and then policies have a mobilisation dimension rather than a management dimension of current trends.
- 2) *Profile*: Young people of Moroccan origin and their link to Morocco: most transnational entrepreneurs are young people with an attachment to their country. They can be entrepreneurs by necessity or by choice, but in both cases, there are social mobility opportunities and specific skills and competences involved
 - 3) *Networks* working as a resource to promote Transnational Entrepreneurship (TE). These networks provide access to resources, advice, and support that may result in economic, political and cultural exchanges
 - 4) *Intercultural aspects*: We expect that most MTE have a social and cultural capital focused on intercultural links and diversity advantages. They may see their country of origin as a resource and an advantage rather than as something inconvenient and constraining as their parents. Intercultural skills are expected to be decisive in their entrepreneurship decision, as well as intercultural promotion in their entrepreneurship activities.
 - 5) *Migration and development nexus*: beyond the remittances focus, how can TE capacities be mobilized and utilized in development activities? TE exploit opportunities in diverse homeland contexts to create businesses and jobs, stimulate innovation, create cross boarder social capital and channel political and financial capital towards development.
 - 6) Effects of this concrete TE in their countries of origin in economic, social and political terms.

Presentations

Ricard Zapata-Barrero, Director GRITIM-UPF

The chair and organizer of the table, Professor Ricard Zapata established a basic theoretical framework for the roundtable, presenting the main concepts, debates and context that were discussed by the participants. Zapata briefly pointed out the increased interest both in terms of academic research and public policy with the entrepreneurs living in Europe due to their transnational dimension; remarking an increasing interest in an entrepreneurship that links country of origin and country of destination in the current context of growing mobility in the Mediterranean. Moreover, he also highlighted the importance of return migration as a main dimension of migration policy nowadays.

Setting the stage for the three panellists, he explained that a new narrative has been emerging connecting entrepreneurship, transnationalism and migration. In particular, researchers and policymakers were interested in applying this tripartite framework to contemporary Catalan-Moroccan relations. Within this context, Zapata noted several key shifts in narrative as a result of changing social relations. First, Moroccan-Catalans are beginning to be reconceptualised from workers to “agents” with useful social and cultural capital. Second, financial capital flows are not only seen as remittances anymore but rather as capital “mobilization” within a productive, transnational economy. Third, the concept of brain drain is being reframed as a “brain gain,” as circular migration patterns enable the dispersal of knowledge and skills both within Catalonia and migrants’ native regions in Morocco. Ultimately, Zapata argues that there are two cohorts of Moroccan-Catalan transnational migrants: entrepreneurs that take up residence in Catalonia and entrepreneurs that thrive within Catalonia as a strategy for eventual return to Morocco.

The professor observed then the necessity of differentiating between two profiles of entrepreneurs that arise in these contexts and are taken into account: (1) those migrant entrepreneurs that open business in the country of destination and (2) those immigrants who incorporate entrepreneur activities as a strategy of return, in order to become entrepreneurs in their countries of origin. In terms of theoretical framework, the topic is within the migration and development debate and specifically the debate concerning co-development.

In addition, Zapata specified the turn of the research focus and policies from low skilled workers to migrants with agency – social capital, skills, competence and cultural capital – and that are seen as important agents for the development of the country of origin. In this context, it is important to take into account the role of the Moroccan government in the governance of emigration. Zapata highlighted that in terms of Moroccan policy strategy, there has been an important reversal: from remittances to mobilization of competences, there is, from managing remittance to investing in the productive economy and in the role of Moroccans living abroad as agents of Moroccan economic development, phenomena that can be referred to as “du brain drain au brain gain”. This means that Moroccan immigrants are perceived as important actors in the development of Morocco, mainly through entrepreneurship activities.

Karim Basrire, General Secretary of Moroccan Entrepreneurs

Mr. Basrire displayed a short video which promoted the idea of Morocco beyond stereotypes of poverty and tradition, showing the most progressive side of Morocco, and how attractive it might be for investors and entrepreneurs. After this video, Basrire presented one of his organization projects, the *Treplim Maroc Program*, which has within its goals:

- Coaching Moroccans that want to set up a business in Morocco.
- Promote courses – mainly focused on bureaucratic and formal issues.
- Provide a network in order to connect people.
- Preparation of a business plan.

Morocco, in fact, signed international commercial agreements, with the European Union in 1996 and with the United States in 2005 for instance. Moreover, Basrire highlighted the key role of Morocco as a Gateway to Africa and a Gateway to Europe (access to a market of over 1 billion consumers). In this sense, he considered that the country is in a strategic geographic position that could be further explored. This can already be observed from recent moves from companies such as CaixaBank that moved to Casablanca and other companies that are starting to develop business in the country. Prominent international companies are in fact setting up business by opening branches and subsidiaries, such as Thales, Safran or Altea. He also called attention to the fact that Morocco has a liberal market economy, which makes it simple to open a business in the country, and that the economy in the country is growing. We are talking therefore about an emerging economy. He acknowledged the central role of the diaspora in pushing business from receiving countries towards Morocco.

After introducing the topic and his role in the organization, Mr. Basrire presented the results of a study developed with Moroccan Diaspora entrepreneurs in 4 countries with 464 young Moroccans Living Abroad (MLA) (MRE, in its French initials). Some of the results are that 89 per cent of the MLA were interested in setting up business in Morocco, with a tendency to focus on the region of origin. There is also a clearly transnational character of the entrepreneurs that are taking advantage of their mobility possibilities, and there exists an interest in creating a company with a partner in Morocco. Moreover, there is that 73 per cent of the MLA survey respondents were ready to support financially business projects in Morocco. Nevertheless, there was a perceived small impact in Spain and actions should be done in this regard. Finally, he concluded his presentation by providing some examples of successful Moroccan entrepreneurs in Morocco and Europe, such as Rania Bulkahia and Karim Bernoussi through innovation in their specialization areas. He also suggested visiting the website <www.investinmorocco.ma>, the Moroccan Investment Development Agency, for more information about the topic.

Fatima Tigratine, Head of Moroccans Living Abroad

Ms. Tigratine explained the goals, strategies and activities carried out by the Ministry of Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs, and specifically the work of the Department of Communication and Skills Mobilization. She introduced her presentation by highlighting the three main strategic goals when it comes to the mobilization of the Migrant Transnational Entrepreneurs (MTE):

- (1) Preservation of Moroccan identity and the preservation of the link with their culture of origin.
- (2) Protection of the rights and interests of the Moroccans Living Abroad (MLA).
- (3) Monitoring in order to attract Moroccans entrepreneurs to invest in the country and to contribute to the social and economic development of Morocco.

Furthermore, she presented the profile of the Moroccans Living Abroad; such process of identification is significant in order to design the policies that target them. There is more than 5 million of MLA and more than 80% are essentially living in Europe. Valuable information is that youth among them is highly representative, since 70% of MLA are aged less than 45 years and 55,5% are second generations between the age of 20 and 55. Moreover, 20% are already born in the country of residence. Other valuable data is that 15% of the MLA are considered to be highly qualified, which means that they hold at least a Master's Degree according to the Bologna system of education.

She also cited the main results of a research project about MTE carried out in collaboration with the European Union (EU). To mention some, Moroccan migrants have a strong attachment to their region of origin, which is a priority for them in terms of investment and that there exist a transnational character and nature of migrant entrepreneur, because of the development of mobility in between places. Moreover, the MLA represents 13 per cent of the MENA nationals who are willing to invest USD 100,000 in their country of origin. The profile of these MTE is majorly male dominant but there is an increasing tendency of feminization. The main challenges for MTE are related to the knowledge of the local law framework information and the business climate.

Tigratine presented a program developed by the Ministry called "*programme d'accompagnement*" ('monitoring program', in English), its main goal is to answer questions and demands related to develop business in Morocco for MLA. It has a regional approach, which means the individualization according to the region of origin in which the business project is located. It also offers a digital platform in order to make information more accessible. The main objective is in fact to monitor people inside this program and keep them informed, helping in the creation and development of their companies and projects. Moreover, it is a program that would help identifying partnerships to be set up with local actors, encouraging MLA to contribute to the development of their region. She also highlighted the importance of the digital platform as a system that is available for entrepreneurs, in order to provide information and training. It contains also a database consisting of useful information for the development of the MLA business projects, and can be considered as a tool that allows monitoring the projects from the distance through online tracking.

Ms. Tigratine explained the pilot projects already developed in Belgium and France within the respective French Development Agency and Belgian Cooperation body as partners, for the mobilization of entrepreneurs as principal objective. These pilot projects aim to the identification of projects and to follow-up, monitoring the people that want to start a business or a project, providing the information about the steps and the information they may need to do so. The final goal is the development of Morocco through mobilizing the Diasporas towards this objective in both Belgium and France. Regarding this mobilization, Tigratine highlighted the existence of Moroccan funds for this purpose, which is 'Le Dispositif Fonds MDM-Invest' (or the MDM Invest fund instrument, in English), that was launched in order to face the impact of the economic crises, considering the entrepreneurship as a way out, a response to the challenges created by the

crisis. This fund also provides the opportunity to associate with foreigners. The MDM Invest programme can provide the following assistances:

- equity of at least 25% of the project amount.
- a state subsidy of 10% of the start-up costs (MAD 5 million as ceiling), and/or
- a bank loan that can reach 65% of the start-up costs.
- the project investment should be at least worth EUR 100,000 to be elected for this programme.

The MDM Invest project portfolio should be deposited in a bank chosen by the actual beneficiary, and the sectors of activities should be related to health, education, hotel business, and industry-related services. This program aims at ensuring the post-creation follow-up of the newly created companies, as well as orienting project leaders towards innovative and profitable sectors. She concluded the presentation referring to the website www.mre.gov.ma where more information can be found about and for MeM, 'Marocains Entrepreneurs du Monde' (in English, Moroccan Entrepreneurs of the World).

Zouhair El Hairan, GRITIM-UPF researcher

Zouhair provided an academic perspective to the debate by presenting his research which is situated within the framework of the transnational entrepreneurship debate. His research focus is on Moroccan youth diaspora entrepreneurs between Catalonia and Morocco, that is, a new generation of Moroccan-Catalans that could have an economic impact in a medium and long term perspective. This study is undertaken at the micro level. His research aims at answering the following questions:

- (a) How do they undertake a business project in both Catalonia and/or Morocco?
- (b) How do they develop social capital through cultural and linguistic understanding?

Zouhair emphasized that he expects his work to make a contribution to public policies, since it could provide more information and understanding about the current scenario and provide insights into future policies. Related to the theoretical and conceptual framework, he referred to Honig et al. that define transnational entrepreneurs as: "people who enact networks, ideas, information, and practices for seeking business opportunities or maintaining business within dual social fields"; these entrepreneurs are usually based in the Country of Residence (CoR). He also challenged the Moroccan second generation term, that tends to resemble an eternal process of migration and suggested to bring up the term of Catalan-Moroccan youth. Moreover, he is exploring to what extent these young entrepreneurs have a cultural knowledge of their Country of Origin (CoO), and whether their actual understanding of the dual diverse cultural contexts would let them to undertake transnational business activities. He is also exploring to what extent the relevant policies of the Moroccan government are having an impact or influence; underlining that these Moroccan young entrepreneurs can be an important source of creativity, innovation and transfer of knowledge, and their contribution is not only limited to the creation of wealth and the transfer of money for their Country of Origin.

In conclusion, he pointed out his initial hypothesis about the profile of the Moroccan-Catalan young entrepreneurs. This profile is predominantly highly qualified, raised or born in Catalonia, and based in Barcelona. They have strong social and cultural capital, and this can lead them to seek transnational entrepreneurship opportunities. An essential condition as well for the Moroccan government is to create favourable conditions in order to attract this profile of potential entrepreneurs and professionals.

Oriol Amoros (General Secretary for Equality, Migration and Citizenship, Catalan Government)

In the last part of the session, Mr. Amoros, in his role of discussant, provided his thoughts about the topic, to introduce the discussion. He began by emphasizing the challenges to the administration that migration might entail and the necessity of giving it a positive perspective. He also stressed the idea that there has been an important change from seeing migrants as a resource for non-qualified jobs to a more open perspective that perceives them as a development resource, although this perspective is mainly the one of origin countries. Mr. Amoros also highlighted the fact that the free movement of people would be ideal for allocating the best assets, whereas free movement was usually thought only in terms of products and money but not in terms of people and/or human movement.

According to Mr. Amoros, mobility is crucial for development, because otherwise financial transaction come with a really inflated cost. In this context, according to Mr. Amoros, policies of cooperation should involve the diaspora, mainly because a Catalan-Moroccan can be the most appropriate person to develop the relations between the two countries. He also mentioned the importance of circular migration and of designing win-win projects and/or cooperation policies. Moreover, he referred to some others critical points he indicated as related to transnational activities:

- The access to credit or bank loans, since it differs from country to country and it is crucial to have clear and detailed information.
- The activity of the diaspora that could influence activities of foreign trade, in terms of import and export.
- Importance of sharing knowledge between countries in form of branches.
- The movement of students as an important source of cultural exchange.

Mr. Amoros concluded by emphasizing that transnational activity is potentially good for Morocco but also for Catalonia and that the social mobility of migrants is key for achieving a better society, and that important challenges related to migration issues should be appropriately addressed.

Ricard Zapata concluded the discussion by highlighting the different frameworks within which the debate can be inserted, such as: development, cooperation, entrepreneurship as social mobility, entrepreneurship public policies, entrepreneurship and trade nexus. He also called attention to the challenge related to convincing receiving countries of the win-win situation represented by transnational entrepreneurship migration, in the sense that it is positive for the economic development of receiving and sending societies. In fact, we may be witnessing the advent of an emerging phenomenon and it is crucial that researchers investigate it in order to provide insight into public policies that influence these entrepreneurial endeavours.

Program

Chair: **Ricard Zapata-Barrero**, Director GRITIM-UPF

Discussant: **Oriol Amoros** (General Secretary for Equality, Migration and Citizenship, Catalan Government)

- **Karim Basrire**, General Secretary of Maroc Entrepreneurs

Title: A new generation of immigrant Moroccan Entrepreneurs

- **Fatima Tigratine**, Head of Moroccans Living Abroad. Investor Support, Dep. Communication and Skills mobilization, Ministry of Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs

Title: The policy of mobilizing the competences of the Moroccans Living Abroad (MLAs):

- **Zouhair El Hairan**, GRITIM-UPF researcher and Secretary of Euro-Arab youth organization

Title: The Moroccan Youth diaspora transnational entrepreneurship in Catalonia

Speakers

Karim Basrire, General Secretary of [Morocco Entrepreneurs](#), a network in Europe contributing to social and economic development by encouraging Moroccans abroad or people strongly attached to Morocco to set up their business in Morocco. Karim created several companies in telecommunication and distribution. He serves also as a consultant and expert on related issues to entrepreneurship and contributed to the last study and survey of Moroccan entrepreneurs living in Europe launching by the Ministry of Moroccans living abroad through the EU-Morocco Sharaka project. Sharaka is a support project for the EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership and also for the mobilisation of Moroccans living in Europe for the development of the country.



Zouhair El Hairan, GRITIM-UPF Researcher and the Secretary of [Euro-Arab](#) youth organization, which is a network of young European and Arab researchers and professionals interested in the Euro-Arab relations and dialogue. His research interests are related to the Moroccan Youth transnational entrepreneurship in Catalonia and Spain, as well as the Moroccan political transnationalism participation, and the Immigration and Media.



He is also a member of the Journalists Institute of Catalonia and the young group of the UNESCO's inter-religious association (AUDIR). He has given lectures on issues related to immigration, the Islamic-Arabic world and the media. Personal site: www.zouhairhairan.com.

Fatima Tigratine, Head of Moroccans Living Abroad. Investor Support, Department Communication and Skills Mobilization, [Ministry of Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs](#). Miss Tigratine holds a degree in Economy Science from the University of Mohamed V AGDAL, Rabat and specialization degree on International Economic Relations and International Economy from the University of Mohamed V, AGDAL. She also has extensive formation of migration for development and advance techniques for business development and financial management for economic development. She is an expert in the fields of economy and business organization, in Moroccan corporate taxation regime, in Social and Commercial legislation and statistics.



In 2012, she has been member of the selection committee of projects received by 'Rabat incubateur' – Regional Delegation of the Association of Moroccan Entrepreneurs Women. Also, in 2011, she was member of the selection committee under the 'Paceim' Program of Assistance to the Creation of Innovative Enterprises in the Mediterranean Initiated by the Institute of Research for Development in France.

Oriol Amorós, is Secretary of Equality, Migration, and Citizenship of the Generalitat of Catalonia.



Agricultural engineer from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia and an agronomist from the University of Lleida. Postgraduate in agrarian economics and the European Union, and in managerial public administration from ESADE.

He was a member of the Catalan Parliament from 2003 to 2006 and from 2010 to 2016, where he worked as a member, spokesperson, and secretary on diverse commissions. He has also been deputy speaker of the parliamentary group ERC.

From 2006 to 2010 he was Secretary of Immigration of the Government. During this period he pushed for the National Pact for Immigration, the law for the reception of immigrants and refugees to Catalonia. He created the Bureau of

Citizenship and Immigration, and also participated in the negotiations for the transference of the authorization of work permits to the Government of Catalonia.

On the 26th of January 2016 he was nominated Secretary of Equality, Migration, and Citizenship, a position in which, among other assignments, he steers the Committee for the Reception of Refugees.

Ricard Zapata-Barrero, Professor, teaches at the [Department of Political and Social Sciences](#), Universitat



Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona-Catalonia-Spain). His main lines of research deal with contemporary issues of liberal democracy in contexts of diversity, especially the relationship between democracy, citizenship, human mobility and immigration. He is director of

[GRITIM-UPF](#) (Interdisciplinary Research Group on Immigration, www.upf.edu/gritim) and the [Master Programme on Migration Studies UPF](#) (9 editions, double degree with University

Liege and CEDEM in Immigration Studies). He is member of the Board of Directors of the

largest research network on Immigration in Europe [IMISCOE](#), and lead two Standing Groups according to its lines of research related to Cities and Multi-level Governance, and Diversity and Cultural policy. He is a

member of several European projects, among others, current “Diasporalink Transnational Diaspora Entrepreneurship as a Development Link between Home and Residence” (2015-2018, H2020-MSCA-RISE-2014). He founded the Intercultural Cities Network in Spain in 2014 (now composed by 16 cities), as expert of the intercultural cities program, and of Compendium (cultural policies) of the Council of Europe. He is also member of editorial boards of several academic journals, and member of several government advisory boards, and occasional contributor to media and policy debates.

For more information about his publications and research findings:

- See personal website: <http://dcpis.upf.edu/~ricard-zapata/>
- See also GRITIM-UPF Research Group website: <http://www.upf.edu/gritim/>